

NED
SEMI-ANNUAL NARRATIVE REPORT
CORE INSTITUTES
INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE
NEPAL: YUVA NETRITWA: PARADARSHI NITI (YOUTH LEADERSHIP:
TRANSPARENT POLICY)
Reporting Period: October 1, 2021 – March 31, 2022

Project number: 2020-0010AAA
Sub-grantee: Solutions
Effective dates of project: July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022
Total amount of NED project budget: \$350,000

I. PROJECT SHORT SUMMARY

To strengthen youth political and civic participation as champions for democratic change, the International Republican Institute (IRI) will provide emerging leaders with increased opportunities to build momentum for youth activism and put pressure on Nepali political decision-makers to become more transparent, accountable, and citizen-centered in their decisions. The Institute will achieve this through developing networks of youth activists and providing them with skills, resources, and platforms to build connections and advocate concerns to political party leaders.

II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM BEING ADDRESSED

Political institutions in Nepal, including political parties, are highly centralized, with top-down governing structures that provide little accountability or space for citizen inputs. Politicians have little incentives to adhere to electoral promises or develop governance agendas based on citizens' interests, and instead pursue backdoor agreements and deals to gain or consolidate power. These structures have led to the formation of governments that are unable to respond to citizen concerns and pursue political strategies to consolidate their own positions of power rather than improve governance conditions. These dynamics have been particularly clear over the past two years as the split between the two major factions of the Nepali Communist Party (NCP), led by former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal respectively, led to intensified competition for political influence, which in turn prevented the government from effectively responding to the COVID-19 pandemic or addressing deteriorating economic conditions. Even after the fall of the NCP government and the formation of a new coalition government led by Sher Bahadur Deuba and the Nepali Congress, internal disputes among coalition members about

the allocation of cabinet positions has prevented the formation of a cabinet government or the development and implementation of new policies that can both respond to the pandemic and incentivize economic growth. Furthermore, centralized, unaccountable political structures also lead to increased opportunities for corruption and manipulation and interference by foreign powers. Such interference is of particular concern in a country like Nepal, which is sandwiched between two larger powers – India and China – that frequently manipulate its internal politics for their own strategic aims. This has deepened citizen dissatisfaction and disenchantment thus weakening the democratic process.

However, despite the current state of Nepal's politics, there are points of democratic resilience. Nepali youth have demonstrated their ability to play an increased role in politics, as a series of youth-led protests, under the slogan "Enough is Enough", broke out. These protests, focused on the government's ineffective response to the COVID-19 pandemic, were led by mostly non-political youth, and called for reforms to improve the efficacy of the government's COVID-19 response and greater transparency around government spending regarding these efforts. While initially responding with severe crackdowns, the government eventually signed an agreement with youth activists addressing their concerns, including providing free health services for COVID-19 patients.*

To sustain these successes and capitalize on existing political will, young people in Nepal will need more platforms to develop sustainable networks to advocate for common concerns and be successful champions for democratic change. Through this project IRI will provide the next generation of Nepal's civic and political leaders with opportunities and platforms to develop cohesive and sustainable advocacy networks. This, in turn, will better position them to raise awareness of democratic values and pressure Nepali political institutions to become more accountable, transparent and citizen centered. To this end, IRI is implementing Yuva Netritwa: Paradarshi Niti (Youth Leadership: Transparent Policy). In Yuva Netritwa: Paradarshi Niti, IRI will conduct an analysis of barriers to youth participation in the political process that will help design content for the Emerging Leaders Academy (ELA). The ELA program will provide youth leaders with the skills and knowledge to ensure that future advocacy efforts are more effective and sustainable.

III. SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

Analysis of Barriers to Youth Participation in the Political Process

*<https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2020/0911/Youth-protests-spur-change-in-Nepal-s-coronavirus-response>



Established in 2000, Solutions Consultant is one of Nepal's fast growing fact-based research firms. They have a strong local market understanding and service presence. Solutions previously conducted high-quality research and implemented the findings in Nepal.

Due to the lack of qualitative assessments of barriers to youth participation in Nepal, IRI has partnered with Solutions Consultant, a local research firm, to conduct a nationwide barrier analysis to identify and evaluate the barriers Nepali youth face while engaging in the political process. The barrier analysis will consist of a combination of youth focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) held with civil society

representatives, elected representatives and other key stakeholders and subject matter experts. Solution Consultants completed FGDs in four of the provinces and is expected to complete the final three by the end of April. Once the FGDs are completed, Solutions Consultant will begin conducting the KIIs. Although the KIIs were scheduled to be completed by the end of April 2022, this timeline will likely be delayed until mid-May due to local elections scheduled for May 13.

During this reporting period, the IRI Nepal team held several internal discussions with IRI's opinion research department, the Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR), to determine the scope of the barrier analysis and finalize the methodology. IRI also developed a detailed discussion guide to provide guidance to Solutions Consultant on conducting the FGDs and KIIs. Solutions Consultant used the discussion guide to develop questions on Nepali youth's experience with political parties, their role in shaping the policies in Nepal and the barriers they face while entering the political realm. Following the conclusion of the FGDs and KIIs, Solutions Consultant will write an analytical report which IRI will use to help design the content of the *Youth Empowerment Skills (YES) Workshops* and other activities under the ELA.

Emerging Leaders Academy: Youth Empowerment Skills (YES) Workshops

IRI held a series of virtual and in-person consultations with civil society organizations, and potential partners including 'We for Change', Center for Social Change and Dalit Youth Alliance to determine the selection criteria for ELA participants. IRI also worked with youth and inclusion experts within IRI's Center for Global Impact to develop curriculum for the ELA's YES workshops. The curriculum will be closely tailored to fit the Nepali context and will be informed by findings from the youth barrier analysis. IRI will finalize the ELA curriculum in the next reporting period.

Additionally, IRI held discussions with youth-focused civil society organizations (CSOs) including 'We for Change', Dalit Youth Alliance and Nepal Youth Council to find an implementation partners to conduct the YES workshops. IRI is currently soliciting proposals and plans to sign a fixed amount subaward (FAS) in the next quarter with the selected partner.

IV. PROGRESS TOWARDS EVALUATION POINTS

Objective: To strengthen youth political and civic participation as champions for democratic change through increased opportunities to network and raise awareness of key issues.

Evaluation Point 1: Nepali youth participants self-report utilizing research conducted by the program when interacting with their communities, political party members and government officials via social media, in person or at the summit. IRI will monitor the number of times the research was referenced through quarterly surveys with the participants.

- This project is still underway. IRI observed enthusiasm among youth during the FGDs and that youth are willing to use the knowledge and skills they learn during their interactions with party leaders to try to influence decision-making. IRI will report on this evaluation point in the next reporting period.

Evaluation Point 2: ELA participants develop a virtual network of youth activists as evidenced by the number of digital engagements among participants following the workshop series. IRI will monitor the instances of digital engagements by tracking the number of posts, likes, and shared within the ELA Facebook page. In addition to this figure, IRI will track instances of online and cellular communication (WhatsApp, SMS text, and phone calls) through quarterly follow-up interviews with participants.

- IRI has not made significant progress towards this evaluation point. IRI will report on this evaluation point following the launch of its Emerging Leaders Academy in the next reporting period.

Evaluation Point 3: Following the ELA workshops, participants develop a network of youth activists as evidenced by the number of digital engagements among participants following the workshop series. IRI will monitor the instances of digital engagements by tracking the number of posts, likes, and shared within the ELA Facebook page. In addition to this, IRI will track instances of online and cellular communication (WhatsApp, SMS text, and call) through quarterly follow-up interviews with participants.

- IRI has not made significant progress towards this evaluation point. IRI plans to conduct the ELA workshops starting in May 2022. IRI will report on this evaluation point in the next reporting period.

Evaluation Point 4: ELA participants gain networking and advocacy skills as demonstrated by the number of participants who self-report skills gained through the program. IRI will assess skills gained through a survey administered to participants after completion of the small grants project

- IRI has not made significant progress toward this evaluation point. Small grants will be awarded at the conclusion of the ELA, which is scheduled to launch in May 2022.

Evaluation Point 5: ELA participants conduct community outreach as evidenced by the number of citizens engaged through the small grants projects. IRI will track the number of citizens engaged through quarterly progress reports submitted by ELA participants.

- IRI has not made progress toward this evaluation point. Small grants will be awarded at the conclusion of the ELA, which is scheduled to launch in May 2022.

Evaluation Point 6: Political and civic leaders demonstrate support for youth policy priorities by becoming a signatory to the youth charter. IRI will monitor the number of political and civic signatories to the youth charter and will conduct interviews with signatories to understand unexpected outcomes of the youth charter.

- IRI has not made progress toward this evaluation point. The youth charter will be finalized at the conclusion of the ELA, which is scheduled to launch in May 2022.

V. CHANGES IN PROJECT STRATEGY

In this reporting period, public pressure caused the government to announce that local elections will be held May 13, rather than wait until October and November as previously planned. The election code of conduct prohibits public events during elections. This caused IRI to change workshops and other activities scheduled for May. Additionally, the individuals that IRI is targeting for this program (politically active youth and first- or second-time voters) have changed their attention to the upcoming elections, making it difficult for IRI to engage with them on program implementation. IRI will update activity timelines accordingly to ensure that participation levels are high.