Youth, Inclusion and Democratic Consolidation in Mauritius

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Home > Call for Proposals - 8th UNESCO Youth Forum > Webform results > Submission #45865

I. INFORMATION ON THE IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION

Organization submitting the project proposal: Institute of Social Development and Peace (ISDP)

Status of the organization: Local youth-led or youth-focused NGO

Statutes document: ISDP brochure.pdf

Year of creation of the organization: 2004

Examples of previously implemented projects:

1. ISDP in collaboration with EISA and IDEA organised a 2 day workshop on: “Electoral Reform – Moving Towards An Inclusive Democracy” held in February 2006 at the University of Mauritius

2. ISDP and Mauritius Council of Social Services (MACOSS) organised a 2 day multi stakeholder workshop/conference on the theme: “Poverty in Mauritius – An Agenda for Reflection and Action: Articulating the Local with the Regional” in October 2007

   The conference was sponsored by the Southern African Trust and it preceded the SADC International Conference on Poverty and Development hosted by Mauritius in April 2008

3. ISDP organised a workshop on “Striving for a new Political Culture” in 2009 at the University of Mauritius
4. ISDP organised a workshop on “Governance: Accountability and Transparency, Waging War against Poverty” in October 2011


Local press articles were produced by young member of ISDP/students of the University of Mauritius on different issues including: the exclusion of the voices of the youth in decision making process, the racism and ethnic discrimination prevailing in Mauritian society, the opacity and speculation around the land question, the marginalisation of poor children and cross generational poverty produced by the schooling system, the excesses of capitalism and neo-liberalism and deepening inequalities; the absence of meritocracy. Please see attached supporting document for the press articles.

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II. PROJECT PROPOSAL

Executive summary:

Mauritius is often cited as a ‘democratic’ model but the ‘voices’ of the young are often left out. The Mauritian constitution notes that every citizen has the right to participate in the political life of the country, the youth, particularly young women, are not really given a chance to participate in politics and/or to shape programmes/policies which may be affecting their lives. Youth perspectives (both male and female, albeit more pronounced amongst females) are generally left out.

Discussing the electoral system of Mauritius and the need for reform in Mauritius, Judge Albie Sachs who was invited to produce a report on electoral reform by the Mauritian government notes:

“Young people are socially conscious and possess the energy and idealism necessary to change the world. Unfortunately, most do not see politics as the vehicle through which to exercise social responsibility, but rather as a forum that both excludes and ignores them” (Sachs, 2005).

The exclusion of youth from the political process highlights one of the several weaknesses of the Mauritian democracy and now that the Mauritian economy is experiencing a slowdown with little opportunities for the youth, it is very important that their voices be heard.

Given the current crises – (the food crisis, the environment crisis, the financial crisis, the euro zone crisis) – that the world is experiencing, a small resource poor island state such as Mauritius is bound to suffer and its youth will more than likely take the toll.

While education is free and accessible in Mauritius, there are no corresponding opportunities on the labour market. There is a need to revisit the model of development which is currently too obsessed with growth. Sadly, the growth is of a jobless nature, with little opportunity for the young.

Having more young people in politics would help to shape and formulate policies which can be more embracing and inclusive for the young.
What is even more unacceptable is that the current electoral system requires that each person who stands as candidate for the elections has to declare his/her ethnicity. Yet large segments of the youth community do not wish to do so. They question the system and wish to see transformation and the de-institutionalisation of communalism. It is believed that such a practice goes against the principles of nationhood and citizenship. Somehow the rights of the youth are being infringed upon. Candidates who are not prepared to declare their ethnicity are debarred from participation and this is unacceptable in Mauritius which calls itself modern and inclusive.

The biased and communal/ethnicised nature of the current Mauritian electoral system must be challenged. The first past the post system is driven by the ‘winner takes it all’ and remains unfair. Given the male dominance that prevail in the political parties and the patriarchal set up, women particularly young women are largely left out in the current gender unfriendly electoral system.

Objectives of the Project:
1. Undertake a survey to measure the state of political literacy among Mauritian youth.
2. Promote awareness of the Mauritian youth on the need for a more inclusive democracy.
3. Ensure a better representation of young women in politics.
4. Advocate and lobby for a more just electoral system.
5. Work towards ensuring durable peace.

Justification of the Project:

The National Youth Policy (2010-2014) describes Mauritian youth as ‘a person between 14 and 29 years old living in the Republic of Mauritius’ but large segments of Mauritian youth have little knowledge about politics and the constitution of the country.

Civic and political literacy classes are totally absent from the Mauritian education system. The University of Mauritius is the only space where there is a degree course in political science on offer but not enough to create a critical mass of young people for transformation.

Mauritian politics badly needs renewal and there is the need for a new political culture. Only the young can and should drive this process. At the moment, the political landscape is dominated by a politics of opacity, a politics of masculinity, politics of dynasty, absence of meritocracy such a landscape can persist for very long if a dent is not made into the endless coalitions and alliances that the old generation of politicians thrive upon. Mauritian youth is often said to be characterised by apathy but the
reality is that Mauritian youth is not given the chance to express itself nor does it have the resources to do so.

We the young people of the Institute of Social Development and Peace want to address the lack of participation of Mauritian youth in politics. We believe that the poor representation of the youth voice in politics affects the quality of Mauritian democracy. Equipping Mauritian youth with the right knowledge and expertise in the field of politics will go a long way in addressing the multiple democratic deficits of Mauritian society.

**Results expected to be achieved:**

1. Obtain a greater pool of young people who are well versed with the political set up before the next elections scheduled to take place in mid 2015.
2. Build a critical mass of Mauritian youth who can advocate and lobby for transformation.
3. That the voices of the youth are included in the shaping of policies and programmes.
4. Ensure a better representation of women in politics not only for a politics of representation but for a politics of transformation.

**Beneficiaries of the Project:**

A large pool of young people from different zones and localities both in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

Out of school youth who live on the margins of society.

Young people in secondary schools who do not have access to any form of political literacy and active citizenship.

Other youth networks who wish to see transformation but do not have the knowhow and resources to do so.

Students councils and unions at universities – both private and public.

**Main type of intervention:** Support for /promotion of youth-led action

**Main theme:** Democracy

**Objective(s) of the project:**

The project will start off with a base line study i.e. – a survey to assist with measuring the state of knowledge of young people about the current political system. The issues surrounding the political set up in the country.
The project aims to deepen understanding of the young about the fact that democracy is an unfinished agenda and that there is a strong nexus between democracy, security, development and peace. The project seeks to equip the youth with the expertise and skills that are necessary for them to advocate and lobby for a more just, gender-friendly and inclusive electoral system.

In many ways, the project will also assist in getting rid of the politics of opacity, masculinity and dynasty that is embedded in the system. Without the long promised electoral reform and the persistent absence of a Freedom of Information Act as well as the vacuum in political literacy in the context of an education system which does not encourage critical thinking. This project will go a long way in making Mauritian youth participate more effectively in democratic consolidation.

**Implementation strategy:**

Implementing the project “Including Mauritian Youth for Democratic Consolidation” requires that ISDP adopts a multi pronged strategy to achieve its goals. The implementation strategy will focus on organising seminars, workshops, conferences, relevant training on a variety of themes related to the question of Youth and Democratic Consolidation. The youth themselves will be encouraged to choose and prioritise on the key themes that they want to organise workshops and trainings etc. Some of these themes could include:

1. Knowing the significance of your vote
2. The Constitution and the Rights of youth
3. The Electoral System, Youth and Ethnicity
4. A culture of Protest, Inclusion and Durable Peace
5. Youth and Leadership

In addition to seminars, workshops and conferences, one of the key implementation strategy is first to obtain some baseline data. This is why ISDP will first carry a survey on the ‘State of Knowledge of the young people on the political system’. The survey findings will be disseminated.

Another part of the Implementation Strategy is to make use of the social media to develop and consolidate an advocacy/lobbying culture by the youth on key political issues that affect their lives and livelihoods. Another component of the implementation strategy is to ensure and facilitate access to social media for marginalised youth particularly young women.

Identification of relevant stakeholders/trainers to deliver training with the view of ensuring a multiple effect is also part of the implementation strategy.
Part of the implementation strategy is to also ensure a decentralised approach so that this important work reaches all types of youth – out of school youth, youth on the margins, young people at school in all parts of the country, including the deprived, peripheral and rural zones.

Implementing such a project also requires a policy dialogue. ISDP youth therefore proposes to produce a short policy brief after each and every event that is organised. In order to ensure an effective implementation of the project, ISDP will undertake a mid-term review so that if there are any stumbling blocks which may have arisen, necessary measures will be taken to address it.

**Beneficiaries:**
- Youth in general
- Young women
- Vulnerable and marginalized youth
- Students
- Out-of-school youth

**Implementing organization(s):** ISDP – see information on the organisation in Section I.

**Institutional partners:**

**Project duration (months):** 24

**Timeframe:**

Starting Date: 1st December 2013 - 1st December 2015

- December 2013 – March 2014: Research on the State of political literacy amongst the youth
- May 2014: Dissemination of findings workshop
- August 2014: Training on political literacy
- Nov 2014 – Dec 2014: Take the training to different regions in the country
- Jan 2015 – July 2015: Using the platforms of workshops and seminars to engage in discussions and policy reflections for transformation on key themes
- Aug 2015 – Oct 2015: Preparing and publishing policy briefs
- Nov 2015 – Dec 2015: Use the media to entrench a culture of advocacy and lobby for political transformation and democratic consolidation

**Overall budget:** (US$) 475,000

**Budget Breakdown:**
Conferences, meetings: $ 30,000
Training seminars, courses: $ 120,000
Fellowships, study grants: $ 100,000
Consultants: $ 40,000
Supplies and equipment: $ 125,000
Publications, translations, reproduction: $ 50,000
Miscellaneous (please specify): $ 10,000

**Monitoring, reporting and evaluation:**

The ISDP executive committee will together with its members plan the detailed activities of the project in line with the time frame proposed. Senior members of ISDP and the Patron of ISDP who is the former president of the Republic of Mauritius will assist in the monitoring. Participants will have to produce regular reports detailing their plan of work – phased over a yearly basis and provide the narratives of their activities.

ISDP may wish to seek the assistance of UNESCO itself in evaluating the project. ISDP will ensure that it provides the basic skills of monitoring and evaluation to its members but it will also identify a couple of the young members to follow a more effective training in M & E so that the internal capacity of the NGO be consolidated.

Reports will have to be produced on the following:

1. The survey on the state of political literacy amongst the youth
2. The dissemination of findings workshop and decisions taken on how to advocate and lobby
3. Reports capturing the discussions taking place at the various workshops/seminars on the different themes proposed

**Supporting documents:** TRUTH AND JUSTICE WORKSHOP - Articles.docx