

# Bridging the Gap: Building Trust Between Youths and Lawmakers



## INTRODUCTION

Young Nigerians are becoming increasingly disengaged from politics, a concerning trend given that active participation is essential for shaping decisions and ensuring a better future. In Eastern Nigeria, this issue is particularly pronounced as findings from insights-gathering activities conducted by NGYouthSDGs reveals that one of the primary causes of this disengagement is the disconnect between lawmakers and their constituents. Many lawmakers engage only during election periods, neglecting regular communication or delivering on meaningful projects. This lack of accountability increases mistrust and discourages young people from participating in politics and civic processes.

In view of these challenges, NGYouthSDGs organised a town hall meeting titled "Bridging the Gap: Building Trust Between Youth and Lawmakers" in December 2024. The event aimed to increase trust and optimism among youths towards lawmakers in Enugu East Senatorial District, bridge the communication gap between young people and their representatives, and inspire lawmakers to take action based on the discussions. The meeting convened over 50 youth stakeholders, including community leaders, lawmakers from Enugu East Senatorial District, civil society representatives, youth group leaders, and young people, including persons living with disabilities (PWDs).

The discussions during the event addressed key challenges like youth apathy, mistrust, corruption, and the lack of civic education, with the goal of finding actionable solutions to boost youth participation in governance.

## KEY ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED

- **Youth Apathy and Disengagement:** Many young people are not actively involved in politics because they do not trust the government, believe their votes don't make a difference, and see money as a major influence in politics.
- **Limited Platforms for Engagement:** There is a significant lack of reliable and sustainable systems that facilitate consistent interaction and communication between youth and lawmakers. This gap hinders young people from effectively sharing their concerns, ideas, and feedback with leaders, while also limiting lawmakers' ability to understand and address the needs and priorities of the younger generation
- **Inclusion of Marginalised Groups:** Marginalised groups, such as persons with disabilities, are not adequately represented or engaged in decision-making processes. This lack of inclusion means their unique needs and perspectives are often overlooked, leading to policies and initiatives that fail to address the challenges they face.
- **Transactional Political Culture:** Leadership is often perceived as a means for personal gain rather than a responsibility to serve the public. This mindset prioritizes self-interest and financial profit over addressing community needs and fostering development.
- **Lack of Civic Education:** Many young people have a limited understanding of democratic processes and how governance works. This knowledge gap makes it harder for them to actively participate in civic activities, advocate for their rights, or hold leaders accountable.

## KEY OUTCOMES AND COMMITMENTS

- **Commitment to Sustainable Youth Engagement:** Hon. Princess Obiajulu Ugwu committed to organising a town hall for her constituency in 2025 and emphasised the importance of youth engagement in her election journey, inspired by the "Not Too Young to Run" bill.
- **Building Trust and Political Participation:** The panel discussed strategies to build trust between youth and lawmakers, highlighting the need for persistence, resilience, and a shift in mindset regarding political engagement.
- **Proposals for Youth Empowerment:** Mr. Okechukwu Odogwu, the managing director of Dream FM proposed creating internship opportunities for youth and increasing media engagement to build awareness and trust.
- **Financial Independence and Inclusivity:** Participants underscored the importance of financial independence for youth and called for more inclusive leadership, with particular focus on engaging marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities, to ensure full representation.
- **Participant Feedback and Satisfaction:** Following the event, a questionnaire was distributed to assess participants' satisfaction. Among the youth who attended, 91.3% expressed satisfaction, with 73.9% being satisfied and 17.4% very satisfied. This positive outcome indicates that the majority of attendees felt the meeting met their expectations, particularly through meaningful engagement and interaction with their lawmakers.

## LIMITATION:

- The lawmakers did not stay for the entire duration of the town hall meeting, which impacted opportunities for deeper dialogue.
- Many participants arrived later than the scheduled time but still expected the event to conclude at the promised end time, creating time constraints.
- Some stakeholders and youth canceled their attendance due to unforeseen circumstances, affecting the expected turnout.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the challenges identified and build on the feedback received, the following recommendations emerged:

- Schedule key sessions involving lawmakers early in the program, ensuring their active participation during critical discussions, allowing them to listen to key youth contributions before they leave.
- Regular platforms should be created for youth and lawmakers to interact by organising recurring town hall meetings at the grassroots level, fostering open communication, inclusivity, and ongoing engagement.
- Ensure that marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities, are actively involved in decision-making processes by creating policies that guarantee equal opportunities for all youth to participate in governance.
- Boost awareness of democratic processes and the importance of youth participation through educational campaigns, while using media platforms to build trust and encourage civic responsibility among young people.
- Advocate for a move from transactional politics to a service-oriented leadership approach, while empowering youth with the skills and resources for financial independence to reduce reliance on monetary incentives.
- Create policies that provide internship opportunities for youth within governance structures, and establish systems to measure the impact of youth-focused initiatives to ensure accountability and ongoing improvement.
- Engage the media to amplify the outcomes of town hall meetings and promote positive narratives about youth involvement in politics and their contributions to governance.
- Schedule town hall meetings before, during, and after elections to give youth a platform to voice their opinions, share their needs, and assess leaders. Introduce virtual participation options alongside in-person events to increase accessibility, and provide transportation, such as buses, to ensure youth can attend. Additionally, use social media and radio to effectively spread the word and engage a wider audience.
- Document the findings and discussions from town hall meetings to provide lawmakers with a reference for driving meaningful change, and establish ongoing town hall sessions in partnership with lawmakers to ensure sustainable and impactful youth engagement

## CONCLUSION

Addressing youth engagement in local governance is critical to building an inclusive and participatory democracy. The recommendations and commitments from the meeting underscore the importance of collaboration between youth, lawmakers, and civil society to foster trust, inclusivity, and accountability. Implementing these recommendations will create sustainable pathways for youth engagement, foster greater trust, empower young leaders, and strengthen democratic governance in Nigeria.

# Get in Touch with Us

For any questions or concerns about this policy brief, kindly reach out to us. Also, feel free to stay connected to us for more exciting opportunities and updates on our work via any of the following means:

✉ Email: [programs@nigerianyouthsdgs.org](mailto:programs@nigerianyouthsdgs.org)

📘 Facebook: [Nigeria Youth SDGs Network](#)

🌐 LinkedIn: [Nigeria Youth SDGs Network](#)

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