

Discussion Summary and Action Plan

The Tokyo Youth Democracy Forum brought together participants from across the Indo-Pacific region, including representatives from Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, and the United States from June 9-12, 2024. Over three days of discussion we worked together to develop a vision for how youth across the region could work together to achieve a healthy society with a particular focus on democracy and the digital frontier.

We divided into working groups to develop actionable plans across three key themes 1) Civic Education in the Digital Age, 2) Youth Voices and Political Responses – The Role of Digital Tools, and 3) How Youth Cope with Information Overload in the Digital Age. During this process we worked together to identify challenges, key stakeholders, and potential solutions across each of these themes.

In addition, we also developed a broader action plan to ensure that we can carry forward the results of the discussion and continue to have an impact in the future. We identified two key areas for future action 1. Building Solidarity through Developing a Cross Border Youth Democracy Network and 2. Strengthening Civic Education through Sharing Lessons Across the Region

1. Building Solidarity through Developing a Cross Border Youth Democracy Network

Recognizing the value of coming together and sharing diverse perspectives and actions on promoting healthy democratic societies across the region, we believe it is important to maintain the momentum generated during the youth forum, so we propose formalizing the network of participants to create a network that connects stakeholders across borders through the following:

- Establishing a regular forum like this one, either digitally or non-digitally, where young people can regularly communicate, share updates, and collaborate on projects. This platform will serve as a central hub for ongoing engagement and support, ensuring that the relationships established during the forum continue to flourish.
- Organizing regular virtual meetings or check-ins to discuss ongoing initiatives, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration. These meetings will help maintain momentum and ensure continuous progress.
- Developing a mechanism to report back to the larger group on further collaboration that takes place in the aftermath of the forum. Such reporting will help motivate participants to continue working together.
- Exploring avenues for expanding the youth network in the future by connecting with participants in any future activities. We will also consider carrying out a mapping survey, if funding allows, to identify further youth networks in the region, which can be connected to our work.

2. Strengthening Civic Education through Sharing Lessons Across the Region

While we found that the levels of youth engagement in politics varied across local contexts, a major challenge shared throughout the region was the question of how to encourage youth to engage more effectively in the democratic process. For example, in Japan younger people often focus on specific issue areas such as climate change but are not following politics more broadly, while in the Philippines youth find it easier to express their political views online but are not engaged in more direct political action, such as becoming involved in political parties.

We identified civic education as a critical avenue for promoting youth engagement and addressing lack of interest in engaging with democracy. We shared our thoughts on the state of civic education in our respective countries and identified several areas for enhancing civic education, which should accomplish the following:

- Informing young people of their rights, including those outlined by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of Children, and those enumerated in the constitutions of their respective countries, and encouraging young people to hold their government accountable in respecting and protecting those rights.
- Expanding beyond explaining the structure and function of a country's institutions of government, to also provide a path towards civic engagement. For example, through explaining to young people how to become civic actors, whether through detailing how they might become involved in a political party or by suggesting other avenues for making their political voices heard.
- Extending beyond the classroom to be practiced at a grassroots level so that in situations where a government is not upholding its commitments to protect the rights of its citizens there are alternative public spaces where civic education can take place.

In the same way that the level of youth engagement varied across the region, we also noted that there were differences in the state of civic education across our respective countries. **As such, the first step in terms of taking concrete action would be to create a task force aimed at sharing lessons from across the region on how to develop effective and holistic civic education that incorporates a rights-based approach, offers training on taking direct civic action, and which takes place both in the classroom and at the grassroots level.**

We commit to engaging all relevant stakeholders, such as government, intergovernmental bodies, communities, and also civil societies, to gain the support to implement this action plan.