

## **Module 2: Promote the Common Good**

Thematic Areas: Common Good, Youth Participation, Ethics, Cooperation.

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### **Introduction**

***Youth participation as a promoter of the common good and global development.***

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#### **Inter-American Democratic Charter Corner:**

Article 6: It is the right and responsibility of all citizens to participate in decisions relating to their own development. This is also a necessary condition for the full and effective exercise of democracy. Promoting and fostering diverse forms of participation strengthens democracy.

UNESCO (2015) defines the “common good” as “the shared values and resources that sustain life in society and promote dignity, equity, and social cohesion.” Consistent with the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IADC), programs should prioritize cultivating civic virtue, volunteerism, and community service without prescribing ideological outcomes. This implies the existence of political, economic, and social conditions that allow all people to develop their potential with equal rights, particularly through education, justice, and citizen participation.

In turn, the Inter-American Democratic Charter highlights the importance of youth participation in public affairs to strengthen the common good in democracy. Thus, in Article 27 it states: “Special attention will be given to the development of programs and activities for the education of children and youth as a way of ensuring the permanence of democratic values, including freedom and social justice” (OAS, 2001).

Within this framework, the common good refers to the set of social, economic, political, and cultural conditions that allow all members of a community to achieve their full development and live with dignity. Therefore, it is not only about the pursuit of individual success, but about what benefits everyone through active participation, respect for human rights, and the pursuit of collective well-being.

Promoting the common good is a challenge shared by all of society, where the role of young people is fundamental, as they become agents of change who bring a new perspective to transform their communities, influencing society by fostering democracy and social cohesion. By promoting the common good, young people put into practice actions of solidarity, empathy, and respect for others.

### a. Be Active in Your Community.

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In the current context, where social, environmental, and economic challenges abound, the active participation of young people in their communities is no longer an option but a necessity, as their involvement is essential for sustainable development, democratic strengthening, and the improvement of educational systems.

Various international organizations such as the OAS in the Americas, among others have consistently reiterated the importance of involving youth in processes of social transformation. This promotion and commitment stem from the conviction that young people are not only beneficiaries of change, but also key actors in making it happen.

From the perspective of **education**, youth participation fosters meaningful learning and the development of civic competencies. Becoming involved in community life allows young people to put into practice values such as solidarity, justice, and respect for human rights. It is important to promote a culture of engagement in the democratic process in schools so that young people are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to be informed, engaged, and responsible citizens (OAS, 2023).

In the field of **political science**, the inclusion of youth in decision-making processes is vital for revitalizing democracies. Political apathy and institutional disengagement can be countered with real and effective spaces for participation. It has emphasized that the lack of youth representation in political systems threatens the legitimacy and sustainability of modern democracies. Citizen participation in decisions that affect their own development is both a right and a responsibility and is an essential condition for the full and effective exercise of democracy. In this context, promoting and supporting various forms of participation strengthens democracy (IADC, 2001). There is an imperative to empower individuals to actively participate in shaping the future of their communities, countries, and by extension the world that they want (OAS, 2023). By participating in social movements, student associations, or community projects, young people develop political skills and acquire a sense of collective agency.

For the OAS (2016), the role of youth in democracy in the Americas is fundamental, highlighting their potential as agents of change and promoting the importance of their active participation in building more just and democratic societies. Their energy and creativity can be channeled into projects that address local problems in innovative ways, benefiting their communities and strengthening the democratic fabric.

Thus, international organizations recognize that youth participation strengthens democracy and social cohesion. When young people feel heard and included, the risk of exclusion, violence, and radicalization decreases. Community engagement also enables the development of skills such as leadership, empathy, and critical thinking—essential

competencies not only for personal growth but also for building more just and inclusive societies. The consideration and promotion of young people as active members in their communities is grounded in various reasons, among which the following stand out:

<b>They Drive Development</b>	Education is key to strengthening democratic institutions, promoting the development of human potential, and alleviating poverty and fostering greater understanding among our peoples <sup>1</sup> . Young people's active participation in areas such as education, environment, equity, and social justice is crucial for building fairer and more sustainable communities.
<b>They bring innovation and new ideas.</b>	Youth often have a mindset that is more open to change, technology, and innovation. Their active participation can offer fresh solutions to longstanding problems and contribute to new ways of thinking.
<b>They promote social cohesion.</b>	Involving young people in their communities reduces the risk of them feeling excluded or marginalized. This can help prevent issues such as crime, youth unemployment, radicalization, and other social risks.
<b>They strengthen democracy.</b>	Civic participation from an early age promotes democratic values such as engagement, solidarity, and respect for human rights. Young people who take part in their communities are better prepared to become responsible and committed citizens.
<b>They develop leadership and other skills.</b>	Community engagement provides young people with the opportunity to develop personal skills such as leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, and communication, which in turn enhances their employability and self-esteem.
<b>They ensure generational representativeness and fairness.</b>	Young people make up an important part of the world's population. Encouraging their participation ensures that their needs, ideas, and concerns are represented in decisions that affect both their present and their future.

Source: Own elaboration.

Promoting youth participation plays a fundamental role in positioning them as agents of development, innovation, and social equity. Encouraging their active involvement in community life not only benefits young people themselves but also strengthens society as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Inter-American Democratic Charter (2001). Available at: [http://www.oas.org/charter/docs/resolution1\\_en\\_p4.htm](http://www.oas.org/charter/docs/resolution1_en_p4.htm)

## **b. Act with ethics and responsibility.**

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Ethics and responsibility are core elements for active youth citizenship. In the context of today's democratic societies, which face multiple challenges, the ethical development of young people takes on crucial importance.

From the perspective of international organizations, ethics is understood as an essential component for building just and sustainable societies. According to Article 2 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter (2001), the effective exercise of representative democracy is the basis for the rule of law and of the constitutional regimes of the member states of the Organization of American States. Representative democracy is strengthened and deepened by permanent, ethical, and responsible participation of the citizenry within a legal framework conforming to the respective constitutional order.

At the institutional level, the OECD (2017) highlights that ethics in the public sector is based on values such as integrity, responsibility, and transparency, which are fundamental pillars for citizen trust. Similarly, the OAS (2022) has pointed out that strengthening public and civic ethics is essential for democracy, the fight against corruption, and responsible civic participation.

Taken together, these perspectives agree that ethics regulates individual behavior and provides an essential framework for democratic coexistence, respect for human rights, and responsible governance.

Promoting an ethic of responsibility among young people also means empowering them to become agents of change. Through social projects, community participation, or student activism, they can exercise positive leadership that contributes to the common good.

*But how are ethics and responsibility promoted, taught, or developed in young people?* Ethics and responsibility find their most fertile ground among youth through a multifaceted approach that combines formal education, positive role models from adults and peers, active community involvement, and the commitment of various social actors to democratic and solidarity-based values.

In this regard, ***schools play a central role***. According to the OECD (2020), ethical development should be at the core of the curriculum to empower students as responsible agents of social change.

Ethics education seeks to shape students as responsible learners and citizens, capable of critical reflection and socially conscious action. This is achieved through subjects such as civic education, philosophy, life skills education, history, and the principles of democracy, but also through the cultivation of values like justice, respect, empathy, and

solidarity. In this way, the classroom becomes a space for dialogue, peaceful conflict resolution, and cooperative learning. As Martha Nussbaum (2010) points out, educating ethically means teaching to think with freedom, sensitivity, and responsibility in a diverse and interdependent world.

Secondly, ***family and adult role models*** also have a strong influence on ethical development. The daily example of parents, teachers, community leaders, or public figures shapes responsible—or irresponsible—behavior. Young people learn both through direct instruction and by imitation. This is why consistency between words and actions is key.

Finally, ***active participation in community activities***, such as volunteering, student councils, social projects, and service-learning, allows young people to exercise responsibility in real-life contexts. These experiences (OAS, 2022) strengthen their sense of belonging, commitment to the common good, and ability to act ethically when facing concrete social challenges.

Thus, educating young people in ethics and responsibility is not an add-on but a core pillar of both education and social life. Through ethical awareness, young people learn to value human dignity, engage with their environment, and make decisions that promote collective well-being. Ethics provides them with a framework to act with justice and responsibility, and to face today's challenges with critical thinking and commitment. Only in this way will it be possible to build an active, conscious, and solidarity-driven citizenship, capable of sustaining vibrant democracies and fairer communities.

### **c. Cooperate with others.**

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In today's societies, where individualism and distrust threaten social cohesion, it is necessary to strengthen forms of human interaction that promote coexistence, empathy, and justice. In this regard, cooperation emerges as one of the most significant social practices among young people. Although it is often valued as a useful skill for teamwork or school learning, cooperation transcends its practical dimension and becomes a fundamental ethical value for democratic life.

For young people, cooperation fosters the development of skills that support effective problem-solving, and the building of relationships based on respect, solidarity, and commitment to the common good. Thus, cooperation is conceptualized not only as a functional skill but also as a way of relating ethically to others.

From a functional perspective, cooperation is a practical and cross-cutting skill that enables young people to succeed in different contexts. This skill involves knowing how to listen, engage in dialogue, work in teams, share responsibilities, and achieve collective goals. In the educational sphere, it is expressed in group activities, cooperative learning, and the

joint resolution of challenges. Likewise, in the workplace, cooperation is highly valued because it ensures the ability to integrate diverse teams and collaborate effectively in complex and dynamic environments.

However, reducing cooperation to a functional skill would limit its scope. In reality, cooperation is an ethical decision, as it implies recognizing others as equals, acting responsibly, and seeking the common good. In this sense, when young people cooperate, they not only develop useful skills but also learn to coexist and to build community. Moreover, cooperation makes it possible to address real social problems from a collective perspective: whether at school, in the community, or in youth participation spaces, to cooperate means to act in order to transform the environment.

The cooperative participation of young people (OAS, 2022) in social projects, student councils, or volunteer work strengthens democracy, as it promotes commitment, shared responsibility, and a sense of belonging. Through these experiences, young people learn to act not only for their own benefit but also for the well-being of others. In this same sense, and from a pedagogical perspective, Martha Nussbaum (2010) argues that cooperation is a way to develop “moral imagination”: the ability to put oneself in another’s place, understand their reality, and act accordingly. This capacity is not only useful but necessary in a world where cultural, social, and political differences are inevitable. Ethical cooperation, therefore, teaches us to coexist with others—not despite our differences, but through them.

Cooperating means actively committing to the pursuit of common goals, sharing responsibilities, respecting differences, and recognizing the value of others. For young people, cooperation becomes a fundamental path to learning how to coexist and participate in society.

The OAS has recognized the importance of fostering spaces for cooperative youth participation as a tool to strengthen democracy. In its 2022 report, it notes that cooperation among young people in student councils, social organizations, or community projects enhances social cohesion, strengthens public ethics, and encourages responsible civic participation. Through these experiences, young people learn that their actions have a real impact on their environment, and that cooperation is not a secondary option, but a way of actively exercising citizenship. Likewise, through the Program “Democratic Principles strengthened through Education and Policy Dialogue”, recognizes the importance of educational systems providing youth with the tools and spaces for democratic participation to become more informed, active citizens in the future (OAS, 2023).

Cooperation is a form of relationship that goes beyond group work: it is a concrete expression of ethics, citizenship, and commitment to others. In a world where individualism tends to isolate people, educating young people in cooperation means equipping them with the tools to live in community, build peace, and act responsibly. Educational and social

institutions must take on the challenge of shaping cooperative, critical, and empathetic young people who are capable of actively contributing to the common good. Only in this way will it be possible to build fairer, more supportive, and more democratic societies, where everyone has a place and a voice.

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**Case for discussion:**

**PROMOTE THE COMMON GOOD**

**Youth participation as a promoter of the common good and global development.**

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*In the city of Nueva Esperanza, a group of high school students creates an organization called “EcoYouth.” It begins as part of a school project on environmental issues but gradually grows.*

The students organize recycling campaigns, environmental education workshops, and park clean-ups. Soon, they gain the cooperation of other schools, and in less than a year, they mobilize over 1,000 young people from different institutions, also securing the support of the local municipality.

As the group becomes more organized, they propose a new project: transforming an abandoned lot—previously a hotspot for neglect—into a “Sustainable Community Park” with green areas, sports facilities, and an urban garden open to everyone. However, their good intentions alone are not enough; they need the support of local authorities, who inform them that there are other plans for the land: building a shopping center.

The organized youth argue that their proposal promotes the common good, improves mental health, benefits the environment, and provides a free public space for all—especially for sectors facing greater development challenges—while fostering community cooperation and participation. The authorities, meanwhile, maintain that the shopping center will create jobs and generate income for the municipality, which also contributes to economic development.

Some adults in the community question whether these young people are mature enough to influence public decisions, while other neighbors openly support them. A public debate grows, and the local television station, intrigued by the issue, interviews the students so they can explain their perspectives. The support for the young people grows so strong that the municipality decides to hold a citizen consultation to determine the future of the site.

**Guiding questions:**

1. Do young people have a valid point in defending the park as a common good? Why?
2. Can and should youth participation influence local political decisions?
3. What challenges do young people face when trying to actively participate in their community?





# OAS

4. How does this case illustrate the connection between youth participation and development?
5. Do you think adults, in general, take youth participation seriously? Should they?
6. What decisions would you make if you were part of the local government?