First-Time Voters (First-Time Voters Network Concept Note)

Relevance of the Action

Since the First Time Voters Network (FTVN) campaign was launched by Center for Youth Advocacy and Networking partners\(^1\) in 2001, awareness on first time voters issues (i.e. voters disenfranchisement, lack of voters’/political education, etc.) did not only increase, but were also addressed significantly over the years with the government itself taking steps to ensure the inclusion of young people in the electoral process. With such gain achieved, it is imperative to undertake conscious efforts to convert such political awareness into actual votes for progressive candidates and/or political parties during election time. Thus, the target to make the FTV vote a crucial part of the “reform constituency” in 2010. In the last three elections, traditional politicians took advantage of the first time voters by employing the latter as campaign machineries, or much worst, by luring FTV’s to their platforms which were undoubtedly based on patronage and money politics rather on real-time, serious and programmatic reforms. The need for first time voters to make informed decisions will matter greatly in 2010 as the high estimate of FTV’s is expected to shoot up to a staggering number of NINE million people, if Commission on Elections will be able to maximize the time left for voters’ registration.

Stunningly, recent surveys from Pulse Asia show that young Filipinos aged 18-34 years old are very critical of the political ads of the different public figures rumoured to have political ambitions in 2010. Furthermore, the monitoring group also said that about 79% to 90% of registered voters below 55 years old were aware of political ads in 2004 and there was a slight increase to 88% to 94% in 2007. In addition, they said that focused group discussions conducted in July 2007 indicate that the youth: 1) can recall more ads; 2) can recall more endorsers; 3) have a more positive attitude toward ads; 4) tend to view it as a source of information; 5) as well as source of entertainment; 6) but still based their votes on the candidates’ track records

Ironically, data from the National Anti-Poverty Commission would also show that 78% of young people aged 17-21 years old seldom or never discuss politics with their family and friends, whereas 70% of the same age bracket would also say that they have very little or no trust with politicians. Coincidentally, these age brackets are usually the age-bracket of first time (youth) voters.

With this growing gap, FTVN sees the bigger need to inform the greater young generation, the country’s future electorate, on the value of their political participation. Alternative venues of information should be made available to the first time voters, as media warfare is, to a large extent, still the arena of traditional political players who have the financial capacity to launch a media campaign. The need to train more young people who will immerse in schools and communities to give political education is more pressing now more than ever with the impending elections.

As part of the FTVN’s campaign, a voters’ education program is regularly conducted since 2001 but with limited number of areas of implementation due to the organization’s lack of financial capacity. Through the years, despite the varied physical and logistical barriers, FTV, was able to expand to more than 40 strategic areas nationwide, namely the National Capital Region, and by extension to Rizal and Bulacan = Manila, Quezon City, Makati, Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas, Valenzuela, Mandaluyong, Pasig, Muntinlupa, Rizal, Bulacan, Las Pinas, Alabang, Muntinlupa; Luzon= Isabela, Nueva Visacaya, Nueva Ecija, Pangasinan, Ilocos Norte, Baguio, Laguna, Sorsogon, Naga, Camrines Norte, Batangas, Cavite, Palawan, Pampanga; Visayas = Iloilo, Cebu, Neg Occ, Bohol; Mindanao = Gen San, Davao, Cotabato, Butuan, Iligan, CDO, Zamboanga City and the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. These areas were selected based on the following reasons: 1) there is great lack of youth participation in the said locations; 2) vote rich areas, places which historically delivered/s

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\(^1\) CYAN Partners are Student Council Alliance of the Philippines, Movement for the Advancement of Student Power, Alliance of Community-Based Youth, Towards an Alternative Sanguniang Kabataan (TASK), National Anti-Poverty Commission – Youth and Students, various political youth organizations (Akbayan Youth, Aksyon Kabataan, Kabataan Liberal, etc).
votes; and 3) heightened political tension in the said areas (election hotspots - vulnerable/susceptible to electoral cheating and violence). But above all these reasons, FTVN is very keen on encouraging more young women to participate in the electoral processes, recognizing the fact that until now, young women are most often disempowered politically which is largely attributed to the normative and patriarchal culture of most of the Filipino communities especially at the rural level. In the same manner, FTV Network also pays attention to organizing the out of school youth, which at the moment, has ballooned to a modest estimate of 17 million people. These young people are the usual target of vote buying, coercion, and electoral violence. Historically, these are also the part of the society who actually votes as they usually belong to the economic strata of D and E.

In 2007, CYAN and the FTV Network participated in the consultation process of Consortium on Electoral Reforms together with other political institutions and civil society groups, to come up with a Citizen’s Voters Education Module which is based on human rights. This with, FTVN’s own data were then collated by FTV to come up with a more comprehensive yet less legalistic voters’ education program for first time and youth voters aged 17-25 years old. Furthermore, together with Newsbreak, with funding support from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), FTVN came out with a consolidated national youth agenda that were presented to both local and national candidates during the 2007 elections. Based on these agenda, the candidates lay down specific program of actions. The top three reform agenda that resulted from the national process of FTVN revolved on education reform, Sangguniang Kabataan (Youth Council) Reform, and decent employment for young people. It is important to note that when SK Reform was identified by FTVN, there was also a consequent effort in the lower house of the Philippine Congress to abolish it because of the general sentiment over its vulnerability to corruption.


After the 2007 elections, FTVN member groups filed the Sangguniang Kabataan Reform Bill and the Students’ Rights and Welfare Bill as their immediate follow up to the FTV Youth Agenda, a clear manifestation of commitment from the FTV network during and beyond the election period. At the moment, the consolidated version of Magna Carta of Students is scheduled for plenary deliberation in the lower house this month.

FTV Network has surpassed the challenges of apathy and indifference among the many young people it has reached over the years through its capacity-building programs of political education but organizing the youth at the grass root level is a continuous job that the network has also realised as more young people are entering the political landscape year by year.

The Network’s partnership with Commission on Elections, different establishments and business groups such as the Metropolitan Railway Transit, Light Railway Transit, the Araneta Center, local business groups in the regions, and civil society groups like Task Force 2010 has made the network a trusted ally in the electoral and political reform advocacy. Even personalities and political leaders alike recognize FTVN’s past and continuing contributions to the electoral reform advocacy.

With 2010 fast approaching and candidates already positioning themselves, campaign for first time voters needs to go beyond the usual calls to register and vote, it requires the facilitation of grassroots political education and the consolidation of local reform-oriented youth force who will resolutely engage the 2010 elections.

Building the FTV bloc as a conscious and critical voting populace in 2010 will strategically position the youth sector as a major political force in the national polls, thus raising the level of sectoral based discourses towards the national issues during elections and ensuring the accountability of the new government thereafter.

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2 a consortium and partnership between and among various election watchdogs; see http://tf2010.slb.ph/
Social accountability is integral to good governance. Thus, a good bureaucratic system will not materialize if elected officials are not held accountable after they take their oaths in public office. It is crucial for youth voters to ensure that the candidates that they have voted for have actually done their tasks from the very time that they were affirmed as government leaders.

**Project Description:**

CYAN in partnership with the FTV Network will undertake a five month implementation of the First Time Voters (youth) Network Youth Leaders Assemblies for Social Accountability which is aimed at going beyond the usual campaign of register and vote, but rather premising on the need to empower the young electorate on the tenets of social accountability in public office through advocating for political and electoral reforms by assessing the track record and performance of elected public officials from 2007, based on the network’s 2007 youth agenda, among others, which was founded on the network’s valued principles of participatory democracy, gender equality, pluralism and transformative politics and governance.

Specifically, the project aims to achieve the following:

1. Organize young people to create a reform constituency by building on FTV's previous activities that promote critical thinking and in-depth analyses of the current political situation
2. Further push for programmatic engagement of young people in government based on the FTVN's Youth Agenda\(^3\) stemming from 2007 to 2010 and beyond (assessing of 2007 youth agenda; reviewing the politicians’ stand on the said issues, checking what they’ve done to act on the said agenda)

The design of the project particularly addresses the need to organize the FTV youth bloc as a major political force in 2010 and beyond, capacitating them to make informed decisions and empowering them at the grassroots level to engage the political and electoral processes significantly both at the local and at the national level. It seeks to break down the culture of impunity and cynicism largely seen in today's young generation, greatly reflected in their usual questions when asked about elections – “Kung boboto kami, sino ang iboboto namin? Pare-parehas lang naman silang trapo” (If we will vote, who do we vote for? They’re all traditional politicians). The project hopes to impress upon the young electorate the necessity to introduce and clamour for program-based politics starting in 2010 to make elected officials accountable to the voting public.

FTV will develop a youth agenda report card that will be based on a point system that will give a quantitative and qualitative assessment of 2007 (and/or 2004) victorious candidates who are planning to run for the 2010 elections. So then, choosing a candidate will be merit-based as opposed to personality politics that is fuelled by the usual three G’s in the Philippine Electoral Process (goods, guns, gold), which evidently felt in mass media, with political advertisements sprouting here and there.

The project will also challenge the existing and entrenched culture of political dynasties and clans all over the country even more by creating a vibrant and dynamic youth sector which can confront issues that deal with the traditional political families and in so doing open up space for new blood politics that will pave the way for crucial local reforms and progress.

\(^3\) FTV’s YOUTH Agenda generally focuses on policy reforms which are related to the youth.
At the same time it will also place pressure on political youth groups such as youth wings of political parties to push the FTV Youth Agenda within their respective political blocs as more unorganized and unaligned young people take active roles in political and electoral reform issues.

The project will require 2010 aspirants to give feedback on FTV’s 2010 youth agenda and its report card.

**Project Implementation**

The project will conduct a series of Youth Leaders Assembly, which will include Student Councils and Student Political Parties, Youth Councils and Youth agencies, Community Youth Organizations and faith-based organizations to tackle and answer extensively FTV’s 2010 Youth Agenda Report Card. There will be a minimum quota of 30% women participants per area. This phase will generate the following outputs:

a. Regional Youth Agenda Assessment Report Card
b. FTV Booklet on 2010 Agenda and 2010 Candidates’ Track Record and Performance vis-a-vis FTV’s 2007 Youth Agenda and the Candidates’ Feedback on the 2010 Youth Agenda
c. Information materials on youth agenda report (documentation, posters, primer)

After which, results of the regional assemblies will be presented in a national congress of youth leaders with simultaneous presentation to the media. This will be FTV’s way of levelling the playing field of the 2010 elections in terms of bridging the candidates’ real performance in the past three to four years in relation to issues that concern the young people.

**Activities:**

1. Three Island Wide Assemblies (Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao)
   a. Luzon (Manila, QC, Mandaluyong, Pasig, Caloocan, Malabon, Valenzuela, Isabel, Cagayan Valley, Bulacan, Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, Nueva Viscaya, Pangasinan, Naga, Palawan)
   b. Visayas (Cebu City, Dumaguete, Bohol, Iloilo, Negros Occidental, Samar, Leyte)
   c. Mindanao (Davao City, Davao Del Norte, Cotabato, General Santos City, Iligan, Cagayan de Oro, Zamboanga City)


**Target Participants:**
- 100 participants per Regional Assembly;
- 100 participants in the National Youth Congress (20 Visayas, 20 Mindanao, 20 Luzon, 40 NCR)

**Timeframe:**

**Regional Youth Assemblies:**

Luzon: January 30-31, 2009
Visayas: February 19-20, 2009  
Mindanao: February 26-27, 2009  
National Youth Congress: April 3-4, 2009

Budget Per Regional Assembly: 200,000 x 3 = 600,000  
Budget for National Conference 750,000

**Budget Break Down for Regional Assemblies:**

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### Budget Breakdown for National Congress

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### Project Monitoring and Sustainability

CYAN, as the conduit institution of FTV Network will facilitate and handle all management tasks related to the implementation of the project. Monthly reports will be created to see the actual progress of the project and area coordinators shall be appointed to ensure real-time monitoring of all the activities.

CYAN Partners such as Movement for the Advancement of Student Power, Alliance of Community Based Youth, Student Council Alliance of the Philippines, National Anti-Poverty Commission – Youth and Students and TASK will provide a backbone for the project as these organizations are institutions already in their respective areas of work.

Since 2001, FTV has encountered a number of physical and logistical barriers in the implementation of its projects such as financial constraint, traditional/transactional/money politics, transient nature of student leaders, etc. but these have never hindered the network from growing and expanding. This feat could be attributed to several factors: 1) FTV engages both unorganized and organized youth groups; 2) FTV develops the skills of its leaders and members which they later on pass on to their
second line of leaders and so on; 3) FTV member organizations’ ownership of the campaign; 4) FTV, 
being the pioneer youth network advocating for electoral reform has gained the trust and confidence 
of schools, partner civil society groups and the government agencies themselves; 5) FTV is a 
grassroots-based network with institutionalized national youth groups serving as the network’s core 
group and think tank.

Immediate regional and area coordinators of FTV are dedicated and seasoned youth and student 
leaders from Student Councils, Youth Councils (Sangguniang Kabataan), and Community Youth 
Organizations. Despite calls to abolish the Youth Council in 2007, FTV proved that there are 
functioning and performing SK’s throughout the country through TASK, and has since then enabled 
SK’s as crucial part of the campaign.