# Youth and Peacebuilding

Key insights and lessons from
a global online consultation

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# About this report

This report presents insights and recommendations from young peacebuilders on the current state of youth-led peacebuilding and the operationalisation of principles at the forefront of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda. Peace Direct in collaboration with the United Network of Young (UNOY) Peacebuilders held a three-day online consultation from 8-10 April 2019, with over 140 participants and guest contributors who exchanged insights and local experiences on YPS across three thematic categories, namely (1) Deconstructing the role of youth in peacebuilding, (2) Moving towards empowerment and inclusion, and (3) Investing in youth peacebuilding capacities.

We thank Christian Cito Cirhigiri as the main author of this report. This report has been edited by Peace Direct. The main sections of the report include contributions from participants that took part in the online consultation. Where quotes are anonymous, they are from participants who preferred to keep their identities private for personal and/or security concerns. The contents of this report are the responsibility of Peace Direct. The text in this report should not be taken to represent the views of any other organisation.

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# Acknowledgments

Peace Direct would like to extend a very special thanks to our participants and guest contributors for their commitment and valuable inputs to this report, and for engaging proactively in the online consultation with respect and without judgement. We received over 400 engaging comments over nine discussion threads and benefitted from everyone's insights and recommendations on the formulation of strategies to foster effective youth inclusion in varied peacebuilding contexts around the world.

# Abbreviations

| | | | |
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| CSOs | Civil Society Organisations | UN | United Nations |
| DRC | Democratic Republic of Congo | UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| ECOSOC | Economic and Social Council | | |
| LfR | Letters for Reconciliation | UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| LVP | Local Voices for Peace | UNOY | United Network of Young Peacebuilders |
| NVR | National Voluntary Review | | |
| SCR | Security Council Resolution | WtR | Write to Reconcile |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals | YPS | Youth, Peace and Security |

# Executive Summary

**Almost four years since the historic adoption of the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution (SCR) 2250, most signatory Member States are still lagging in supporting youth-led initiatives and generating conducive environments for youth inclusion at the local level.**

Despite most governments' failure to implement this resolution and support youth-led peacebuilding initiatives, young peacebuilders around the world are charting creative and innovative ways to assert their voices, thus contributing to advancing youth inclusion in peacebuilding processes globally. Drawing on a three-day online consultation organised by Peace Direct and United Network of Young (UNOY) Peacebuilders in April 2019 with local peacebuilders from across the world, this report shares key insights and policy recommendations to enhance youth inclusion in peacebuilding processes in light of young peacebuilders' strengths and aspirations to transform their respective contexts.

This report forms part of Peace Direct's *Local Voices for Peace* (LVP) Report series and seeks to amplify young peacebuilders' voices and explore the different, innovative ways in which they are advancing youth inclusion in political and peacebuilding processes in their contexts. It underscores the challenges that

young peacebuilders are experiencing in the implementation of SCR 2250. Participants of the online consultation delineated the tensions that exist between their optimistic individual attitudes, behaviours, and aspirations underlying their peacebuilding efforts, and the attitudes and behaviours of policymakers toward youth-led peacebuilding initiatives. Thus, a central question that the report posits for policymakers, governments, peacebuilding organisations, research institutions, and young peacebuilders working to advance the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda is: how can we effectively support and engage the growing number of youth peacebuilders around the world? How can we ensure greater support and identify a new approach to engage youth peacebuilders?

To advance youth inclusion in peacebuilding processes, it is critical that policymakers and local stakeholders choose to perceive young peacebuilders and youth in general as allies for good rather than threats to contain.

# Key Insights

The three-day online consultation, convened by Peace Direct and UNOY, sought to explore the innovative ways in which local young peacebuilders are advancing youth inclusion in political and peacebuilding processes in their different contexts. Participants were invited to contribute to a series of online, text-based discussions for three days. Over 140 participants took part from 56 countries. The most noteworthy insights and recommendations from the online consultation are summarised below:

- Participants of the online consultation juxtaposed the optimistic individual attitudes and behaviours of many young people driving peacebuilding efforts with the **failure of policy makers to recognise and support the positive potential of youth in peacebuilding processes as agents of conflict transformation.**

- **Most governments have thus far failed to adequately implement SCR 2250 at the local level.** Youth peacebuilders face combined challenges of shrinking civic engagement spaces, limited access to individual economic opportunities or organisational funding, and a lack of transparency from governments on the implementation of the YPS Agenda.

- **It is important that policymakers open political spaces for youth to fully participate in both the formulation of decision-making structures and actual decision-making processes.** Open dialogue is key to building trust between youth peacebuilders and policymakers.

- **Despite exclusion from political and policy processes, most young people do not turn to violence as a solution for political change.** However, such exclusion can exacerbate the risk of violence and radicalisation in certain contexts.

- **Existing gender norms can affect which youth groups can access peacebuilding processes.**

- To advance the inclusion of youth, and other marginalised groups such as women, in peacebuilding processes, **it is critical to also recognise and account for the destructive roles these constituencies have played in conflicts** — allowing appropriate transitional and restorative justice mechanisms to address past abuses. This is especially crucial in countries with histories of unaddressed past grievances in which youth were perpetrators of violence.

## Recommendations

Governments, multilateral actors and civil society groups should:

- **Recognise the force of youth peacebuilders as agents of conflict transformation and peacebuilding**. Governments must urgently implement SCR 2250 and foster meaningful youth participation in peacebuilding processes through effective policies and programmes. This involves engaging youth constituencies in defining country strategies and peacebuilding processes that are reflective of their needs and aspirations.

- **Support greater funding for youth groups and youth-led initiatives at local levels**, for example through supporting youth peacebuilder networks and fostering local youth leadership. This should include flexible funding structures needed to build organisational sustainability at local levels.

- **Improve accountability and transparency on action on YPS, such as through improved official and shadow reporting on implementation on the five pillars of SCR 2250** - namely participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration - as well as on the specific stipulations of SCR 2419 on youth participation in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements.

- **Undertake intersectional analyses to understand and address factors impeding the full recognition of the contributions of young women and other marginalised youth groups.** It is important to promote the inclusion of girls and women in peacebuilding processes by challenging negative gender norms.

- **Adapt to new ways of participation and new youth leadership models.** This paradigm shift involves an awareness of youth-friendly mechanisms and tools such as youth MP quotas, youth advisory councils, dedicated youth programmes, and social media to stimulate their full contribution in social and political matters.

- **Continue to build the evidence around young people's contributions to peacebuilding in diverse conflict contexts.**

- **Support the establishment of intergenerational councils to discuss challenges related to youth inclusion in peacebuilding.** These councils would provide permanent platforms for intergenerational participation in the policymaking process and should be composed of elders, political leaders, policymakers, and youth representatives from all backgrounds—especially those most affected by conflict.

# Introduction

Youth inclusion in peacebuilding processes is critical for ensuring sustainable and inclusive peace, as recognised by the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution (SCR) 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions). Young people are also often at the forefront of movements and community-based efforts around the world to advance peace, promote more equitable societies, and demand greater inclusion in decision-making for themselves and others.

However, almost four years since the historic adoption of SCR 2250, young peacebuilders remain largely excluded from formal peacebuilding processes. Misguided policies continue to consider youth as a threat to contain rather than allies in the effort to build peace. Governments, donors, and policymakers should listen to the voices of young people working at the forefront of local peacebuilding in various contexts around the world and make efforts to address the trust gap that continues to characterise their engagement with young people in peacebuilding. How can we effectively support and engage the growing number of youth peacebuilders around the world? How can we ensure greater support and identify a new approach to engage youth peacebuilders?

To that end, Peace Direct and the United Network of Young (UNOY) Peacebuilders convened a three-day online consultation in April 2019 to explore the different, innovative ways in which local young peacebuilders are advancing youth inclusion in political and peacebuilding processes in their contexts. The online consultation also provided a space for knowledge- and experience-sharing among peers working on the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda around the world. The insights generated from this consultation form the basis of the analysis and recommendations developed in this report.

Section 1 covers the methodological approach used during the online consultation to foster a safe and inclusive online environment for participants to learn from each other in respect of diversity of opinions and open-mindedness. While Section 2 provides definitions of key concepts used during the online consultation and a brief literature review on the background of those concepts. To deconstruct youth identities, Section 3 explores participants' experiences engaging with youth from diverse backgrounds—stressing the need to redefine gender roles, masculinity, stereotypes and assumptions about young peacebuilders. Section 4 covers the barriers and challenges of young peacebuilders, putting an emphasis on the structural, process and internal bottlenecks confronting youth-led peacebuilding initiatives. Beyond challenges, Section 5 explores strategies to foster effective youth inclusion – highlighting among others the relevance of youth leadership development for peacebuilding and the necessity for peacebuilding actors to develop an appropriate methodology to foster intergenerational dialogue.

The report concludes that young peacebuilders are already playing decisive roles in preventing and resolving some of the most endemic conflicts around the world, and their full recognition, inclusion, and support is necessary for the sustainability of peacebuilding processes at all levels. A complete paradigm shift in the way governments and stakeholders perceive young peacebuilders will help to shape new values and norms upon which a transformative culture of youth inclusion can emerge. It is vital that the insights and recommendations of this report lead to increased support and strengthening of youth-led peacebuilding initiatives and foster collaborative approaches in addressing the complexity of meaningful youth inclusion, which has a critical bearing on world peace today and for future generations.

# 1 Methodology

**The online consultation was a participatory and inclusive discussion series that fostered knowledge dissemination and first-hand experience sharing among participants on selected themes including (1) Deconstructing the role of youth in peacebuilding, (2) Moving towards empowerment and inclusion, and (3) Investing in youth peacebuilding capacities.**

Facilitators established the ground rules to encourage mutual respect and open-mindedness in the discussions and participants nurtured among each other a healthy and productive environment for learning and sharing. To stimulate enriching dialogues, each daily session featured three discussion threads that were started with a short text introducing the topic and set up questions for discussion. Facilitators also provided participants with relevant resources on the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda – from UN Security Council Resolutions to studies on youth led peacebuilding initiatives to level the ground of knowledge on youth inclusion in peacebuilding processes. They [facilitators] also introduced the content of the following day of online consultation with a recap of key points from participants' engagement in each day.

While the online consultation promoted an open sharing of ideas by encouraging participants to use their names, participants were also able to comment anonymously if they had security concerns. Furthermore, participants had the option to edit their responses and comments if necessary, to clarify their inputs. This facilitation approach fostered a safe online space for participants to share experiences among each other—sustaining a coherent and structured flow of discussions from Day 1 to Day 3.

Concepts such as "peacebuilding" and "young peacebuilder" have varying definitions in different contexts. To foreground the insights and recommendations shared by participants, it is important to clarify these concepts as applied in the online consultation. The following section also provides an overview of relevant international frameworks that were discussed during the online consultation, mainly SCR 2250 and SDG 16, and their importance to youth-led peacebuilding.

This report summarises the key themes of the consultations. Analysis was conducted by first grouping the responses according to the extent to which participants agreed or offered new insights. Themes and issues that had not been posed in the framing text or questions, but had emerged during the discussions between participants, are also included here. Quotes from participants included in this report are illustrative of the perspectives raised during the consultations. Efforts have been made to include contributions from a wide range of participants. Participants quoted in this report have given consent to be quoted directly. Minor edits have been made to a small number of quotes to aid with readability. Some asked for their names and organisations to be included, whereas others preferred to remain anonymous. The case studies in this report were based on select participants' contributions in the online consultations. Follow-up interviews and email correspondence were held with those participants to develop the case studies with explicit consent.

# 2 Definitions and international frameworks

## 2.1 Peacebuilding

While the term peacebuilding has several definitions, most peace initiatives adopt a broad definition based on the work of Galtung[1] and Lederach[2] —two of the most relevant scholars that have contributed significantly in expanding the concept of peacebuilding as initiatives to promote positive peace by addressing the roots of conflict, preventing and mitigating all forms of violence, and fostering just and inclusive societies. This vision of inclusion is predicated on the inclusion of all members of society, particularly youth, and strives to promote a culture of peace.

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1    To learn more about Johan Galtung's peace theory: https://www.transcend.org/galtung/papers/Peace%20Theory-An%20Introduction.pdf
2    To learn more about John Paul Lederach's Peacebuilding Pyramid: https://www.beyondintractability.org/moos/lederach-pyramid

## 2.2 Young peacebuilder

According to the UN, a youth is an individual between 15 and 25 years old; alternatively, the African Youth Charter (2006) considers as youth those between 15 and 35 years old. The term youth is not a homogenous category and several other social factors and identities, including culture, ethnic origin, disability, gender, position as an ex-combatant, status as a refugee or migrant, role as a caregiver of younger siblings, etc. (UNOY Peacebuilders, 2015; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2015), shape our understanding of youth. Taking in consideration these broader factors, during the online consultation Peace Direct adopted an inclusive definition of young peacebuilder as any person between 15 and 35 years old engaged in a peacebuilding initiative around the world.

## 2.3 UNSCR 2250 and SGD 16

In September 2015, UN member states approved Agenda 2030, a comprehensive international policy framework with 17 comprehensive Sustainable Development Goals elaborated to address some of the most pressing problems of our planet, including ending atrocities. SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) at its core endeavours to secure peace, deliver justice, promote inclusive participation in politics and beyond, and consolidate effective, accountable and inclusive institutions[3]. Increasingly, young peacebuilders around the world are advocating for more inclusion in the implementation of SDG 16 – this was also the case during the recent Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum in New York on April 8, 2019, in which young participants engaged with policymakers on the gaps of youth inclusion in meeting SDG 16 and invited them to invest needed resources to achieve peace dividends through youth participation.

Another important policy framework that has shaped and defined the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda is SCR 2250. Adopted by the UN Security Council in December 2015, SCR 2250 is a landmark international legal framework that highlights the key role(s) that youth play in addressing world conflicts. This historic policy framework is relevant to young peacebuilders because it recognises the legitimacy of youth's efforts in building peace and acts as a step to galvanise the international community and UN member states to develop policies and programmes that foster meaningful youth participation in peacebuilding processes. Various UN, international, national, and local peace entities on the forefront of the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda have produced several reports based on this resolution to better understand the specific gaps facing the implementation of SCR 2250 at local, national, regional, and global levels. Some of the most important reports on the progress of YPS include, *The Missing Peace* (UN), *Beyond Dividing Lines* (UNOY), Frontlines (UN Development Programme), to name a few.

The following section briefly examines some key findings of some of the recent studies on the progress of SCR 2250. Their insights are an important background to some of the recommendations and analysis shared by participants of the online consultation.

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3    For more information about SDG 16: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16

## 2.4 Addressing the gaps

To follow up on the adoption and implementation of SCR 2250 by Member States in 2016, the UN Secretary-General appointed a team to carry out a progress study on youth's positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution, and draw recommendations to promote effective responses at local, national, regional and international levels. The study also proposed ways to support the agency, leadership, and ownership by young people in peace processes and offered a blueprint for the implementation of the recently adopted Resolution 2419 (2018)[4] on youth, peace and security. The report dubbed, "*The Missing Peace*", is the outcome of the appointed team's study and among its key findings is the growing trust deficit between young people and their governments, multilateral bodies and even international civil society organisations. This generalised sense of distrust has led to what the report refers to as 'policy panic', a tendency of policymakers to enact discriminatory policies against youth based on the prevailing, highly gendered, and unfounded assumptions that young people are either drivers of violence or its passive victims. Not only do these perceptions deny the agency of young people's contribution to peace, but they also encourage policy myths and fear-mongering about their roles in violent conflict[5].

In other efforts to contribute to the existing knowledge base on the positive roles of youth-led engagement related to peacebuilding, UNOY published "*Beyond Dividing Lines*", a comparative study of cases that highlights challenges and opportunities facing youth-led initiatives in Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Colombia, and Libya. Like the "*Missing Peace*" report, UNOY's study underscores the trust deficit existing between policymakers and young peacebuilders in these contexts and advocates for increased capacity building support for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives and the nurturing of safe and inclusive environments for young peacebuilders[6].

In a collaborative effort with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) to contribute to the "*Missing Peace*" report on SCR 2250, between July and September 2017, Conciliation Resources also carried out a research study with 494 young people from various conflict contexts, including Afghanistan, Jammu and Kashmir, South Sudan, the Georgian- Abkhaz context, and among youth of the Ogaden diaspora living in the United Kingdom. Like the "*Beyond Dividing Lines*" report, this study emphasises the need for policymakers to create enabling environments for youth to engage in political processes and facilitate and support dignified livelihoods for young people. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance for increased inter-community and inter-generational dialogues between youth and adults to promote knowledge sharing and community support for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives.

While the existing studies on the progress of the implementation of SCR 2250 also point to the positive roles of youth in peacebuilding, further research is needed on the impact of youth-led peace initiatives. Additionally, most of the studies face several financial, logistical, and time constraints that do not allow for extended analysis of underlying factors contributing to or impeding youth-led peacebuilding. Nonetheless, to increase the effectiveness of advocacy efforts for SCR 2250, it is crucial that local, national, and regional and global peacebuilding organisations continue to address these gaps by bringing forward both qualitative and quantitative evidence of young people's contributions to peacebuilding in diverse conflict contexts. It is also important for peacebuilding organisations to increase dialogue spaces in which local young peacebuilders learn from each other and foster supportive networks across thematic areas.

The online consultation sought to address these policy and practice gaps by providing policymakers with direct insights from local peacebuilders around the world while at the same time creating a safe online space for young peacebuilders to exchange knowledge and best practices in response to challenges of youth inclusion.

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4    For more information on SCR 2419: https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2419(2018)
5    For more information about the "Missing Peace" report: https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2419(2018)
6    For more information about the "Beyond Dividing Lines" report: http://unoy.org/wp-content/uploads/Final-Version-Research-Report_Beyond-Dividing-Lines_UNOY.pdf

# 3 Deconstructing youth identity

**Youth are still one of the main victims of exclusion around the world, both in fragile and developed contexts. Ethnic diversity, as well as religious, economic, social and political differences, create several challenges within societies, which most often fail to respond to the needs of young people.**

Although there is a growing body of peace research pointing to the positive contributions of young people in peacebuilding processes (McEvoy, 2006), a dominant perception among policymakers and multilateral stakeholders is that youth are troublemakers that pose a threat to world peace, and consequently must be contained by tough policy regulations. To reap peace dividends through youth inclusion, it is important that policymakers start viewing youth as agents of conflict transformation and invest efforts to bridge the existing trust gap towards youth.

## 3.1 Constructed identities

Around the world, many young people are victims of cultural, direct and structural violence, and can sometimes become carriers of that violence or perpetrators. However, despite a strong tendency among politicians and policymakers to position youth engagement within the victim-perpetrator binary, participants of the online consultation debunked these myths and stereotypes—by asserting their roles as peacebuilders, intentionally working to promote a culture of peace in their respective contexts.

### 3.1.1 Is UNSCR 2250 enough?

Because of its integral acknowledgement of youth's contributions in peacebuilding processes, SCR 2250 is an important framework to consolidate and cement youth identity as peacebuilders. It is also a crucial legal paradigm shift that can transform the negative attitudes of policymakers towards youth-led peacebuilding initiatives. It is important to note that young peacebuilders have a variety of experiences with the implementation of the YPS Agenda and their engagement with policymakers. During the online consultation, youth participants noted their excitement about the potential of SCR 2250 to foster youth inclusion in peacebuilding and political processes; others are stressed and frustrated at the disappointing challenges youth-led peacebuilding initiatives encounter in their respective contexts. Keith Sibanda (Zimbabwe) stated that:

*"Resolution 2250 is supposed to be the thrust of youth-led initiatives in peacebuilding. However, this has not been much of a success [...] lack of government support, inadequate donor funding, being looked upon as too young, irrelevant and inexperienced. In many conflict setups we youth are seen to be people that do not understand topical issues because when some conflicts started, we were either too young or not yet born."*

A few other participants are finding ways to set more realistic expectations for SCR 2250 based on a deep understanding of their unique contexts and youth's capacities to change them. However, regardless of where young peacebuilders find themselves in the implementation of SCR 2250, participants of the online consultation expressed their commitment to building a supportive community of practice around the world to address the limiting attitudes and behaviours that affect their peacebuilding work. They also showed resilience in shaping a transformative culture of youth inclusion in different peacebuilding processes around the world.

While it is important to examine how policymakers and governments' attitudes limit progress of the YPS Agenda—to understand all the fundamental challenges facing the implementation of SCR 2250— it is equally important for youth-led initiatives and their allies to be self-reflective to ensure they can effectively be part of the solution. For some participants, being part of the solution in advancing the YPS Agenda means implementing bottom-up initiatives that empower young people. Janat Rakhimova (Uzbekistan) proposed that:

*"[...] Peacebuilding among the youth is necessary in order to solve problematic issues not from high tribunes, but through various seminars, conferences and forums that positively affect the integration of young people from different countries of the world."*

In other efforts to contextualise and make relevant the implementation of the resolution, youth-led peacebuilding must foster creativity in providing local solutions to local problems, which implies understanding their organisational strengths and capacities to effect lasting impact. In that regard, some participants viewed their peacebuilding initiatives as contributing to the formation and dissemination of alternative messages and narratives, both online and offline, about the drawbacks of conflicts and the benefits of pursuing conflict resolution. Dishani Senaratne's (Sri Lanka) contribution is an example of the creative processes that young peacebuilders generate to inspire their communities for peace:



*"[...] The Write to Reconcile (WtR) project enabled me not only to shed my tainted glasses but also to be self-critical of my own assumptions and affiliations. Most importantly, the experiences that I gained from WtR catalysed me to focus on the civil conflict in my creative pieces. I strongly feel that literature is a potent tool to make readers aware of alternative viewpoints."*

## 3.1.2 Exclusion and radicalisation

Despite exclusion from political and policy processes, most young people do not turn to violence as a solution for political change. However, such exclusion can exacerbate the risk of violence and radicalisation in certain contexts.

Nde Bruno Anomah (Cameroon) shared this account:



*"[...] More than 250 villages have been completely burned by government troops, the youth are targeted and killed while some are in the bush fighting back to protect their lives and that of their people. Who are those fighting this battle? The youth, of course. Why are they fighting? Marginalization. They are treated as second-class citizens in their own country, with no jobs and opportunities, a lack of capacity-building and the government simply has no concern for the youth of English Cameroon. Today we are fighting, most of my friends and age mates are dead [...]."*

## 3.1.3 Youth preventing electoral violence

When effectively carried out, elections can establish the grounds for good governance and solidify the foundations of peacebuilding. Too often, politicians—especially in Africa—incite youth to engage in violence during elections and thus the dominant narrative of youth participation in elections is often negative. Some participants, however, viewed their role as promoting nonviolence and preventing violence before, during, and after political elections. Chukwuma Chukwura (Nigeria) stated that:



*"[...] In Nigeria my group and other youth-led groups contributed to the restoration of peace in Jos, after the 2008 and 2009 crises that claimed so many lives. The 'Vote Not Fight' campaign in Anambra state Nigeria was deeply involved in building civic awareness on the need for peace before, during and after state elections through public campaigning, rallies, and peace walks, thereby reaching millions of other youth who subscribed to the movement and continue engaging other members of their society [...]".*

## 3.2 Diversity and gender among youth constituencies

Young people are not a homogeneous group. Defining youth with an understanding of the diverse identities and priorities they represent is an important step towards improving youth inclusion in peacebuilding processes. Despite evidence ascertaining the roles young women play in peacebuilding processes, their contributions remain largely overlooked. It is crucial that youth-led peacebuilding initiatives remain cognizant of factors impeding the full recognition of young women's and other youth groups' contributions. It is also important that all actors carry out regular gender and diversity analysis upon which more inclusive strategies for youth participation can be articulated.

## 3.2.1 Understanding where youth and gender intersect

Policymakers and governments often treat young women as a sub-category of the YPS Agenda. As such, young women's experiences and voices do not receive equal attention. It is vital to change this policy approach by engaging in comprehensive intersectional analysis, to improve policies and increase young women's participation —taking into consideration other factors influencing inclusivity, such as socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds that may affect the quality of young women's participation. It is critical that policymakers understand that intersectionality is key to inclusivity and diversity of participation for the advancement of the YPS Agenda.

A crucial step in fostering the recognition and inclusion of youth's diverse constituencies in peacebuilding efforts is to demystify the (mis) conception that gender equality is only a women's issue. Participants in the online consultation addressed the need to move beyond this paradigm by proposing that all actors should undertake intersectional analyses which take a broad approach to understanding inequality on multiple fronts such as gender, minority groups, disabilities, and recognises that these can interact to create multiple layers of disadvantage.

It is widely accepted that women and young people are the primary victims of conflict. It is also largely recognised that women and youth, as conflict survivors, bear the burden of rebuilding their communities and repairing relationships. However, it is only very recently that research has focused on the active roles of women and youth in perpetuating violence as fighters. To advance the inclusion of women and youth in peacebuilding processes it is critical to also recognise and account for the destructive roles these constituencies have played in conflicts — allowing appropriate transitional justice mechanisms to address past abuses. This is especially crucial in countries with histories of unaddressed past grievances attributed to the roles of youth and women, and which are often used as triggers and justifications for renewed cycles of violence. Not addressing these grievances and solely focusing on youth and women's roles as peacebuilders can cause more harm in fragile peacebuilding contexts. In this regard, Pascalia Nyamita (Kenya) stated that:

*"It is necessary to incorporate all people (a diverse group) into peacebuilding mechanisms because as we have seen in a number of militias, women and young people have been active participants in the propagation of violence and this has been evident in recent times. A lot of women have been recruited in terrorist groups and there are young people who have been lured by financial incentives, and thus when addressing such issues, the role of women and youth in violence and terrorism should be addressed."*

Governments and policymakers can play a crucial role in encouraging change by involving young people in the formulation of policies that define new societal norms and values of respect and inclusion of all at all levels. Underscoring this point, Musa Carew (Sierra Leone) shared that:

*"Governments and actors involved in policymaking should include relevant stakeholders; including young peacebuilders in formulating, improving, and evaluating new and existing policies, in order for a gender equality perspective to be incorporated into all policies at all levels and stages."*

## 3.2.2 Deconstructing gender roles and addressing masculinity

Another important step in recognising diversity in youth constituencies and promoting their inclusion is by deconstructing gender roles, i.e. understanding how social and cultural expectations of men and women's roles favour men's identities as peacebuilders. Gender norms and expectations are grounded on unequal power dynamics between men and women. Because of these norms, men may resist stepping outside expectations of masculinity for fear of being shunned by their peers.

Participants discussed the need to understand and challenge gender norms and shift negative masculinities to promote greater inclusion of girls and women in peacebuilding processes. To emphasise this point, Annie Malongo (Democratic Republic of Congo - DRC) shared that:

*[...] Participants are not motivated to listen to women because for them the place of women is in the kitchen and not to talk about peace in front of people, and especially not in front of men. During our peacebuilding work, we do everything we can to ensure that the young people (girls and boys) in our group participate in discussions even in places that are most hostile to women, such as in front of a traditional chief. As a woman, I would like young men to accompany us in the struggle for women's participation and the fight against backward customs, because young men are often also hostile towards the work that women and other marginalized groups do."*

Chelsea Barrera (Mexico) added that:

*"[...] These definitions have become gendered because society continues to teach men that they must be strong and assertive, whereas women are taught to be submissive and peaceful. Unless we begin to teach both men and women to be peacebuilders from a young age and gain a deeper psychological understanding of what creates violent tendencies, this will continue to be a gendered definition [...]."*

Zahara Namanda (Uganda) also shared her personal experience:

*"Gender in my community is like an active volcano that everyone is trying to address. Yes, it is true as a woman that I have been threatened to leave gender advocacy because the community says I will not get married with this kind of work!"*

## 3.3 Debunking stereotypes and assumptions about young peacebuilders

As extensively evidenced in the "*Missing Peace*" report, several dangerous assumptions about the role, position, and contribution of youth appear to plague thinking among national and international policymakers driving recovery efforts within societies in transition. These misconstrued assumptions about youth fuel distrust between young peacebuilders and other stakeholders. To advance youth inclusion in peacebuilding processes, it is important not only to debunk these stereotypes and assumptions but to also understand how youth groups are actively engaged in asserting their roles as peacebuilders.

## 3.3.1 Young peacebuilders as active agents of conflict transformation

In many conflict contexts around the world, young peacebuilders are feared as threats to the political status quo. Reflecting on this problematic stereotype, Zaharah Namanda (Uganda) shared that:

*"Initially when I had just started working as a youth peacebuilder, politicians and the larger community called my team and I as the unemployed who are trying to create jobs for themselves. The society felt that we were too young to build initiatives that could create sustainable impact and most of them assumed that we had no agenda to drive peace. [...] As a young person, I have always broken the stereotype that we are not focused and money driven!"*

The lack of young people's recognition as political actors undermines their peacebuilding contributions—making young peacebuilders feel under-utilised and unappreciated and that their efforts are wasted. To recognise young peacebuilders' agency as political and peacebuilding actors, it is crucial that policymakers and governments understand that young people who grow up in conflict and post-conflict zones constantly make strategic decisions about how to engage with politics—adopting violent or non-violent techniques of struggle.

Despite the challenging nature of conflict and post-conflict contexts, young peacebuilders show great 'navigational skills' to repair damaged community relationships through creative and innovative initiatives. Additionally, they can contribute to shaping societal norms and values so that they can find a voice and place in emerging peacebuilding structures. For young peacebuilders, for example, attending international peacebuilding conferences hones political tact and experience, and this should not transform them into threats but into prepared allies in the pursuit of a common local and national good.

It is therefore important that policymakers and governments conceptualise young peacebuilders as agents of conflict transformation working not only to address the challenges of physical violence, but also to tackle structural and cultural violence. This includes addressing the broader social change processes to transform violent, oppressive and hierarchical structures, relationships behaviours and attitudes, into more participatory and inclusive ones. Emphasising youth's role as agents of conflict transformation, Lina Maria Jaramillo (Colombia), stated:
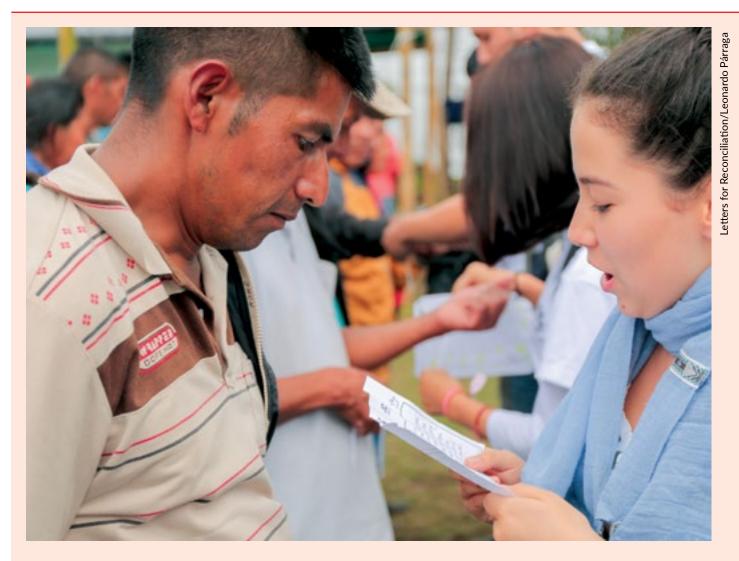
*"I think the strongest narrative youth peacebuilders should take over is understanding youth as active agents of conflict transformation by leading all the processes related to peace-culture and pedagogy at the community level. This is not a mere form to relegate young peacebuilders to local peacebuilding activities at the community level but rather to understand their key role in bottom-up processes of peacebuilding by changing mindsets and narratives that have sustained violent dynamics and the roots of conflicts."*

To change negative conceptions of youth's contributions to peacebuilding, it is vital that policymakers and governments move away from simplistic conceptualisations of youth that reduce a diverse category to a homogeneous group and undermine the agency of young peacebuilders. It is also important to take into consideration the barriers and challenges young peacebuilders tend to face during and in the aftermath of armed conflict.

For now, despite confronting several challenges in their work, participants expressed belief in their potential to contribute to peacebuilding and give back to their communities—demanding policymakers and governments to improve their working conditions as partners for peace. Reflecting on this point Ayabavi Linda Ophelie Comlan Sessi (Benin) shared that:

*"[...] We must be involved, we must be partners, we must participate in decision-making in the major bodies. We can take decisions and take good actions to achieve the objectives of the African Union Agenda 2063, the objectives of the UN Youth Strategy 2030, we have assets. Youth are a source of peace. We want our voices to be heard, we no longer want to be represented by our peers in conferences, international meetings and forums for discussion and dialogue. We want to act ourselves [...]."*

## Case study: La Panga and BogotArt in Colombia

Since the peace agreement was signed between the FARC-EP and the government in November 2016, over 500 social leaders and activists have been killed in acts of violence and by far-right paramilitary groups in Colombia. Amidst the violence, general disinformation is rampant and peacebuilders are struggling to bring reconciliation and dialogue to the forefront. Yet even in what sometimes appears as a desperate situation, several youth-led organisations have been coming up with creative ways to build peace. Lina Maria Jaramillo and Leonardo Parraga's initiatives are just two examples youth-led organisations creating innovative ways to build peace.

Lina felt that the momentum from the 2016 October referendum had passed, and motivation for youth to get involved was waning. She set about developing La Panga, a digital platform that would map art-based peacebuilding initiatives across the country. With the goal of allowing artistic peacebuilding organisations to collaborate and coordinate between themselves, these partnerships were meant to strengthen each initiative and create a large impact nationwide. One such initiative was Leonardo's organisation BogotArt – an organisation that believes in the creative arts as a means for reconciliation.

Letters for Reconciliation (LfR) is one of the two main youth-led peacebuilding initiatives BogotArt have coordinated in cooperation with other youth organisations from all over the country, emerging from the polarised post-peace agreement environment. According to Leonardo a key motivation for this divide was that people were acting based on prejudices and stereotypes without having any first-hand experience with the other side. In a society where too much communication happens online, with LfR BogotArt wanted to get back to the fundamentals.

The campaign began around Valentine's Day 2017, with the idea that writing letters would hold a strong symbolic value, both as love and reconciliation letters. They were exchanged between ex-combatants and civilians. The written format allows the writers to experience catharsis which then opens the way for acceptance and reconciliation. The process of writing brings with it the release needed to let go of hatred and resentment against the other side.

The project embodies the notion of embracing diversity, which Leonardo believes will help create an inclusive country. To solidify the outcomes of the letter exchange BogotArt then created a space in the FARC encampments to engage in face-to-face conversation. The feedback shows that the experience was transformational for those who took part. Several participants described it as the single most 'enlightening experience to understand the conflict and its actors in Colombia'.

Though the initiative was very successful, it being youth-led meant the organisation had to tackle multiple issues. Leonardo says that the biggest to overcome was the lack of trust in youth-led organisations. He was often met with the commonly held belief that youth-led equals low-yield.

Lina raised frustrations over the lack of support given to youth-led initiatives. Despite La Panga's initial success of receiving funding and solutions, they were never provided long-term guidance. In addition, Lina noted that youth-led initiatives often do not receive full recognition by institutions. She explained that young people are praised for coming up with new and innovative ideas, but only rarely do institutions focus on implementing those ideas with a long-term plan. It seems the priority often falls on celebrating an individual for an isolated event in order to boost visibility, to the detriment of creating lasting change.

Leonardo echoed Lina's remarks, "These stereotypes perpetuate what I call an 'adultocracy', where the youth are left out of the decision-making and do not have a say in determining the aspects of their lives that affect them the most."

Consequently, people believed that the activities carried out were leisurely and rarely taken seriously. This made it difficult for BogotArt to receive support and resources to carry out projects. BogotArt were not perceived as partners in peacebuilding and were never given the chance to pilot their initiatives.

# 4 Barriers and challenges for young peacebuilders

While SCR 2250 and a growing body of studies on the progress of the YPS Agenda are transforming the narrative on youth's engagement in peacebuilding processes, young peacebuilders are still braving a wide range of difficulties linked with operating in contexts of protracted conflict or slowly recovering from heightened violence.

## 4.1 Structural and policy barriers

For many participants, limited access to resources and support, rampant marginalisation and mistrust from and towards community and government stakeholders, and widespread unemployment were among the chief structural factors affecting their engagement in peacebuilding efforts.

### 4.1.1 Shrinking civic engagement spaces

As discussed throughout this report, the lack of youth's political inclusion in many conflict or post-conflict contexts is a major source of multi-stakeholder distrust contributing to further polarisation of youth in societies desperately striving to make some peacebuilding progress. Because of the shrinking and closing civic spaces, governments, donors, state and youth-led peacebuilding organisations are finding it increasingly difficult, and sometimes impossible, to find any common ground for engagement—often resulting in incongruent and unarticulated peacebuilding and humanitarian efforts, scarce resources, and worsening conditions after their intervention.

It is also important to note that in contexts where civil society space is limited, peacebuilders compete with one another and some choose to support tokenistic government practices around youth to gain favour. This situation often leads to more division among youth constituencies and discourages youth's participation in political processes. Reflecting on this challenge Khishigjargal Enkhbayar (Mongolia) stated that:

*"In Mongolia, youth are divided into 3 sections: the first type of youth are members of youth wings of parties [...] they are members of political parties for personal gain and quick promotions, [...]. The second type are the 'I'm not going to participate because nothing will change even if I do' youth, [...] 'Let's not talk politics' is their motto. The third type are somewhere in the Middle. They vote and are involved in some aspects of political decision-making. [...]"*

### 4.1.2 Lack of economic opportunities

Another relevant challenge that participants discussed is the lack of dignified livelihoods. This is especially true for young peacebuilders who feel that they have employable skills but are unable to find sources of income to sustain themselves and their families—especially considering that their peacebuilding work is often done on a voluntary basis. For many young people in this context, being unemployed can lead to restlessness, depression, low self-esteem, anxiety and a host of other mental health issues—an issue that has received limited attention even in the peacebuilding field. Reflecting on this challenge, Khishigjargal Enkhbayar (Mongolia), stated that:

*"Living with an internal struggle of being skilful but not being able to obtain desired jobs is difficult. [...] This is impacting my mental health, which then impacts my desire to volunteer my time for social good. I have been volunteering continuously for 10 years, but lately I have been declining offers to take up new community projects."*

Furthermore, as is the case in most conflict or post-conflict contexts struggling to rebuild their economies, rampant corruption, high levels of bureaucracy, and the lack of government incentive packages to stimulate youth entrepreneurship affect young people's economic ambitions. One of the dangers for countries operating in such fragile contexts is the high risk of brain drain among young people who, out of desperation, choose to migrate to countries with more opportunities. According to Pife Muliro (DRC):

*"Whenever some youth would think of creating any enterprise, the government charges a lot of 'illegal' taxes that lead to closure of the initiative. This is seen as a paradox; instead of encouraging people to be self-employed, the government is discouraging them. There are competencies in almost all sectors of life that can help youth to create their own ventures, but the environment is not favourable for them."*

Furthermore, donors and relevant actors should redesign the volunteering concept to include incentives and grants to support volunteers in training programmes as fully-fledged social entrepreneurs. In this way, young peacebuilders involved as volunteers will be supported in meeting their other basic needs rather than be torn between doing peacebuilding work and finding a sustainable source of income.. Lina Maria Jaramillo (Colombia) stated that:

*"[...] I believe there are two particular actions that would help us to tackle our economic and financial challenges. Donors, governments and organisations aiming to finance youth-led peacebuilding initiatives should design programmes addressed to cover both the training process for young peacebuilders, so they can build project management skills and second, the same initiatives may think of including financial opportunities as incentives for their participation in training workshops..."*

Another key element to think of in terms of the economic inclusion of youth has to do with upgrading the education system by prioritising academic programmes oriented to the strengthening of critical thinking, the development of soft and collaborative skills, and youth leadership. Similarly, employment opportunities for young people should be linked to the consolidation of community-based activities and solidarity with those most affected by exclusion. Janat Rakhimova (Uzbekistan) noted that:

*"[...] Inclusive education has a good foundation in the world. Also, the main goal of inclusive education is to create a special tolerant environment that would affect all participants in the educational process. This approach emphasises that all students are individuals with different nuances that require attention and understanding, regardless of their physical abilities. In most countries, inclusive education is not available for many young people with disabilities. To implement a tolerant attitude towards them, an environment of equal conditions in economic and social life should be created."*

Most consultation participants highlighted that they find ways to positively impact other important life skills among youth through arts, sports, media, informal learning and personal relationships — in addition to teaching peacebuilding skills. According to Robert Wertz (United States):

*"Youth-led peacebuilding from my context is reflected by their willingness to get out of their heads and into their hearts. This occurs as participants in a spiritually based team building exercise recognize that peers from other religions are willing to express their vulnerability. Vulnerability represented by not being able to solve the problem on their own. Vulnerability represented by lack of formal education. The recognition that they may not have the answer represents an initial step toward establishing trust. Once trust is established among the participants the team pools intellectual and life experience to solve the problem [...]."*

# Case study: RURCON Nigeria

Nigeria holds the largest youth population on the African continent, with a median age of 18 years old, and young people accounting for more than 44% of its total population[7]. Even with a population and economy exceeding all other African nations, economic fragility has worsened in recent years and the rate of unemployment for youth in Nigeria sits around 20%.

As a result, underemployed and unskilled youth seek any opportunities available to them – creating a cycle of cheap labourers and diminishing hopes of economic empowerment. Ameh Kenneth Seidu, youth activist and a member of RURCON, a Nigerian interfaith peacebuilding organisation located in Plateau State, states that young people without opportunities for economic empowerment *"become vulnerable to crime, robbery, addictions and other youth related social vices."*

Youth in Nigeria, as in many places, are negatively perceived as threats that incite violence, participate in criminal activities, and abuse drugs. In addition to the lack of employment opportunities, these negative perceptions make it difficult for young people to be trusted to create their own initiatives and empower themselves. Running youth peacebuilding initiatives is also difficult due to ongoing insecurity in many regions and a lack of support from security forces. Providing a safe space for young people to gather is risky, and their voices tend to be drowned out by adults regardless.

Recognising the widespread marginalisation felt by young people across the country, RURCON has been engaging this demographic to help create an alternative national narrative for youth in Nigeria. Their projects create opportunities for young people to gain vocational and entrepreneurial knowledge and skills in order to enhance their self-reliance and opportunities for employment, thus contributing to national economic growth and development.

RURCON uses the TREM strategy – Train, Rehabilitate, and Empower – to approach young people involved in violence, crime, and drug abuse and help them transform their lives, to free them from poverty. As part of this strategy, RURCON brings together youth, religious and traditional leaders to participate and collaborate in interfaith dialogues, consultation meetings, and conflict transformation workshops. This helps to break the stigmatisation of young people and promote their economic empowerment. As Ameh at RURCON argues:

"Youth and other stakeholders were imbibed with knowledge, attitudes and skills for inter-faith dialogue, entrepreneurial skills; thus, encouraging interactions, preventing social vices, strengthening local security and reducing unemployment amongst youth in the project areas to achieve de-radicalisation and strengthen civic trust."

The strategies and initiatives enforced and applied by RURCON have helped introduced an alternative narrative for vulnerable youth, developing their knowledge and skills, and enabling them to increase their economic opportunities and imbue positive attitudes in others as well.



7    https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html

## 4.2 Process barriers and internal challenges

While some young peacebuilders can create positive impact in their communities using minimal resources, most youth-led peacebuilding initiatives are largely underfunded, lacking the necessary organisational and programmatic capacities to attract donor funding and develop effective partnerships with other actors in the field.

## 4.2.1 Funding for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives[8]

Despite the increasing visibility of the YPS Agenda, most youth-led peacebuilding initiatives remain underfunded. As a result, many youth-led organisations and initiatives are run by volunteers with limited or no organisational management training and/or mentorship. Besides, young volunteers often lack professional skills, including financial management, fundraising, monitoring and evaluation, reporting, etc., which are often required by donor institutions. Commenting on this challenge, Yee Man Ko (Hong Kong SAR China) stated that:

*"As a young leader with less experience compared to those who are more senior, it is difficult to overcome the criticism of being a youth. This is especially relevant when it comes to peacebuilding, which requires past experience to tackle the problem more efficiently, and therefore involving youth is not preferable when it comes to decision-making on peacebuilding [...]."*

It is critical that donors prioritise funding organisational capacity-building for local youth initiatives and adopt more flexible funding structures to ensure financial sustainability of youth peacebuilding organisations.

## 4.2.2 Transparency and accountability

Poor transparency and accountability to YPS at national, regional, and international levels continue to undermine the efforts of youth peacebuilders. Through the 2030 Youth Strategy, the UN emphasises the importance of accountability and transparency in line with the implementation of SDG 16 at country levels. Through this strategy the UN aims to foster accountability among member States on youth policy issues, which involves the UN entities successfully addressing youth issues through their programming; effectively and meaningfully engaging young people in their work; and tracking budget allocations and expenditures[9].

While this is a step in the right direction, its implementation leaves much to be desired. For most consultation participants operating in conflict and post-conflict contexts, governments and bilateral actors make insignificant or no efforts to promote transparency and accountability with regards to youth, peace and security pillars—an additional reason fomenting distrust between youth and policymakers. The localisation of transparency and accountability for youth issues will require increased youth involvement in the formulation, dissemination, and monitoring of country strategies to also promote SDG 16. Additionally, it is important that the UN puts in place mechanisms to incentivise and acknowledge countries making accountability and transparency progress in the advancement of youth inclusion – through all international frameworks and SDGs alluding to youth's contributions in peace processes, including SDG 16, SCR 2250 and SCR 2419, among others.

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8    The development of this theme continues in Section 7 under the section titled "Pushing for financial sustainability."

9    To learn more about the 2030 Youth Strategy: https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-un

# 5 Strategies for effective inclusion of young peacebuilders

One of the key findings of the recently published UNDP report[10] on youth inclusion in the prevention of violent extremism is its appeal to policymakers to recognise that young people, their organisations and networks, bring strengths to preventing violent extremism and peacebuilding efforts, and that these contributions should be nurtured and supported.

Additionally, to advance the inclusion of young peacebuilders in national, regional, and international peacebuilding efforts, it is important that policymakers open political spaces for youth to participate in the formulation of decision-making processes that affect their wellbeing.

## 5.1 Empowerment through political processes

Youth participation in both formal and informal political processes are a good measure of an inclusive democracy and a sign that a country is moving in the right direction in addressing policy issues that affect youth. However, there is strong evidence showing that the participation of young people in formal, institutional political processes is relatively low when compared to older citizens across the globe—mainly due to misconceived perceptions of youth as threats to the political status quo. Another important contributing factor to the lack of effective youth inclusion in formal political processes has to do with political parties' corrupt and tokenistic practices—discouraging most youth to engage in politics.

## 5.1.1 Addressing campaign politics and violence

In most fragile democracies around the world, formal political participation faces significant challenges, including corruption and the monetisation of votes to lure the large masses of unemployed youth voters. In countries where youth-led protests have forced authoritarian regimes from power, significant frustration is likely to arise if youth are not included in new formal decision-making—leading to the destabilisation of democracies and the acceleration of conflict dynamics and electoral violence. Furthermore, in countries where 'winner takes all' is the dominant political norm, grave election abuses are likely to occur—exacerbating distrust between youth and policymakers and heightening social tensions. Envisioning a more transparent and inclusive political culture, it is important that governments and policymakers create an enabling environment for young people to actively participate in the whole electoral cycle—not just during campaigns. It is also important that youth-led organisations show resilience in tackling divisive political rhetoric that often puts young people against each other. Reflecting on this issue, an anonymous participant mentioned that:

*"[...] Young people are trained in ethno-political conflicts to intimidate the population in the presence of the authorities. Vengeance cycles are observed without being discovered. The division of youth based on partisan and ethnic perceptions prevents it from having a common vision of the future. Our organisation "coalition for peace in Burundi" (COPA-Burundi) organises training on the peaceful management of conflicts, community dialogues between young people, representatives of political parties and security forces to reduce violence. Young people are engaged in building and consolidating peace. With the support of UNFPA, we are working on the resilience of young people to socio-political conflicts."*

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10   To learn more about UNDP's recent report on Youth fighting Violent Extremism check https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/frontlines.html

In an effort to stifle political opponents and suppress youth voices, it is quite common before, during, and after elections that oppressive governments scrutinise and monitor people's online exchanges and impose stringent measures to limit online communications around elections. This was the case in 2018 in Uganda, where the government imposed a tax for social media communications dealing with elections. However, many young people still shared their political sentiments through online platforms and showed resilience in standing for their freedom of expression despite all risks. Reflecting on this issue, an anonymous participant stated that:

> "[...] Ugandan youth have continued to use social media to enhance political campaigns and be actively involved in the politics within the country. It is important to note that the number of young people account for 78% of the country's population [...]. In a country where freedom of expression is limited by intimidation, participation and inclusion in political processes can be very challenging. Seeking a more resilient approach to inclusion and pushing for effective political change beyond the age factor is crucial. International support from diplomatic bodies and relations is equally important as well as challenging laws that limit freedom of expression and participation."

## 5.1.2 Towards a new political culture

To promote youth empowerment through informal political processes, young peacebuilders also need to rethink young people's engagement in politics—understanding that true political power is not acquired through corrupt practices but rather through grassroots awareness-raising efforts and a deeper knowledge of people's realities. Through grassroots processes, young peacebuilders are also well-attuned with the peacebuilding dynamics at local levels and able to articulate political messages that resonate with local conflict resolution efforts. Amjad Saleem (Switzerland) stated that:

> "[...] We fail to see how informal processes work, how peace is maintained at a local level and how this can be worked on. We don't see zones of peace but the drivers of peace at a local level. We need a better sense of the peace mapping of what works. Also, if we want to tap into youth constituencies, we need to tap into what is affecting them at the moment."

It is also critical that young peacebuilders reframe political power not as individually centred but as collectively owned and shared. This involves young peacebuilders understanding that their primary motivation for political power is not for personal aggrandisement, but rather for elevating and amplifying the voices of those they represent. Along with this paradigm shift, young peacebuilders need to develop political power through synergies with diverse youth constituencies and remain transparent and accountable to their electorates. Emphasising this point, David Shamala (Kenya) stated that:

> "[...] We need to avoid political parties' politics and form a youth-led wing that will ensure young people are empowered throughout the political cycle..."

Lastly, when addressing the political inclusion of youth, we usually think of participatory mechanisms that foster and encourage young people's engagement in political processes. With this in mind, functioning democracies need to adapt to new ways of participation and new youth leadership models. This new perspective entails an awareness of youth-friendly mechanisms, tools and instruments to stimulate their full contribution in political matters.

## Case study: Partnering to tackle youth stigmas in the Sava region of Madagascar

Madagascar is recovering from a decade-long political crisis that put the country into a spiral of instability and economic decline. Though the situation has since stabilised, Madagascar's recovery has yet to trickle down to the large majority of the population - most of whom are youth facing rampant poverty and a severe lack of opportunities. Moreover, the crisis deepened ethnic and regional divisions between the country's many ethnic communities, and youth involvement in months of political violence and continued exposure to turmoil has left them vulnerable.

According to Sharman Rambirana, young activist and head of "Act in Solidarity" (*Agir Solidairement* -AGIRS), a youth-led peacebuilding organisation based in the Sava region of Madagascar, stigmas and divisions are negatively affecting youth and their ability to take part in political and economic spheres. To tackle this, AGIRS launched a programme called Youth Students for Peace (YS4PEACE), which aims to provide university students with greater opportunities in their academic and professional lives through exposure to and participation in youth-led peacebuilding initiatives. YS4PEACE also develops youth accountability and legitimacy to tackle the youth stigmas by supporting and organising civic initiatives. AGIRS guides the development of youth participants through training and mentoring sessions, equipping them with the means to create their own peace initiatives.

A key element of the programme's success has been AGIRS's collaboration with the head of CURSA University (*Centre Universitaire Régional de la Sava*). The university director and senior staff helped to promote YS4PEACE across the university and provided AGIRS with much-needed space and materials to run their seminars and training sessions. As a result, AGIRS was able to run the programme effectively with the buy-in of the university and was able to convince other universities in the Sava region to expand the programme.

AGIRS has since decentralised and set up multiple branches across the country, making the YS4PEACE programme more manageable while extending its reach. The YS4PEACE programme is now being run secondary schools in the Sava region. As a result of this work, Sharman has noticed an increase in social cohesion within schools and surrounding areas. Perceptions of youth are noticeably shifting, which has coincided with the growing number of youth-led peace initiatives across the Sava region.

### 5.1.3 Restoring political trust

"Trust is at a breaking point. Trust in national institutions. Trust among states. Trust in the rules-based global order. Within countries, people are losing faith in political establishments, polarization is on the rise and populism is on the march." UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

As extensively documented in the "*Missing Peace*" report, political distrust among young people and policymakers is a major obstacle for effective youth inclusion in political and peacebuilding processes. Addressing the UN General Assembly in September 2018 and recognising that global relations are currently plagued with the trust deficit, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres invited multi-stakeholders to join efforts in restoring the global political trust — an effort towards which young peacebuilders can significantly contribute.

Another step in restoring the decreasing political trust is by seeking and fostering healthy dialogues with policymakers—showing them the willingness to receive a different opinion. Underscoring this point, Vyonne Akoth (Kenya) added that:

> *"I believe culture is dynamic. It is high time we start having conversations with our leaders on succession planning for the betterment of our communities/societies."*

### 5.2 Connecting local agendas to YPS

An ongoing concern among peacebuilding organisations about the implementation of SCR 2250 and SDG 16, is how to connect local initiatives to the YPS agenda. In addition, to review processes at the international level, it is important that peacebuilding organisations develop other locally-owned mechanisms at country level to foster a sustained information exchange among local actors working on the YPS Agenda.

### 5.2.1 Youth's grassroots approach

One of the ways to engage local actors with the YPS Agenda is through what consultation participants have referred to as the grassroots approach. This method consists of drawing national attention to local peacebuilding agendas through awareness campaigns and emerging technologies. By increasing the visibility of local peace initiatives and sharing information with their peers about local efforts, young peacebuilders are also drawing global attention on important issues that are often left on the margins in high-level engagements between governments and policymakers. By so doing, young people validate their roles as indispensable peacebuilding allies that ought to be consulted in political and peacebuilding decision making processes at all levels. Referencing this point, Zaharah Namanda (Uganda) added:

> *"[...] to counter political disempowerment, I have built my value proposition by concentrating on grassroots work. I have dwelled into challenges that affect the common 'village man' because most politicians exclude them in their planning and implementation process. This has enabled me to also work with fellow youth…"*

Furthermore, to provide access to information to youth from all levels of society, social media and technology should be used strategically to engage young people, in parallel with initiatives that emphasise relationship building, including information sharing and awareness campaigns by local peacebuilding organisations in their communities. Using social media in schools, youth camps, libraries, etc., as a learning tool in areas where youth may not have ready access to technology at home, could help expose students to approaches that may help them to participate in political and peacebuilding processes.

## 5.2.2 Towards effective youth peace networks

Another valuable step to connect local agendas to YPS is through young peacebuilders' networks that seek to bridge the gap between youth and decision-makers at local levels through civil dialogues and discussions on key issues, including youth representation in local governance bodies, resource-allocation, youth unemployment, etc. Pife Muliro (DRC) stressed:



*"As peacebuilders we cannot give up despite the environment in which we are operating. We need to be problem solvers, get a vision to see things not in a negative way but in positive one. We need to work in consortium with other people like local civil organisations, local authorities, national ones and the international community with all international organisations, UN agencies, etc., to see what can be done to improve leadership skill. The only way that can help us to inform the development of peace leaders' is through a strong network among all the youth."*

## Case study: Benefits of Youth Peace Networks: Looking at the success of UNOY's Organisational Development

UNOY Peacebuilders is a youth-led network of peace organisations with more than 100 members across the world. Prior to 2016, the daily operations UNOY-led initiatives were coordinated by the International Secretariat, based in The Hague. As a result, the network faced difficulties in ensuring the active engagement, participation and ownership from members outside the secretariat. However, following members' requests for more bottom-up engagement in 2016, UNOY decided that developing a stronger regional structure for the network was not only necessary for participation, but would also enable the network to facilitate a stronger regional agenda that is relevant to members; be better informed about members' needs and the realities on the ground; support members' advocacy and increase networking and cooperation among them.

As a result of this initiative, the Secretariat piloted the creation of Regional Coordinator (RC) positions in West and Central African and Asia (2017), whose success led to its replication in East and Southern Africa (2018), the Middle East and North Africa (2019) and the Americas (2019).

The positive effects of this decentralised structure have been numerous for UNOY members. In the regions where RCs have been appointed, members report that communication and information flow has increased, both among members but also between the Secretariat and the members. Some RCs have successfully secured co-funding to implement online and face-to-face capacity and organisation development activities with members. The impact of this includes stronger member organisations, with increased individual and organisational capacities to build peace, stronger regional networks through increased communication and cooperation, and a more open and democratic network. Overall, the success of UNOY Peacebuilders' decentralisation process reflects the potential benefits which come with participating in such networks. Simply by participating in the overall management of the network, members have in turn increased their personal and organisational capacity and have increased opportunities for funding their development more generally.

## 5.3 Developing Youth Leadership

The international community, policymakers, and governments still have much to learn when it comes to identifying effective strategies and mechanisms for engaging youth in the implementation of SCR 2250. Key to ensuring that youth are involved in peacebuilding efforts is recognising that many are already participating in noble peacebuilding activities within their communities.

### 5.3.1 Positive Leadership

Through their small-scale local initiatives and engagement in informal political processes, young peacebuilders bring innovative ideas that can catalyse renewed dialogue between polarised groups. Participants of the online consultation underscored the importance of their peacebuilding leadership to be conceived as a service to their communities – highlighting that peacebuilding work ought not be a path to personal aggrandisement, and therefore an important quality that young peacebuilders should embody is humility. Lina Maria Jaramillo (Colombia) said:



*"When we decide to work as peacebuilders it is really important to understand that our leadership is not a means to self-empowerment but a means to serve others and practice humility."*

An important starting point for nurturing this type of leadership in peacebuilding can be found right at home. While young peacebuilders are implementing formidable community peace initiatives, it is equally important to lead the peacebuilding example in facilitating family dialogues and seeking peace within their inner social circles. The impact of youth leadership in peacebuilding is much more sustained when the foundations for their peacebuilding engagement –the family—is solid. Reflecting on this point, Zaharah Namanda (Uganda) added:



*"I believe peacebuilding and leadership should be necessary key points in the communities, families and government. There should be willingness for individuals to take part in leadership not necessarily through political recognition but by addressing even the key challenges that start from their families."*

To foster a leadership culture that encourages service in the peacebuilding field, it is particularly critical that governments and policymakers also embody this spirit in addressing youth's needs and aspirations —especially coming from the most marginalised sectors of society. Such leadership culture would have tremendous effects on not only bridging the trust gaps existing between policymakers and youth but also in fostering mutual accountability in addressing community challenges.

# Case Study: The Story of Boy Dhessa Pasha and Congo Unites

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, youth peacebuilders have long been grappling with persistent challenges to utilise their talents and energy. A long history of political instability, endemic youth unemployment and the suppression of freedom of expression, have prevented young people from being able to speak out against injustice and their voices have largely been silent as a result. Moreover, initiatives led by young peacebuilders are largely run by volunteers who lack much-needed organisational and leadership capacities, which further limits their ability to secure further funding for their work.

To address this issue, Congo Unites ("Congo Unit") is a volunteer apolitical movement established in 2012 that aims to build the leadership capacities of young people through specialised training in nonviolence and reconciliation. The movement primarily focuses on developing Congolese youth leaders to assume leadership in their respective communities, expanding their network and reach in the process. With 120 chapters established in 20 Congolese provinces, the movement now includes 12,000 volunteer members representing DRC's diverse youth constituencies who are engaged in their communities to promote a culture of tolerance and dialogue.

One of their leaders, Boy Dhessa Pasha, provides an example of local youth leadership and the impact of Congo Unites's work. Boy had experienced conflict at an early age and was displaced several times in the tumultuous North Kivu region. Moved by the impact of the conflict on his peers and himself, he started a Hip-Hop radio programme in 2008 to reach young people in North Kivu and offer them a creative outlet to express their frustrations and develop their talents. Boy became a key member of Congo Unites after its creation and ran their outreach and awareness-raising campaigns on youth leadership. Through his leadership, Congo Unites has become one of the largest volunteer youth-led peacebuilding movement in the DRC.

Congo Unites now organises youth fairs to help train youth leaders around the DRC, and many young peacebuilders have been able to use Congo Unites' network of allies, including organisations and influential figures, to connect to coaching and mentorship opportunities across the country and abroad. Despite increased challenges around raising funds and ongoing security threats against their members, Congo Unites has become an inspiration to young Congolese peacebuilders and maintains its efforts to support the development of youth leadership as part of its mission to foster a culture of peace and nonviolence across the Congo.

## 5.4 Building intergenerational partnerships

The tension between young and old has been at the core of an emerging movement interested in the relevance of intergenerational dialogues to advance youth inclusion in peacebuilding. Participants in the online consultation stressed that engaging in dialogue and communication between generations will not only boost peacebuilding efforts but will help dismantle negative perceptions of youth while simultaneously providing training opportunities for young peacebuilders. They also highlighted that collaboration gives space for youth to put in practice their insight and knowledge of creative approaches, particularly with regards to digital platforms and online resources, and agreed that learning is a two-way street and working together is a positive for all age groups.

Additionally, too often, the older generation perceives young peacebuilders as naïve idealists. This perception often results in lack of community support and inconsiderate policy formulations that may impede the advancement of youth-led peacebuilding initiatives and discourage many young peacebuilders to pursue their work. One consultation participant, Essam Emile Ako (Ivory Coast), stated that:



*"In several of my interactions with elders, youth peacebuilders are perceived as naive or idealist. However, our impact is real across the country and communities. When youth are involved in peacebuilding, messaging, the impact on other youth groups is important. The youth understand the youth and their language. There is little attention to youth peacebuilders by national institutions [...]."*

Finally, participants of the online consultation underscored the need for peacebuilding organisations in conflict and post-conflict contexts to promote healthy intergenerational dialogues in which prejudices against youth are addressed. Taking into consideration the existing gaps of peacebuilding knowledge between the young and the old, urban and rural residents, literate and illiterate community members, it is crucial that peacebuilding organisations design adequate methodologies that promote effective inclusion of all in such intergenerational learning processes.

# Conclusions and recommendations

Because of its holistic focus on youth's contributions in peacebuilding processes, SCR 2250 is an important framework to consolidate and cement youth identity as peacebuilders. However, for many participants of the online consultation, the reality of in-country implementation of this framework is proving to be more frustrating than expected mainly due to increasing distrust between policymakers and youth, and the underlying attitudes and behaviours of all actors concerned with the advancement of youth inclusion in political and peacebuilding processes.

To reap peace dividends through youth inclusion, it is important that policymakers start viewing youth as agents of conflict transformation and invest in bridging the existing gap in trust toward youth.

As demonstrated throughout this report, despite the complex challenges facing young peacebuilders that participated in the online consultation, they continue to play important roles in preventing and resolving some of the most endemic conflicts around the world, and their full recognition, inclusion, and support is necessary for the sustainability of peacebuilding processes at all levels. A complete paradigm shift in the way governments and stakeholders perceive young peacebuilders will help shape new values and norms upon which a transformative culture of youth inclusion can emerge. It is vital that the insights and recommendations of this report will lead to increased support and strengthening of youth-led peacebuilding initiatives and foster collaborative approaches in addressing the complexity of meaningful youth inclusion, which has a critical bearing on world peace today and for future generations.

In response to these insights, governments, multilateral actors and civil society groups should:

- Recognise the force of youth peacebuilders as agents of conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Governments must urgently implement SCR 2250 and foster meaningful youth participation in peacebuilding processes through effective policies and programmes. This involves engaging youth constituencies in defining country strategies and peacebuilding processes that are reflective of their needs and aspirations.

- Support greater funding for youth groups and youth-led initiatives at local levels, for example, through supporting youth peacebuilder networks and fostering local youth leadership. This should include flexible funding structures needed to build organisational sustainability at local levels.

- Improve accountability and transparency on action on YPS, such as through improved official and shadow reporting on implementation on the five pillars of SCR 2250 - namely participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration - as well as on the specific stipulations of SCR 2419 on youth participation in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements.

- Undertake intersectional analyses to understand and address factors impeding the full recognition of the contributions of young women and other marginalized youth groups. It is important to promote the inclusion of girls and women in peacebuilding processes by challenging negative gender norms.

- Adapt to new ways of participation and new youth leadership models. This paradigm shift involves an awareness of youth-friendly mechanisms and tools such as youth MP quotas, youth advisory councils, dedicated youth programmes, and social media to stimulate their full contribution in social and political matters.

- Continue to build the evidence around young people's contributions to peacebuilding in diverse conflict contexts.

- Support the establishment of intergenerational councils to discuss challenges related to youth inclusion in peacebuilding. These councils would provide permanent platforms for intergenerational participation in the policymaking process and should be composed of elders, political leaders, policymakers, and youth representatives from all backgrounds—especially those most affected by conflict.

# Appendix: Participants

Below is a list of the participants who took part in the online consultation. We also acknowledge the contributions made by participants who wish to remain anonymous. The details included here represent those provided by participants at the time of the consultation and may no longer reflect their current roles.

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## About Peace Direct

Peace Direct works with local people to stop violence and build sustainable peace. We believe that local people should lead all peacebuilding efforts, and this report is the latest in a series canvassing local views on violent conflicts around the world in an effort to highlight local capacities for peace and local expertise.

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