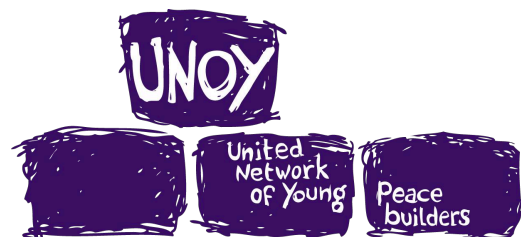


BEYOND DIVIDING LINES

The reality of youth-led peacebuilding in Afghanistan, Colombia, Libya and Sierra Leone.



Research Report



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YOUTH POWER

Research Team

This report presents the information gathered by a team composed of eight researchers (two per country), representing four youth-led peace organisations, all UNOY Peacebuilders Member organisations:

- Afghans for Progressive Thinking - Afghanistan
- Fundación Escuelas de Paz - Colombia
- Together we Build It - Libya
- Youth Participation in Peace and Development - Sierra Leone

The local researchers were supported by a lead researcher and three support staff. For security reasons, several are not listed as authors of this report.



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Comments

The research team welcomes comments and questions related to this report!

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Executive summary

About the research project

This report presents the findings of research carried out in Afghanistan, Colombia, Libya and Sierra Leone between January and October 2018 by the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY Peacebuilders) with the support of USAID's YouthPower Learning Project. The project was undertaken in collaboration with four UNOY Peacebuilders member organisations: Afghans for Progressive Thinking, Fundación Escuelas de Paz, Together We Built It and Youth Participation in Peace and Development-Sierra Leone (YPPD-SL). This project's main aim is to contribute to an increasingly evidence-based approach to policies and programming related to peace and security. It does so by documenting and examining youth civic engagement in these countries, its barriers and motivators, as well as the perceived impacts of youth-led civic engagement for peace.

The research adopted a participatory, youth-led approach, involving 241 respondents, mainly youth.

Describing youth-led civic engagement

Young people engage in advocacy and education activities in which they feel safe

The majority of activities led by young people focus on advocacy and education in which they could feel safe, comfortable and owners of the space and process, and where they can develop personal, civic and professional competences.

Young women, most constrained yet most actively promoting gender equality

In general, young women were found to be more constrained in their engagement. At the same time, they are mostly the ones active in initiatives related to gender equality.

Young people choose art and social media as channels of engagement

Other youth-led activities that are preferred include artistic expression, and campaigns through media and social media. Youth also take the lead in humanitarian efforts and start social enterprises to address the devastating effects of violent conflict, such as food insecurity and youth unemployment.

Few young people report being engaged in electoral processes or with political parties

Notably few young people engage with political parties and electoral processes - with the exception of Sierra Leone - which can be explained by mistrust in politicians and political instability.

Motivating and limiting factors

Despite the many challenges and limitations that youth face in conflict-affected countries, they engage in a wide range of civic activities for peace. They are highly driven and find encouragement in supportive environments made possible by peers, families, communities, civil society and governmental actors.

Inner-drive to contribute to their communities and meaning as key motivators

The main motivating factors are the inner-drive of young people to contribute to the betterment of their communities and the need to feel that their engagement is meaningful in terms of their personal and professional development. The enabling factors are the respect for civil and political rights - such as freedom of expression - safe spaces and the support and opportunities mainly offered by civil society organisations and in many cases, also facilitated by youth, to a less extent, the support of the government. Finally, the support of family and friends is both an important motivator and enabler.

Poverty and unemployment, main limiting factors

The primary limiting factor is the structural restriction imposed by poverty and unemployment, especially on youth of disadvantaged backgrounds who are unable to access educational opportunities, information or possess the mobility to participate in civic activities.

Negative perceptions towards youth engagement discourage young people

The second limiting factor is the negative perceptions of the community toward youth and youth engagement, particularly in relation to young women stepping out of more traditional caring and reproductive roles. Related to these general negative social perceptions is the lack of recognition of youth by political actors, who largely fail to meaningfully involve them. This is linked to the prioritisation of youth participation in governmental agendas.

Sometimes too painful to engage

Finally, it was reported that, for some youth, it is difficult to engage in peace and reconciliation activities due to the fact that they still struggle to overcome the individual trauma of having experienced the loss of loved ones as a result of the conflict.

Perceived impacts

- There is **more awareness among community members and leaders** of the importance of peace and reconciliation and the key role of youth as positive agents of change, due to youth civic engagement activities.
- In Libya and Colombia, there is a **sense of growing solidarity among young people** due to challenging situations and new political opportunities.

-
- Youth initiatives contribute to **depolarise societies and create positive perceptions** of all groups, and help to foster dialogue and normalisation of relations among groups previously opposed to each other. Youth bridge the divide, for example, former gang members create peace initiatives in Sierra Leone, and young women who had faced discrimination find their own voice and strength to create new enterprises.
 - Youth **show resilience** and the capacity to imagine better futures and put their ideas into practice.
 - In Afghanistan and Sierra Leone, youth who had been **active youth leaders have become policy makers** with the ability to look beyond dividing lines (ethnic, ideological) and with the capacity to find common goals.
 - **Youth are creators of social enterprises** that address youth unemployment and contribute to mitigating the devastating effects of conflict on the economy, on social trust and on feelings of solidarity.

Scaling up success

Evidence pointed out that there is a strong inner drive of young people to change the reality around them. They are able to engage when they had family and community support.

That is, places where they could feel safe, listened to, find like-minded persons and develop their own leadership skills. It is vital to consider major limiting factors in conflict contexts, such as insecurity (limiting mobility), civil and political freedoms, and the creation and safeguarding of youth-friendly, youth-led, gender-sensitive, safe and pluralistic spaces. These become spaces of refuge amid turbulent contexts and where the seed of civic engagement can grow and mature. They should not be spaces that are protected in a paternalistic way or where youth are kept “occupied”, rather a space where youth can take the lead and experience dialogue and support from both peers and adults.

This is why opportunities for engagement created by youth themselves or other civil society and community organisations are fundamental to enable youth civic engagement.

These activities create chances for young people to develop their own identities and views. At the same time, young people learn about the “other” in less biased and more respectful ways, contributing to diffuse negative perceptions of “others” and humanising all groups in particularly polarised and wounded societies. Supporting, sustaining, enhancing and scaling up these youth spaces is fundamental to nurture the development of democratisation and peacebuilding efforts.

Implications for policy and practice

Findings lead to policy and practice implications in three main areas:

- The **strengthening and development of meaningful youth participation** at political decision-making at community, local, regional and global levels, where youth take the lead, are listened to and recognised, avoiding tokenism and manipulation.
- **Sustaining, enhancing and developing educational opportunities**, especially civic competences and peacebuilding skills.
- **Ensuring youth-friendly, pluralistic and safe spaces** for youth to engage at school/university, community, local, national, regional and global levels, for example, through youth associations and networks, consultative and decision-making spaces in public institutions.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of research carried out in Afghanistan, Colombia, Libya and Sierra Leone between January and October 2018. This project was undertaken by the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY Peacebuilders) with the support of USAID's YouthPower Learning Project, and in collaboration with four UNOY Peacebuilders members: Afghans for Progressive Thinking, Fundación Escuelas de Paz, Together We Built It and Youth Participation in Peace and Development-Sierra Leone.

Its main aim is to contribute to an increasingly evidence-based approach to policies and programming related to peace and security by deepening the existing knowledge base on the positive roles of youth-led engagement related to peacebuilding. In doing so, the project aims to both support advocacy for youth-inclusive peacebuilding and enhance locally-driven youth-led research outputs and capacities.

1.1 Objectives

The objectives of the project were:

- **Primary objective:** Document and examine young people's roles in civic engagement related to peacebuilding, factors which enable and constrain such participation, the perceived impacts of such engagement as seen and identified by the youth leaders and the contextual factors which make these activities successful.
- **Secondary objective:** Identifying implications from the evidence collected to inform policies and programming at national and international levels.
- **Tertiary objective:** Build up the capacities of young peacebuilders themselves in collecting evidence about their own work.

To achieve these objectives, the research primarily documented and examined young people's roles in civic engagement related to peacebuilding, analysed factors that enable and constrain such participation as well as the perceived impacts of such engagement, guided by specific research questions.

1.2 Research questions

The research analysed data, gathered through rigorous coding and clustering to demonstrate robust findings. The information is presented in a systematic and objective way to depict the lived realities of young people's successful civic engagement in peacebuilding, as well as its barriers. A qualitative research methodology was designed to tap into the nuances of young people's engagement, understand the context and motivations behind it, reflect on the larger community and other stakeholders' reactions to it, and compare between diverse contexts. The mix of qualitative research methods, using

participatory action-oriented research, supported the local researchers - themselves youth leaders - to be able to reach out to their peers and have conversations with adults.

Innovative tools such as the “Listening and learning methodology” developed by Search for Common Ground¹ were used to explore an individual’s context, their motivations and challenges, specially when engaging in conversations with young people. The methodology explained in detail below is set to help answer the following research questions:

- **What forms of youth-led civic engagement related to peacebuilding can be identified?**
- **What are the motivators and barriers that influence young people’s participation in civic engagement related to peacebuilding?**
- **What are the perceived contributions of youth led civic engagement related to peacebuilding?**
- **What are the contextual factors that make these civic engagement activities successful, how transferable are they, and how scalable are they?**

1.3 Conceptual framework

The research was exploratory and qualitative in nature, primarily adopting a grounded theory approach. This meant that it had only a few key concepts to guide the research and help develop the data collection tools/approach and organise practically the data collection rather than a specific theory (or set of theories) to be tested. The main concepts informing the research were those of: “youth”, “peacebuilding”, and chiefly, “youth civic engagement”.

Youth

This research adopted a broad definition of youth as a transition phase between childhood and adulthood, as defined by social and cultural markers. International institutions and governments take different age ranges as youth for statistical and programming purposes. For example, the United Nations (UN) considers youth as those between 15 and 25 years old, and the African Youth Charter (2006) those between 15 and 35 years old. Youth is not an homogenous group; other social factors and identities shape the lives of youth such as culture, ethnic origin, disability, gender, status as a refugee or migrant, role as a carer for younger siblings, position as an ex-combatant, etc. (UNOY Peacebuilders, 2015; Lopes Cardozo et al., 2015).

¹ For more information, see:

https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Listening_and_Learning_Toolkit.pdf

Peacebuilding

The term peacebuilding has several definitions, but most peace organisations use a broad definition based on the theoretical underpinnings of Galtung and Lederach. This is the approach adopted in this research. UNOY Peacebuilders understands peacebuilding as an aspiration to promote positive and negative peace, instead of thinking of it as an end in itself. The process of peacebuilding therefore aims to address the roots of conflict, to prevent and mitigate all forms of violence and work towards the construction of just and inclusive societies. This aspiration can only be met by the inclusion of all members of society, particularly youth, through intergenerational dialogue and the practice of nonviolence. Nonviolent and peaceful means strive toward the promotion of a culture of peace in all societies. Commonly, youth activities promote the culture of peace around the world through the promotion of youth participation and leadership in dialogues and by social, educational, and advocacy activities locally and internationally (Generation Peace, 2018).

Civic engagement

Civic engagement involves “working to make a difference in the civic life of one’s community and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference” (Elrich, 2000). Civic engagement includes both paid and unpaid forms of political activism, environmentalism, and community and national service (Michelsen, Zaff and Hair, 2002). Civic engagement can also be specifically based on different political cultures and levels of civil and political freedoms (Keeter et al, 2002).

In contexts where political and civil rights are respected, civic engagement can flourish and involve a wide range of activities in both the civic and the political/electoral space. The civic space can include volunteering or being part of an association, demonstrating on a particular issue, resistance or nonviolent campaigns, online activism or working for a social enterprise. Activities in the political space can mean running for a position at any level of parliament, campaigning for a political party candidate, and participating in consultative or accountability spaces.

In contexts where political and civil rights are not respected, that is, those of dictatorial rule or violent conflict, civic spaces are narrowed, affecting the forms and levels of civic engagement. For example, volunteering in associations that are allowed to register and operate by the government (often many are not), being active in media but not being able to cover all issues (auto or government censorship), or being able to mobilise on some issues and not others, more or less overtly. Where elections take place, they may be limited to legal parties and may be subject to political persecution or harassment.

Types of activities

Civic activities have been grouped in four main groups (i) Advocacy, (ii) Educational, (iii) Social, and (iv) Electoral political activism and engagement with political parties.

Advocacy activities encompass a range of civic activities by non-violent means, which seek social change on a particular issue or social problem. This includes campaigns in the public

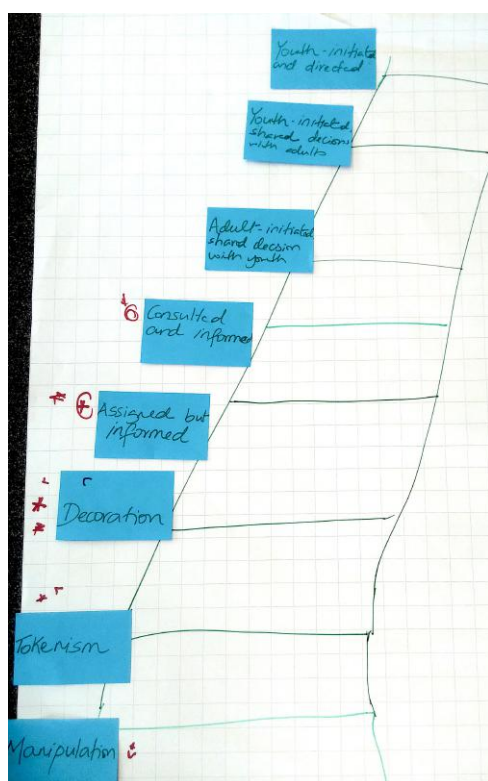
physical and online space, as well as direct and less public meetings with community or government actors. These activities allow young people to express their concerns, demand specific changes and raise awareness about a socially-relevant issue.

Educational activities include those that take place in formal education spaces (schools and universities), in non-formal education spaces, such as those facilitated by youth groups or civil society organisations and informal education spaces (media, public space). Peace education can take place in all of these spaces and seeks to address root causes of all forms of violence and promote human rights, intercultural dialogue and social justice.

Social activities relate to addressing social and basic needs, most commonly humanitarian activities to provide food, health services or shelter to vulnerable groups.

Finally, civic activities can be directly related to political parties, such as election campaigns and running for seats in local or national parliaments, or other representative or consultative bodies.

Youth civic engagement and meaningful youth participation



Research workshop, Local Researchers identifying the level of meaningful youth participation in their countries, The Hague, March 2018.

In this study, youth civic engagement is defined as “any way a young person engages - through action or through mental faculties - with his or her community in their interest of the greater good” (Karakos, 2015: 2). Greater good being that “which develops the skills, assets, relationships, and environment in individual youth and their peers” (Youth Power, 2018: 4). A related concept is that of youth participation, which fundamentally means that youth are able to have a say and be part of decisions that affect their lives directly or indirectly. The concept within children and youth policies and programming refers to giving youth a say about what is important to them, allowing them to ‘own’ decisions, increasing self confidence and empowerment. Participation that is meaningful can only occur when young people are adequately informed and supported in their involvement, their contributions are valued and they believe the work they are doing has a purpose. More specifically, meaningful youth participation makes reference to Hart’s Ladder of Participation (1992), wherein successful participation involves shared decision-making and collaboration with adults. As the Ladder of Participation illustrates, genuine youth participation

moves beyond tokenism towards a process and an environment that allows them to access and learn from the experience and expertise of adults.

In the picture on the right, the local researchers indicated the kinds of youth participation they had observed and experienced most in their countries.

1.4 Methodology

This was a comparative and youth-led, participatory research based mostly on primary data collection and group analysis. At the same time, existing literature was examined but the aim was not to test or validate existing theories in literature, but rather to explore the perceptions and practices of youth on the topic and to a lesser extent, of key informants who observed or previously worked with youth and youth organisations. A literature review (especially reports) was chiefly used to identify potential respondents and avoid missing an important aspect of youth civic engagement in the four countries. It also played an analytical role at the reporting phase to explain the special or specific contributions that this research makes to existing knowledge on the topic.

Youth-led research

The research was youth-led and participatory; it was implemented by a team of eight local researchers (two per country, one female and one male), a lead researcher, a project coordinator and two support persons who jointly collected the data, analysed it and co-wrote this report. UNOY Peacebuilders and four of its member organisations agreed to join the project and collaborate to identify and support the local researchers.

The crucial advantage of youth-led, participatory research is that the researchers themselves have been selected through a rigorous process of identifying individuals that possess strong leadership traits and knowledge of their context. This includes the ability to mobilise other youth, strong communication skills and maintaining a good reputation in their communities. In addition, they have demonstrated active engagement in their communities and all of them are part of UNOY member organisations in the four respective countries.



Research workshop, local Researchers and staff practicing the conversation techniques, The Hague, March 2018.

Local researchers were involved in the fine-tuning of data collection tools and received documentation and training during a four-day workshop in The Hague in March 2018. The training included sessions on the conceptual framework but mainly focused on practical research skills training (how to facilitate conversations, use the learning and listening methodology) and ethical social sciences research in conflict situations (for example, identifying trauma and being able to safeguard when needed). Researchers were further supported via periodic individual meetings, emails and phone calls with the lead researcher, and support staff and online group meetings.

Data collection tools

Data gathering tools were designed by the lead researcher, further developed with the group during a three-day training in The Hague (March 2018) and then adapted to each local context by the local researchers in consultation with the lead researcher. Once the tools were completed, the local researchers conducted a series of test conversations and finally adjusted the questionnaire/approach.

The research was fully reliant on locally driven information that is qualitative in nature. The main data gathering methods are outlined below.

Conversations with youth/peers: Researchers used a specific approach considering the youth-led and conflict-sensitive nature of the research. Rather than adopting a traditional method of interviewing (the researcher asks questions and the interviewee responds), the researchers facilitated conversations over a list of topics, having guiding questions which were previously agreed by the group, but using them flexibly. This approach is grounded in participatory action research principles and based on the Listening and Learning and aspects of life history methodologies. We consider this an innovative and appropriate approach to make young people feel comfortable to share about what is most relevant to them in relation to the topic. This approach allows interviewees and interviewers to engage in dialogues, rather than question and answer sessions and to both learn from the exchange.

These conversations equip researchers to adapt conversations to local contexts and understand the individuals' background and biographies (life histories). Evidently, by the nature of conversations, this method obliged the researchers to also share information about themselves, partly to put the interviewees or subjects at ease and partly to gain a more nuanced understanding of individual contexts. However, due to the sensitivity of the conversations and the risk of exposure to vicarious trauma, the researchers had the flexibility to choose whether to share their life stories in conversations or not. Local researchers were trained on techniques of the "Listening and Learning" methodology to gain a deeper understanding of the individuals' lives in relation to the country's history, conflict, politics and, socioeconomic situation.

Although it was planned that researchers would conduct the interviews either together (one as a lead and another as a note taker, one female and one male) most of the time they did it separately, with a recorder. This was the case because of logistical challenges due to the security situation which limited researchers mobility. Additionally, gender and ethnic origin were taken into consideration so that the person who participated in the conversation would feel at ease.

Key informant interviews (KII): They were used as a method to gather information from community leaders, policy makers, academics or those who work with youth or in civic engagement for peace. These individuals were prominent members of the community who were able to verify the information gathered but also provide insights into communities' reactions to youth-led civic engagements. A small representation of the KII was selected.

Focus group discussions (FGD): The aim of the focus group discussion was to reach out to a greater number of individuals who were not part of the conversations and key informant interviews and who represented specific groups as detailed below. The composition of the groups strived to ensure balance in terms of gender, age and diversity of perspectives. However, organising FGDs proved to be challenging due to logistical reasons, it was difficult to bring together participants at particular times and locations.

Ethical standards

The research was implemented following a series of ethical standards for social research, especially working with young people in conflict situations. Respondents signed consent

Locations	Afghanistan Kabul Badakhshan Herat Mazar Tehran and Qom (Iran)*	Libya Tripoli Benghazi Tunis (Tunisia)**	Colombia Bogotá Soacha Medellín El Castillo Granada	Sierra Leone Freetown Makeni
Conversations	F: 12 M: 35 Total: 47 Average age: 27.2	F: 11 M: 12 Total: 23 Average age: 24.9	F: 19 M: 25 Total: 44 Average age: 22.6	F: 17 M: 28 Total: 45 Average age: 30
Focus group discussions	3 FGDs F: 3 M: 11 Total: 14	2 FGDs F: 2 M: 7 Total: 9	3 FGDs F: 8 M: 4 Total: 12	3FGDs F: 5 M: 9 Total: 14
Key informant interviews	F: 1 M: 4 Total: 5	F: 3 M: 6 Total: 9	F: 5 M: 5 Total: 10	F: 0 M: 9 Total: 9
Total # of responses	66 F: 16 M: 50	41 F: 16 M: 25	66 F: 32 M: 34	68 F: 22 M: 46

*Some conversations were held in Iran as one of the local researchers had to travel there to obtain a visa and met with Afghan Diaspora youth.

**Some conversations were held in Tunis for security reasons and because many activities are organised there for and with Libyan organisations and activists.

forms and were asked whether it was possible to publish specific details or the names of their organisations. No names of individual respondents were used in public notes or reports, including this one. Throughout the data collection phase, several meetings and online communication took place to adjust logical aspects as needed, depending on the opportunities and limitations in each location.

Selection and outreach

A total of 241 persons were part of the research as respondents. Local researchers conducted stakeholder mapping and identified relevant youth-led groups and organisations, individual leaders/non-organised groups and those institutions and organisations working with youth. They selected those to approach seeking a representative sample and added more through snowball sampling. Categories of respondents included those listed below.

For youth (conversations and focus groups discussions):

- Youth engaging in different types of civic engagement according to the conceptual framework;
- youth of different genders;
- youth in different locations (urban/rural, attempting to represent the different regions of the country);
- youth with different occupations (students, employed, unemployed); age;
- youth of different affiliations (youth-led civil society organisations, political leaders, non-organised youth leaders); and
- youth in different contexts such as different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

For focus group discussions:

- Youth-led organisations;
- non-youth led organisations;
- media; and
- community leaders.

For key informant interviews:

- Governments (local and national in relevant areas including social, youth, peacebuilding);
- leaders of political parties;
- donors;
- religious leaders;
- security personnel; and
- researchers and journalists

The table below summarises the information on respondents.

In general, data gathering activities were implemented as planned. However there were fewer FGDs and conversations than planned, due to the reasons detailed below.

Limitations

- Security and power cuts hampered the research implementation period in Libya and Afghanistan; local researchers and youth planned to talk but were unable to move freely and safely. They were forced to reschedule meetings and some could not take place. Libya in particular presented difficulties in reporting and communication due to power cuts.
- Budget constraints did not allow for travel to distant locations, while there were additional transportation and communication costs than budgeted.
- Difficulties in scheduling FGDs. For example, bringing together participants in one location and particular time proved a challenge in Sierra Leone. Meetings thus had to be rescheduled with lower attendance than planned.
- Visa issues did not allow some local researchers to attend activities as planned. For example, since a local researcher was denied a visa to attend the training, he had to be replaced by another member of the organisation who had a visa to Schengen countries. Also a local researcher was denied a visa to travel to the analysis workshop in The Hague, so participation was facilitated online and through provision of written reports in powerpoints and email exchanges. These limitations were greatly mitigated by extraordinary efforts to ensure as much quality participation as possible. This meant local researchers who could not attend had to provide extra information in written form prior and during the analysis seminar and participate in discussions via Skype, often facing connectivity challenges which did not allow a clear voice, so speakers had to repeat or share in writing. During the analysis seminar, all participants, those present in the seminar and those joining virtually, exercised patience and listening skills.

Data analysis

Detailed notes were kept of all conversations, interviews and FGDs using a common template which included the research questions. A daily debrief was also completed by local researchers at the end of the day to capture their reflections. Data was extracted and analysed in relation to each research question. Local researchers conducted an initial analysis of their country findings and completed a country report that was presented to the broader project team during a four-day seminar in The Hague (September 2018). During this seminar, participants received training on what data analysis entails and shared about how the research process had been for them to that point, their learning experiences and challenges during the data collection phase. They subsequently analysed the findings in country groups and presented their



Data-Analysis workshop, mapping the motivators of youth-led civic activities per country. The Hague, September 2018.

findings to the rest of the group who posed questions for clarification. The research findings were then clustered and discussed in terms of emerging trends, similarities and differences.

An additional gender analysis of the data was undertaken by local researchers and additional meetings between the lead researcher and the local researchers were held to complete the analysis. Finally, these meetings also gathered extra inputs from the local researchers as informants themselves, acknowledging that they are also active youth leaders. These meetings were held after the data collection and analysis phase, allowing the local researchers to distinguish their roles as researchers from their other roles.

1.5 Context matters

The country selection criteria in this study was based on the concept that youth-led civic engagement for peace would be observed in countries that have experienced high levels of violence in the recent past, yet were at different phases of conflict for comparative purposes. In the period examined, the situation in each country was also different due to specific historical, social and political factors. In Afghanistan, Libya and Colombia major conflicts are still ongoing, though in Colombia a final peace agreement has been signed between the government and the main guerrilla group, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) on 24 November 2016 and the process of implementation started (See more details in the table below). However, in the period of December 2016 to August 2018 130 social leaders have been assassinated indicating an ongoing social conflict.

In Sierra Leone, a devastating civil war that began in 1991, ended in 2002; it is considered a post-conflict country and currently experiencing relative security and political stability.

The following table summarises the main contextual characteristics.²

Locations	Afghanistan	Libya	Colombia	Sierra Leone
Social facts	Population: 36 million HDI: 168 Life exp: 64 years Gender DI: 0.625	Population: 6 million HDI: 108 Life exp: 72.1 years Gender DI: 0.929	Population: 45 million HDI: 90 Life exp: 74.6 years Gender DI: 0.997	Population: 8 million HDI: 184 Life exp: 52.2 Gender DI: 0.872
Diversity	There are several ethnolinguistic groups: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimak, Turkmen, Baloch, Pashayi, Nuristani and Pamiri. Main spoken languages are Afghan Persian or Dari, and Pashto. Religion: 99.7% Muslim.	Most inhabitants are Arab-Berber (97%), but important ethnic groups are Tuareg, Tebou. Main spoken language is Libyan Arabic (Berber), followed by Arabic dialects and indigenous minority languages. Religion: 96.6% Muslim, 2.7% Christian.	Most of the population is of mestizo/white origin, yet there are important indigenous and Afro Colombian groups. Main spoken language is Spanish. 68 ethnic languages and dialects. Religion: Roman Catholic 79%, Protestant 14%, other 7%.	Sixteen ethnic groups, majority groups Temne (35.5%) and Mende. (33.2%) Official language is English, spoken in South: mainly Mende, spoken in North: mainly Temne. Religion: Muslims: 78.6%, Christians 21%, high religious tolerance.
Political system	Presidential Democracy Voting age: 18	Presidential Democracy Voting age: 18	Presidential Democracy Voting age: 18	Presidential Democracy Voting age: 18
Key historical facts	Long lasting war over four decades 1992-1996: Civil war 1996-2001: Taliban regime	1951: Independence 1969: Coup d'état by Muammar Gaddafi, deposing the king.	1810: Independence Since the 1960s, the country has suffered from an asymmetric low-	1961: Independence 1991-2001: Civil war killed approx. 50.000 people destroying 1270 schools

² Sources:

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<http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/COL>

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<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/co.html>

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sl.html>

<p>Key historical facts</p>	<p>2001: US invasion New democratic system 2014: Ashraf Ghani became President after 2014 presidential election where for the first time in Afghanistan's history power was democratically transferred. Violence continues and spreads across the country with several suicide attacks reported.</p> <p>Recently, Taliban attacked on Urozgan and Jaghori regions which have been one of the most peaceful places in Afghanistan, inhabited mostly by Hazaras and which a high level of females are educated in comparison to other regions. This shows a shift in strategy and widespread of violence in the country.</p>	<p>Feb-Oct 2011: civil war and end of Gaddafi regime.</p> <p>2015: an extended series of diplomatic meetings and peace negotiations</p> <p>2016: "unity" government installed, facing opposition from rival governments.</p> <p>May 2018: Libya's rival leaders agreed to hold parliamentary and presidential elections following a meeting in Paris.</p> <p>September 2018: Clashes between rival militia groups in Tripoli, state of emergency declared.</p> <p>The current political context is characterised by political instability.</p>	<p>intensity armed conflict between government forces, leftist guerrilla groups and right wing paramilitaries. The conflict escalated in the 1990s, mainly in remote rural areas. In 2012, former President Juan Manuel Santos and FARC chief Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri «Timochenko» officially announced the existence of exploratory dialogues in Havana (Cuba). After four years of negotiations, on October 2, 2016, the plebiscite that defined the approval of these agreements by Colombians were made, 50.2% voted against the peace agreement between the government and the FARC.49.7% voted for the "yes" and the abstention was more than 60%. However, many Colombians demonstrated their support for the peace process and the approval of the agreements is made through the Congress.</p>	<p>2002-2005: UN Peacekeeping operation 2004: Begin of UN-backed war crime trials</p> <p>2012: Conviction of former Liberian leader Charles Taylor in The Hague of aiding and abetting war crimes during civil war</p> <p>2012: First democratic elections without UN oversight</p> <p>2014-2016: Ebola epidemic, killing 3000 people</p> <p>On August 14, 2017 Mudslides in Freetown killed unofficially 600 people</p> <p>2018: Former military Julius Maada Bio elected as president</p>
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1.6 Youth civic engagement in context: a literature review

This section briefly reviews existing academic literature on youth civic engagement in general, and specifically in the four countries of focus. Understanding youth civic engagement implies understanding human and civic agency, that is, how human beings behave socially, what determines their behaviour and how they learn it through their process of socialisation (family, school, peers, political system, etc.). Though there is an extensive amount of literature from different disciplines and about different aspects of youth civic engagement, the main theoretical trends are summarised here.

The “deficit model”

The study of adolescence and youth emerged in the US in the field of psychology, influenced by the work of G. Stanley Hall who was the first president of the American Psychological Association. He understood adolescence primarily as a time of internal turmoil and upheaval. This approach led to the emergence of a theoretical approach that framed youth as a group at risk or deviant (also named as the “deficit model” (Sherrod, Torney-Purta and Flanagan, 2010). This approach encourages strategies of monitoring, prevention and remediation of social ills of youth. Youth programs influenced by this approach were drug-use prevention programmes, reform schools or activities to keep young people engaged and safe.

The theory of positive youth development

The “deficit model” was challenged by studies that showed how, in contexts of hardship, youth were resilient and pro-social rather than defiant, showing the capacity of youth to recover from a difficult or traumatic experience and cope (Ungar, 2004). Additionally, the “deficit model” was challenged by the theory of positive youth development in developmental psychology. This asserts that young people should be treated as assets to their communities. It is argued that if properly supported, they can positively contribute their energy and creativity to social life as assets (e.g. Lerner, 2004, Eccles and Gootman, 2002). In parallel, though later in time, important youth studies exist in the field of economics, where youth also become assets as they constitute an important part of the workforce. Youth should be trained to ensure their employability and employment given the specific labour market need.

Youth and civic agency

In the aforementioned approaches in psychology (child development, cognitive development) and economics, there is a common idea - that youth were to be cared for and supported, rather than a focus on their civic agency. The study of youth civic engagement takes place in the social sciences. Sociologists and political scientists focus on youth political activism and youth as agents of social change (e.g. Ginwright and James, 2002, Youniss and Yates, 1997). They used the concept of civic agency understood as the human capacity to

reflect about our situations and to make choices taking into consideration opportunities and constraints. This is valid even if space for manoeuvring and the capacity to be fully aware and free are limited by social beliefs, practices and roles, for example, those related to gender roles.

The need for contextualised and culturally sensitive studies of youth civic engagement

The majority of literature identified is in English, and is predominantly based on empirical findings of studies in the US/Canada and Europe, with fewer studies from other regions. Findings in these studies provide a useful foundation to understand youth civic engagement, yet theoretical insights should not be carelessly applied to other countries. Contextual factors may differ greatly, notably political systems and culture, social norms, gender roles, religious beliefs, and the level of respect for civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. For example, Taft (2010) in her book “Youth Activism and Social Change Across Americas” argues civic engagement of young females and queer youth in the Americas is an extremely underexplored scholarly topic.

Moreover, there are a limited number of studies on youth civic engagement in countries that are in conflict and post-conflict situations. The importance of looking at how youth become active citizens, what enables or constrains their activism in specific cultural and socio-political contexts is vital for future programming to be more gender, culturally and conflict-sensitive, and thus, effective.

Each of the theoretical approaches described above have influenced youth development programming and youth policies at a national level, and more specifically, in conflict and post-conflict situations. As explained by Kemper (2005), international organisations adopt three main approaches: the rights-based approach (children and youth as victims), the economic approach (youth as assets) and the social-political approach (youth as agents of social change). The latter is less important in terms of numbers, yet this is the approach that is emerging in policy agendas recently as indicated by the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security.

In the last decade, there has been an increase in studies on youth as agents of change in conflict contexts and on their contributions to peacebuilding processes³. These studies reflect the efforts of a growing movement of youth organisations, civil society organisations and UN agencies - such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) - working with youth for peace from a socio-political approach, and have actively increased their visibility in public policy arenas.

This movement has led to the emergence of a youth, peace and security agenda, and more specifically to the adoption of UNSCR 2250 in 2015. This resolution requested the Secretary-General “to carry out a Progress Study on the youth’s positive contribution to peace

³ See annotated bibliography developed by UNOY Peacebuilders in 2016, available at: <http://unoy.org/wp-content/uploads/Annotated-Bibliography-Youth-and-Peacebuilding-November-2016.docx-2.pdf>

processes and conflict resolution, in order to recommend effective responses at local, national, regional and international levels". This study is the most comprehensive study to date, gathering the opinions of 4,320 youth across 27 countries in the period 2016-2017 (Simpson, 2018).

The study's report, entitled "The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth Peace and Security" reveals that one in four young people between the ages of 15 and 29 are directly affected by armed conflict and organised violence. Young people feel excluded from meaningful civic and political participation. They mistrust the system of patronage and corrupt governance that lack the will and capacity to address their grievances. This has led many young people to withdraw from formal politics and instead, create alternative avenues for participation. Young people organise in diverse ways, through both formal organisations as well as informal groups and movements.

Youth are involved in all phases of peace and conflict cycles, from prevention to humanitarian support to post-conflict truth and reconciliation processes. Young people also address different forms of violence, including violent extremism, political conflict, organised criminal violence, and sexual and gender-based violence, among others.

These general trends identified in this study are in line with the limited literature on youth civic engagement in the four focus countries of this research project, and are strongly confirmed by our findings. It is also noteworthy that more literature exists on youth civic engagement in relation to peacebuilding in Colombia and Sierra Leone, than in the case of Afghanistan and Libya. The main findings of studies on youth civic engagement in the four focus countries are summarised below.

Afghanistan

There is a moderate but growing attention to the role of youth in post-conflict contexts among policy makers and academics. For example, the study of Matsumoto (2008) highlights how the urgent need to reintegrate ex-combatants has led to the implementation of educational programming directed at Afghan youth as a central part of the country's demobilisation, demilitarisation and reintegration (DDR) effort. However, the United States Institute of Peace (2014) special report "A Rough Guide to Afghan Youth Politics" is one of the few studies on Afghan youth civic engagement, focusing on youth organisations and active youth rather than on programming for youth. This report concludes that there is a growth in the number of youth political organisations, that more youth are running for provincial council seats after 2001 and that youth see civil society organisations as one route to political power. Despite these trends, youth politics are still very much influenced by old-guard political leaders and dynamics, while there is a significant gap between youth organisations in Kabul and those in the provinces.

These studies do not adopt a gender analysis. However, it appears that young females are slowly overcoming participation barriers. An example is the case of Shahba Shahrukhi who ran for parliamentary elections in her hometown of Samangan on 20 October 2018, despite

being forbidden to do so by her parents. CNN reports that “for the first time in her life, the 28-year-old psychologist refused to obey them.” She explained: “I know I have to do this to show other women that you can be a leader and you can fight. This country needs new blood”. According to the Independent Election Commission, she is among the 16% of parliamentary candidates who are women.

Colombia

Youth civic engagement in Colombia has been the subject of multiple studies (see, historical literature review by Botero, et al, 2010 and Acosta and Barbosa, 2005; Acosta, 2011; Botero and Torres, 2008; Cubides, 2010; Gutiérrez, 2011). More specifically, Aguilar-Forero and Muñoz (2015) explore youth actively engaged in peacebuilding. The authors argue that while youth are affected by a range of challenges related to economic and life precariousness, as well as uncertainty regarding the future, disenchantment and violence. In the period of study (2012-2013) there were forms of emerging collective youth action that contributed to the constitution of new horizons for the country based on a culture of peace. This argument was supported through the case study of an organisational experience that, since 2006, had worked to construct memory, work against impunity and develop a political and negotiated solution for the social and armed conflict affecting the country.

Two earlier studies concluded that youth who were active in social groups had a more nuanced and complete perception of youth. These studies explored young people's perceptions about peace in Bogotá (Sacipa et al, 2006; Tovar and Sacipa 2011). Young people, especially those taking part in youth groups, relate peace to values like respect, union, solidarity and mutual care, in contrast to understandings of other groups which associated peace with tranquillity and good manners.

These studies indicate that there is a relevant practice of youth being actively involved politically and particularly in peacebuilding activities. Though there is quantifiable evidence as to the proportion of young people involved in these kind of activities, there are clear indications to show considerable engagement. This includes the massive participation in public mobilisations supporting the peace agreement and the meetings to analyse the peace process organised by secondary school students of 20 public and private schools in Bogotá in 2017. In this example, they developed an open letter to authorities demanding less polarisation and the inclusion of peace and reconciliation activities in schools (La Semana, 2018).

Another indication of the emergence of youth as a subject and political actor is the development of youth policies as part of the country's public policy agenda, as shown by the national youth policy and more clearly with the 2013 Law (Nr. 1622), (Varón Cárdenas, 2014), modified by law 1885 (2018)⁴. Colombia's last national youth policy (2005) defined youth as individuals between 14 and 26 years. This was recently changed by law 1885 defining youth

⁴ See: <http://es.presidencia.gov.co/normativa/normativa/LEY%201885%20DEL%2001%20DE%20MARZO%20DE%202018.pdf>

as those between 14 and 28. The 2005 youth policy was the basis of a ten-year plan (2005-2015) which had three main objectives: youth participation in public life, access to good public services and broadening social, economic and cultural opportunities (Youth Policy, 2018). Furthermore, with the Youth Citizenship Act of 2013, Colombia possessed an institutional framework related to public policies affecting young people, coordinated by the Governmental institution Colombia Jóven⁵. Under the new government, Colombia Jóven will be dissolved, with youth issues to be managed by the Ministry of the Family (to be created, draft law is under consideration). Under the 2013 law, district, municipal and departmental (regional) youth councils were created.

Researchers from Colombia explained that while a map on the website of Colombia Jóven shows numerous district, municipal and departmental youth councils established, it does not contain information on the creation of a national youth council and there is no information on the prospects of creating one. Despite the existence of the laws and attempts to develop the institutional frameworks to implement them, there are multiple challenges to put them into practice, including the formation of youth platforms, the lack of training by young people to appropriate the mechanisms and the lack of interest of some groups.

Libya

There is limited literature on youth civic engagement in Libya in general. However, a small number of studies refer to the ways youth strongly protested in large numbers the economic deprivation and exclusion they had suffered in the “Arab Spring”. Menezes and Makkawi (2013) state “there is a clear leading role played by youth in organising and sustaining the struggle”, and Boose (2012) asserts that the “youth population in Libya is very active and at the forefront of the civil society movement toward democracy. The CSOs [civil society organisations] that have developed and continued to operate are youth-led organisations”. They organised through an extensive use of mobiles and social media. For example, the Libyan Youth Movement used a Facebook group for the construction of various discourses around the identity of the movement, during the Libyan revolution in 2011 (Carr, 2011). At the same time, youth in Libya were also identified as a threat or segment to be controlled as being volatile (Foundation for the Future, 2011 quoted in Boose, 2012).

Sierra Leone

There is some knowledge on challenges for youth in Sierra Leone, especially in the post-war period as well as some evidence of the kinds of civic engagement observed. The examination of available literature identified that it is limited in terms of specifically documenting recent youth civic engagement, its motivating and limiting factors and its impacts.

In the general socioeconomic context of Sierra Leone, youth experience challenges such as limited access to quality education and employment opportunities. Additionally, they are

⁵ See: <http://www.colombiajoven.gov.co>

largely excluded from decision-making processes and had a limited role in the peacebuilding process (Bangura, 2016, McIntyre and Thusi, 2003). These authors explain how children and youth had an important (negative) role in the war. They became leaders of militia and were child soldiers. It is calculated that there were 70,000 combatants, the majority of which were youth. However, this large space they occupied became narrowed during the peace process. As leaders, they had a sense of pride and power (based on force) which they lost to a great extent when they engaged in the process of DDR. Some were able to do it successfully thanks to programmes that combined skills training, psychological support and other social activities, while others struggled to find their way back to their communities as they had no support to do so. Given this complex history, social and cultural perceptions of youth are generally negative. The word “youth” is associated with violence, drug abuse or robbery, often manipulated, and perceived as expendable victims (Ansumana, Ngombulango, and Sheriff, 2018).

To address this situation, many associations have been created in the past twenty years. These have acted as youth-serving agencies at grassroots levels, and youth-led associations - new forms of associational life emerged particularly in rural areas after the war (Fanthorpe and Maconachie, 2010). Some of these were donor-dependent and only operated for short periods (Fanthorpe and Maconachie, 2010; Ansumana, Ngombulango and Sheriff, 2018), while others were genuinely created and sustained by youth. Youth programming and support from donors was based on a diagnosis which understood disenfranchised youth as a threat to the peace process. However Cubitt (2012) challenges this view, arguing that it is rather the manipulation of youth by elite actors, the fragility of the economy and the lack of coherent policies that are greater threats to the country's stability.



Staff of youth-led organisation YPPD-SL after a reflection retreat, Makeni, October 2017.

McIntyre and Thusi (2003) explain how, in this narrow space, some youth organisations aimed to articulate the needs of youth and channel youth energies in a constructive way. For example, Movement of Concerned Kono Youths (MOCKY) in Kono region has been credited with playing a highly positive role to consolidate peace in the area through the mediation of disputes. Other organisations such as Youth for Sustainable Development (YOSUPA) - a local youth NGO involved with peace projects immediately after the end of the war - reflect the dynamism and potential energy of young people to take responsibility for the future of Sierra Leone.

Though the contributions of youth in the high-level or more visible spaces of the peace process are limited, other contributions have been critical, if still less visible, including the reconstruction of social fabric, hope and a common vision of peace through educational, artistic and social activities. The effective use of music has been documented; one example is

the association Peace Links which created a music group, where its leader Vandy Kaniako composed peace oriented lyrics and established a local music label (Kanyako, 2002; Del Felice and Wisler, 2007). Pruitt (2013) also shows how music has been extensively used by young people in Sierra Leone to serve as a channel of expression and inspiration for other young people in the post-conflict period. This has included artists organising peace concerts and festivals.

Examples of training and international exchange programmes are those organised by UNOY Peacebuilders in Sierra Leone, such as “Youth Transforming Conflict” in 2004, the Job-shadowing project and the Peace of Mind Challenge by Young Leaders of Sierra Leone together with UNOY Peacebuilders in 2011 and 2012 respectively.

There is also evidence of self-organisation among youth to address their needs. Peters (2007) documents how ex-combatants, who did not go back to farming or diamond digging and remained in cities, created a membership-based trade association of motorcycle taxi drivers, drawing inspiration from modalities associated with former fighting groups. Another documented example is the Youth in Action for Development (YAD) association, a non-political and non-religious organisation based in Kenema which offers training and employment opportunities in a multipurpose youth centre.

A study on post-war youth resilience in Sierra Leone reveals key factors for positive youth development and civic engagement (Betancourt, 2012). The study concludes that there are “multiple influences on psychosocial adjustment and social reintegration for child soldiers. Certainly, individual-level war experiences, coping skills, and competencies”. Importantly, it also identifies family and community structures as important enabling factors, including “the availability of education programs for youth who have missed many years of schooling due to war. Such enabling environments have a critical role to play in supporting the healthy adjustment of war-affected youth” (Betancourt, 2012: 353).

Through an internet search, indicators were found of active youth participation in politics, and that organisations promote youth political participation, yet there is no academic study of political youth participation in recent years.

2. Findings

This section presents the findings conducted in the four countries. First it describes the youth-led activities that youth reported being involved and highlights some of the stories shared by young people (using pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity). These descriptive sub-sections allows to be able to analyse the motivating and limiting factors of youth-led civic engagement for peace, its gender dimensions, perceived impacts and special contributions. Finally, this section explores the success factors and the scalability of youth-led peace actions.

2.1 Youth-led activities

Young people described a wide variety of civic activities in relation to peacebuilding, understood broadly as the work to address all forms of violence. Advocacy and educational activities were clearly the primary activities in which youth are engaged, followed by activism via traditional media and social media and art-related activities. Activities were led by youth associations, students associations, or youth who established a social enterprise, but also by less formalised groups such as online youth networks and youth neighbourhood/community groups.

This figure summarises the type of activities identified and clustered by local researchers in the analysis workshop.



Advocacy

Advocacy activities were the most identified and described, yet it is important to note that these were youth-led activities in the context of civil society organisations and other informal groups, and not in the framework of traditional party politics. In fact, only respondents from Sierra Leone described their participation in political parties' meetings and rallies.

It is clear that youth are able to organise around issues that are of the greatest importance to them and decide to create their own spaces and channels of expression. Some of the most common advocacy activities mentioned related to students' associations at the

secondary and university levels. For example, this included organising debates on specific socially-relevant topics such as human rights, extremism and migration to sharpen critical analysis and public speaking skills (Afghanistan) or activities to engage students in volunteering and civic work (Libya). Youth also organise advocacy activities on specific issues that they feel affected by, such as identity and ethnicity (Colombia), the role of women in peacebuilding through the 1325 network (Libya), supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Afghanistan) and to prevent Ebola and debunk incorrect information and stereotypes about the disease and the campaigns #Not-for-me-without-me, #Not-too-young-to-serve to demand changes in the political system allowing younger people to be able to run for office (Sierra Leone).

A second, yet, key type of advocacy activities is related to participation in youth groups and platforms that advocate for the inclusion of youth in peacebuilding and decision-making processes. These activities were Marches for Peace in Afghanistan and, the public mobilisation supporting the peace agreement in Colombia. In Bogotá there were several key moments to encourage youth participation, all related to peace agreements between the government and the FARC. The first moment was the plebiscite, in which many youth groups organised to attract more voters to the "yes" and then, when the "no" won, the youth immediately organized again, "Paz a la Calle" was born, the camp peace and other groups that encouraged citizens to express support for the peace process. Local researchers from Colombia believed that without such public support the government would not have taken the decision to pass the approval of the agreements through Congress. One young leader from Colombia explained:

I participated and co-organised a group called "Jóvenes por el Sí" (Young people for "Yes") before the plebiscite of the peace agreements, the idea was to organise ourselves as young people to make pedagogy to people who had not read or understood the more than 300 pages of peace agreements, we did many activities in universities, in strategic points of the city in which there was a lot of people.

Educational activities

Respondents described multiple educational activities led by young people. These include peace education in schools and universities in Colombia; "Democratic Saturday" and "Active Citizen Curriculum" organised by the civic society organisation H20, and organisation of young women in Libya; tutoring for young people in schools and mentorship for young entrepreneurs in Sierra Leone; and those in which youth collaborated with adults as with the Model of the United Nations in Afghanistan.

Interestingly, lots of activities are initiated and organised by young people within the formal education spaces (schools and universities) but as extra-curricular activities and specifically, addressing gaps in the formal education curriculum. These are round-tables, seminars and debates in which young people address topics of their concern and where they put the

emphasis not only on academic knowledge, but also on practical skills such as communication and critical thinking skills. Methods used seem much more participatory and learner-oriented as these activities are organised by young people for young people.

Youth also were reported to have been engaged in mediation and dialogue activities at schools and at community level in Colombia and Sierra Leone.



Workshop "A path of empathy, acceptance and integration with the other", Fundación Escuelas de Paz, Mesetas & El Castillo, September 2018.

Art-based peacebuilding

A significant number of the activities described consisted of artistic ways of expression, either to create a channel for young people to share their views, to create awareness about an issue or to denounce social injustice in the public space, as in the case of murals. Other artistic forms were videos, paintings and music festivals.

One respondent from Colombia shared, "I'm a musician and I write songs inspired by the beauty of the territory and the resistance of the people". In Libya WaraQ Art Foundation proved to be an an important artistic hub described by several respondents. It is led by young women who challenge cultural and social norms through art and organisation of



WaraQ Foundation - WARNING art exhibit on human rights featured by several Libyan artists, expressing how they see Human rights violations in Libya in different forms of art, Tripoli, April 2017.

exhibitions. Another example is that of a young graphic designer, artist and youth leader who started his own project to identify Libya’s historic monuments, both lost and still existing.

Civic engagement through traditional and social media

Youth use traditional media, yet more importantly, they create their own media spaces and use social media extensively to advocate for causes, create networks of solidarity or spaces of expression. An example shared by a respondent from Colombia shows how this newly youth-led engagement created spaces that serve as spaces for dialogue, "I led a community radio station and there we talked about literature, politics, art, we had people from all political currents, then we all debated and started to understand how the political world was moving." Another example from Sierra Leone highlights the importance of creating safe spaces. A radio and television programme organised by Africa Young Voices TV called "Youth Perspectives" was considered by respondents as a safe space created to talk about youth issues bordering on politics, employment, drugs and the media.

Sports

Several youth referred to sports as a common activity they organised. Football was the most often chosen sport and this involved mostly males.

Social enterprises

Income generating activities allowed youth to organise and create employment opportunities for themselves and for peers, especially those with less qualifications or opportunities. These activities included urban agriculture, small start up businesses, and recycling. An illustrative example of this is the Okada Riding group in Sierra Leone, a cooperative of taxi and motorcycle riders.



Celebration of youth at Mazadar Burger, start-up that became a chain of small fast food restaurants employing 30 young people. Kabul, September 2018.

Community-development and humanitarian activities

Community and humanitarian activities were reported in all countries. In Sierra Leone, youth develop community action plans and implement them, for instance, building bridges and poles for lights. In Colombia, medical and psychological support had strong gender dimensions. Youth provide medical care for those who have no access to medical services such as Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer

(LGBTIQ+) members and psychological support for young women that were victims of gender violence. One respondent explained:

Due to personal experiences of physical and psychological abuse by a former partner I approached feminism, with some friends we created a feminist support network, what we wanted to do was to support other women who were being mistreated by their partners, give them a safe place to protect them from the abuser and in some cases help them in the impeachment process.

In Libya, youth provide help for migrants children and women. It is noteworthy that due to the high poverty rate in the south of Libya, humanitarian aid is an important aspect of civic engagement. Organisations such as Tripoli Good and Ana-Tawfeeq (I'm Tawfik)⁶ organise many campaigns in Tripoli during Ramadan, Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, where they collect and distribute food and other items for families in need.

In Afghanistan, youth also join humanitarian organisations and civil society organisations.

Youth-led political work

Youth only reported being active in political parties in Colombia and in Sierra Leone. This may have had to do with the sampling but also with the political history and current contexts of high instability and insecurity in Libya and Afghanistan, where political activities are viewed with suspicion and mistrust. One young person from Colombia active in a political party explained their activism through it:

In the party there is a large group of young people, most of us volunteer in other organizations and we are connected with different problems of the country and this strengthens our political thinking. (...) In our political party we have carried out several activities to include young people in different spaces. We have done training schools, cultural activities such as fairs and musical concerts, family bingo, debates and discussions, all these events are planned and executed by the young people of the party, those who don't belong to the party are also invited.

That very few young people in the sample referred to civic engagement through political parties was explained during the analysis workshop as a result of the general feeling of disappointment of young people with politics. Many young people reported fear of manipulation by politicians, and being discouraged by corrupt and tokenistic practices. This finding clearly confirms the finding of the study "the Missing Peace" mentioned above.

⁶ #Iamtawfik is an NGO that works to promote reconciliation and coexistence among conflicting parties. They also have a charity based program to provide humanitarian aid help year round in Tripoli, Benghazi and Sabha. the organisation is named after a young activist (Tawfik Bensaoud) who has been assassinated in Benghazi

Other special activities mentioned in one country only

Afghanistan	Libya	Colombia	Sierra Leone
<p>Debate clubs and groups</p> <p>Book reading circles</p>	<p>Providing medical support to LGBTIQ+ youth</p> <p>Building emergency houses with TECHO</p> <p>Urban agriculture</p>	<p>Help women who are married to non-Libyan</p> <p>Startups like Sinbad and Inspire Lab</p> <p>Youth empowerment through technology</p> <p>SDG awareness workshops</p>	<p>Humanitarian work in the Ebola crisis</p> <p>Campaign to pay no bribes</p>

2.2 Stories of youth-led civic change

Afghanistan

From the ashes of war to youth leader and entrepreneur: the story of Sharbat

Sharbat (pseudonym) was born in Mazar Province northern Afghanistan in 1994 and now lives in Kabul. Her father was an army general and mother a journalist during Najib's presidency in Afghanistan. After the Taliban took over Kabul, they lived under the shadow of fear during the rule of Taliban. Her father was hidden under their house for five years to save his life, and her mother covered her face with the Chadari (burqa) so as not to be recognised. These actions were in recognition of the brutality of Taliban regime. If the regime found out that her mother was a journalist or father a former army official of Dr. Najibullah, (whom was tortured and hanged) the Taliban would arrest them and possibly kill her family.

After the collapse of the Taliban in 2001, during her schooling, Sharbat decided to be independent, "all of my family members are working. I believe money is a source of power for girls. I wanted to be independent."

Studying in 8th grade, and with the help of her mother, 13 year-old Sharbat became a presenter in the National Radio Television of Afghanistan. Later on, she was promoted and appointed as News Narrator in NDT. Sharbat recalls, "reading the news from across the country as part of my involvement in media made me to contribute to the society and it resulted in founding a youth organisation in 2012 to support youth engagement in society".

This youth organisation offered training programs to Afghan youth, recruiting volunteers to share their skills through their online platform. In the first year, 200 youth learned computer skills, graphic design, English and school curriculum subjects. Furthermore, the organisation

developed programs to empower women by providing employment opportunities such as carpet weaving and how to produce homemade pickled vegetables for cooking.

Extending the activities of the organisation, Sharbat founded a laundry company. "Now we focus on economic empowerment of youth and women (...) We pick washable cloths of people from their homes and wash it and return them back. Now ten women and three men are working in her company whom are mostly young people." Additionally, Sharbat is also part of the Afghanistan startup community promoting entrepreneurship across the country.

Colombia

The importance of peace activities in school and international networks

Juan (pseudonym) is from Soacha, a city that is part of the metropolitan area of Bogotá. He experienced a difficult childhood due to the different episodes of violence he suffered. In the face of the violence around him, he decided to take action and began to take a more active leadership role thanks as a result of the peace education activities organised by the organisation "Escuelas de Paz" at his school. Juan became involved in local projects and had the opportunity to do an exchange program abroad, after which he started to support peace projects in other countries.



Workshop "Recognition, experience and action in the construction of youth networks for social transformation" by Fundación Escuelas de Paz. Meta, October 2018

He continues to work locally and internationally. He is now a member of the youth network of an international peace organisation, and currently involved in the organisation of a global peace conference and the pre-conferences in several countries during 2018.

Youth lead nurturing our bodies and souls respecting mother earth

Carlos (pseudonym) used to work for a mining company, but became more aware of the environmental damage of this industry. Despite his economic situation, he decided to learn how to grow his own food. He traveled for years and upon return to Bogotá he started a collective urban garden. This involves young people from the community, especially those engaged in illegal activities such as theft, and the consumption and sale of drugs. The project grew and now they have the opportunity to sell natural products such as creams for muscle pain and to calm symptoms of anxiety and depression. They initially received government support, however the government took all credit for their work. They are now solely reliant

on their own sales. Carlos explained there are other youth-led urban gardens in his neighbourhood and more are appearing as they share know-how through workshops.

Libya

H2o and “loving democracy”

Fatima (pseudonym) graduated from law school in 2012 after the revolution. She did not want to pursue a law career in civil or business law, but was engaged by international law and democracy. After the revolution, she decided to move into this direction and now works for H2O, a youth-led organisation established in 2011. The aim of this organisation is to serve as a space where young people can express their views and aspirations, which are then translated into specific suggestions and demands to be presented to authorities. The organisation “focuses also on the response of Libyan youth towards policies and programs the Government and local authorities present. Credible and creative civic engagement and public education methods are designed by H2O that engage youth in political and social life by enhancing their monitoring and advisory role in turn making the government and elected institutions more efficient, transparent, and inclusive.”⁷ Fatima expresses that she loves democracy and is passionate about her work.

Sierra Leone

From Gang Leader to Peacebuilder

George (pseudonym) grew up in Mountain Cut, one of the overcrowded communities in Freetown. Since he was a child - and for 20 years - he was a member of a gang group called the “Crips”, which developed negative coping mechanisms to survive such as drug dealing and robbery. He was imprisoned multiple times and after realising the devastating effects of these activities on himself and the community, he felt he needed to focus on something more meaningful. This led to his establishment of Youth in Action for Peace Club, which was created to promote peace between the two gang groups. He advances this agenda through the organisation of football matches, social events and non-violence campaigns in schools. He aims to break stereotypes and diffuse the fears the community has of former gang members.

Addressing the past, looking at the future: Students Campus Peace Club

Students who experienced the civil war in Kenema city decided to create a students’ programme called “Campus Peace Club” at the University of Sierra Leone, in the Eastern region of the country. They organise concerts, debates and workshops. The Club is the peace hub of the university. One of the leaders explained how his life experiences led him to start the club:

⁷ Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/h2o-organization/> viewed 12 October 2018.

...the experience was bad and demeaning for a child like me; I saw people killed before me (...), The area where we I lived was attacked by rebels so we have to move to another community. (...) I was able to complete schooling because my foster parents had huge value for education and at that time education was cheaper towards the end of the war; there was free education, school feeding and book supplies motivated me to continue schooling.

When asked why he was engaged he replied: "To me, preaching peace is a way of life, my vision in life is to liberate the minds of Sierra Leoneans from the negative past to a future that is happier, safe and peaceful."

2.3 Motivating factors

This section summarises the main motivating and enabling factors that affect youth-led civic engagement. In the analysis workshop, while clustering and comparing the findings, the local researchers were surprised to observe how similar these were.

Internal factors: personal motivations

Inner motivation to contribute to society

The main motivating factors relate to the inner-drive youth felt to change situations that affected themselves and their communities. Youth expressed the need to "give back to the community" (respondent from Libya) or "a desire to change and stop violence" (respondent from Colombia). During the analysis workshop, all local researchers reached consensus on the idea that young people who were engaged had a strong inner motivation that defied the multiple challenges they faced.

"Young people are motivated by transformation, the search for internal and external peace, to find something to do that gives meaning to our journey."

Young woman (23 years old) from Medellín, Colombia

"I try to do more awareness to the youth, break the negative routine in their life, instead of just living within their bubble going from university or work straight to a café all day long, if we can break down this system with awareness and provide them with something so they can work with it would enable a great group of youth"

Respondent from Libya

This inner-drive was the main impulse behind youth-led activities. One local researcher explained that “these people continue no matter what”, and highlighted that challenges like insecurity or the violation of human rights can be both limiting as well as motivating factors, as youth feel compelled to strive for a better future.”

Youth feel a desire to work for, in and with the community. They feel like working in a safe environment with like-minded people. They want to feel a sense of belonging and to be recognised by the community, where they could exercise solidarity and empathy. They also express the need to reach out to more people and to also be part of wider social networks.



G+ IDEA To ACTION event, organized by Generation Positive an NGO that provides youth empowerment and capacity building programs, Kabul, 2017.

Opportunities for self-development

Other motivating personal factors for civic engagement mentioned are capacity building opportunities. For example, to learn about their rights and responsibilities (Afghanistan) and to understand more about the social and political situation in their country (Colombia). They also describe financial factors like employment opportunities and prospects that may emerge from their civic engagement.



WaraQ Foundation - ART OUT project - yearly project about using art in public spaces, including public discussions and talks. The theme of 2018 edition was: The City is our Gallery, Tripoli, May 2018.

External factors: context and family

Freedom of expression and safe spaces

There were also contextual enabling factors mentioned, notably freedom after suppression (post-Gaddafi period in Libya), respect for civil and political rights (Sierra Leone), the 2001 constitutional framework (Afghanistan) and the opportunities that the peace process opened (Colombia).

Opportunities and support of civil society organisations

Youth express that technical support and opportunities created by civil society organisations are enabling factors for them to engage. For example, youth spoke about the trainings, scholarship and exchange opportunities, materials made available, and overall the support of the international community through NGOs.

Support of family and friends

Youth refer to the support of family and friends, that is, positive peer-group influence as an important factor to engage in civic activities. Though for some, family and friends discourage them due to a negative perception of the activities or fears due to the situation of insecurity.

Opportunities and support from governmental institutions

Some youth mention the support of the government as an enabling factor of their engagement. For example, young people in Sierra Leone highlight legal frameworks for youth to participate in activities and the new political appointment of youth in government positions who are more responsive to youth issues.

2.4 Limiting factors

Poverty and unemployment

The main and most frequently mentioned factor limiting youth-led civic engagement is poverty and unemployment. Youth struggle to survive, thus limiting their motivation, time, level of education and mobility to engage. Two respondents from Colombia and Sierra Leone respectively explain:

I come from a context where young people are drug addicts or dealers, thieves, gang members and even assassins, generally they don't want to study or help the family, I know that and I am able to understand it because I lived that, I was like that, and I thought that everything was lost for people like me, being black and poor in this country is not so easy, sometimes we don't find anything that motivates us, that inspires us.

Looking at our population today many are poor as a result cant access education and job". Most of the problems youths are facing is as a result of poverty that have left homes, youths handicap to cater and provide for themselves. (...) This has render youths with no choice but to hustle for their survival wherein they end up been thieves, gangs, prostitute, drug addict etc and due to this youths are abandon, misuse and abuse by politicians, stakeholders and other authorities.

Poverty also limits access to education and medical services. For example, few have access to quality sexual education, leading to premature, undesired multiple pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, as noted by a local researcher from Sierra Leone.

Negative community perceptions about youth

The second and also important limiting factor to engaging is community perceptions. Youth express that they are often not taken seriously by elders, that people do not believe in youth, and even that adults not only did not trust them, but often censor and discourage young people from expressing their ideas. This emerges partly from societies that are ruled by traditional norms. Activities and expressions of young people that challenge or are not part of that system of norms are discouraged and even rejected.

In relation to traditional beliefs it was also mentioned that prejudices related to certain minorities affect youth engagement. For example, in Afghanistan, youth refer to systematic prejudices in the government against certain ethnic minorities.

"Because of the traditions, cultures and norms society has made women and youths are not allowed to be part of decision making, women are not allowed to sit in a meeting with elders"

Respondent from Sierra Leone

Lack of recognition of youth as competent political actors by policy makers

A lack of attention of political actors - or even disdain for youth - was mentioned as a discouraging factor. For example, a young person from Sierra Leone explained, "youths are only considered by politicians when it [is] time for election activities like rallies, campaigns and youths to serve as party agents." A similar situation is described in Colombia, that "we're in a country governed by adults who use young people as props for their campaigns or speeches but who don't provide them with concrete spaces for participation and decision-making." It appeared in the reflections among local researchers that there seems to be a power-sharing issue, a fear of losing control and an incapacity of not being able to work with youth as partners, to communicate with and reach out to youth in a constructive form of intergenerational dialogue.

Limited government support

Limited government support in terms of quality spaces for participation and special technical and financial opportunities for youth civic engagement was identified as a limiting factor. Youth complained that support for youth activities is very limited due to lack of interest, access to youth-friendly spaces and a lack of coordination with other related programmes. Though there is goodwill in some cases, the resources are limited, and thus the reach of activities is limited and often are not scalable.

Insecurity

The current presence of armed groups was mentioned in Afghanistan, Libya and Colombia as an important limiting factor for civic engagement, with political activists targeted by these groups.

Trauma and unhealed wounds

Though this was not mentioned explicitly by most respondents - probably due to the respondents sampling focused on active youth - one local researcher shared a story of a female youngster whose father had been killed by an armed group and her mother had died of depression. She explained that she did not feel like being in peace and reconciliation efforts as she was not ready for that. It was too painful for her and she expressed healing and reconciliation takes time. The local researcher explained that there was a tendency to put pressure on people to move on and to forgive but that can't be forced upon people.



Data-Analysis workshop, mapping the barriers of youth-led civic activities per country. The Hague, September 2018.

Migration and brain drain

Due to high rates of unemployment and insecurity, youth move to larger urban areas and out of their home countries looking for better opportunities. This includes youth leaders and activists leaving their groups and movements, and causing challenges for the leadership of these.

2.5 Specific motivating and limiting factors

Though the motivating and limiting factors were quite similar in all four countries, there were factors mentioned in one country only which are related to specificities of the context. For example, in Libya, the sense of freedom after the 2011 revolution stimulated lots of young people to engage. In Sierra Leone, the Public Order Act which guarantees political freedoms played a positive role. In both these two countries, however, tribal conflicts continued to be a limiting factor. In Colombia, in the period prior to the referendum about the peace agreement between the government and FARC, lots of young people engaged to

promote the “yes” to the agreement, fearing that the “no” would win. At the same time, supporting the agreement was sometimes associated to support for FARC when this was not the case, and this discouraged some young people. Additionally, homicides of social leaders and gang violence in this period also played a role in de-motivating young people to become active.

There were also two important limiting factors identified in only two of the four researched countries. First, migrations has been as a specific limiting factor in the case of Libya and Afghanistan. People are trained and/or active, but they need to migrate to seek security and better opportunities. Second, both in Colombia and Sierra Leone the negative perception of youth towards youth has been reported.

2.6 Youth engagement and gender

Motivating and limiting factors played out differently for females and males. In all four countries, social perceptions and expectations on gender roles (family and friends) affected youth engagement. This has been mentioned both as a motivating factor (positive perception of young people contributing to the community) and a limiting one (a negative perception of both youth and youth engagement). For young women, this was much more acute, with expectations focused on nurturing, caring and reproductive roles, while males are encouraged to seek more productive and public/social roles.

The majority of activities that respondents referred to were both open and joined by both females and males, however there were some that seemed particularly geared (intentionally or not) for any gender. For example, football matches is an activity commonly popular among males and more caring type of activities such as humanitarian activities with children seemed to have more female participants, such as young females working with children in Sierra Leone.

Youth also mobilised specifically on topics of gender inequality and gender-based violence. For example, the association Together We Built which advocates for UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace & Security (WPS) agenda and Tamazight Women Movement are associations actively supported by young women in Libya. Youth groups made short videos and explained their relevance: “It was highlighted in the focus discussion group that a lot of those videos which were made focused on women and girls success stories.”

It is evident that young women are far more constrained to engage due to social norms, lack of financial independence and issues of mobility related to security. Women in Afghanistan are constrained by all these factors concurrently, and also by threats from extremist groups who explicitly target young women. Additional barriers for girls and young women to engage - in all countries - are early marriage (and lack of support of their families to start or continue their civic engagement), teenage pregnancy and the related school dropout which limits their time and access to information about how and where to engage in civic activism. Several responses across all four countries referred to the fact that when young women have children they believe it is their only role, as they have internalised that young mothers can



Tripoli Good - Distribution of Humanitarian aid supplies to poor families during the holy month of Ramadan. The old city of Tripoli, June 2018.

not study, work or participate in community activities. This is further strengthened by sexist cultures in which young fathers do not share caring and household tasks.

In Colombia, the barriers mentioned by young women are almost the same as those mentioned by males. However, one 14 year-old indigenous girl expressed that although she is allowed to be part of the indigenous council, she is unable to participate actively as it is difficult for her to express her opinion among a group largely comprised of older men.

In the data collected, there is no evidence to affirm that the motivation to engage in civic activities are different between young men and young women. When asked, they expressed the ideas as summarised in the section above, regardless of their gender. The only, and critical, exception is the motivation of women to engage in issues related to gender discrimination and gender-based violence. This is exemplified by a case in Colombia, where a young woman expressed her motivation to create a feminist support network for women abused physically and psychologically. A similar case is also found among Afghans respondents, where an young Afghan woman who migrated to Iran is promoting women's rights through art and social media. Another Afghan woman expressed her motivation to create her laundry company so she could be financially independent as she was discouraged by her family to go to university. She also expressed that she continues to be harassed by men of her community when going to work.

A revealing finding that confirms current knowledge is that male respondents almost exclusively did not mention gender issues or gender violence in conversations. This underscores the notion that gender issues are “women’s issues”, which do not concern or worry them to any great extent.

2.7 Perceived impacts

While some participants in this research could attribute changes to their own civic engagement and that of youth in their context more generally, the majority struggled to precisely identify the impacts of their own civic engagement or those observed in the case of key informants. One local researcher explained that it may be too soon to assess, in the sense that while there are indications of more awareness and active participation, it is uncertain how these translate into more stable behaviour changes and social practices. The desired impacts may be limited by factors beyond their control; although youth may intend to continue or scale up educational activities, they may not be able to sustain their volunteerism due to financial, mobility or security constraints.

Afghanistan

Youth that had been youth leaders in civil society organisations are now increasingly present in the public sphere, running for Members of Parliament positions and present in governmental institutions. Of particular importance is that these youth appear to think beyond ethnicity lines, to broader, common societal interests. An indication of the changing perception of youth towards a more positive image is that the new government shows more interest in youth issues and increasingly supports youth activities.

Colombia

There is an awareness of the growing positive perception of youth leaders by communities in both urban and rural contexts, and that young people's opinions are starting to be heard and considered by adult social leaders. For example, the community as a whole became involved in activities carried out by young people. Participants also referred to a sense of solidarity, as in the case of Libya.

"We have learned that there are other young people who are also doing activities like us... What motivates young people to get involved in civic activities is to find support from other youth processes, that is why it's so important to create solidarity networks"

Young man from Bogotá (30 years old), Colombia

There is a clear trend of young people engaging in peacebuilding activities, especially using cultural and art activities to promote peace and reconciliation in the country. The perceived impact is that now there are more international organisations interested in supporting youth

because they understand the empowerment of young people. As a result of this support, young people can acquire more knowledge to share in their communities.

Libya

Young people interviewed perceive that communities are more aware and open to change than before, when youth activism faced greater limitations. There are more indications of youth being involved in civil society organisations, eager to help one another and share (limited) resources - a sense of solidarity stemming from the difficult context. This is observed through higher involvement of youth in humanitarian work.

Sierra Leone

Youth civic engagement has strengthened trust of community members and leaders in young people in the context of general social misperceptions and stereotypes about youth. Youth groups are now actively involved in nation building programmes, for example, being active in the process of reviewing the constitution. Youth appear as change agents in their communities, transforming the narrative of youth as victims or perpetrators. More specifically, examples included youth who have been active as youth leaders, taking up political roles both at community and governmental levels, as in the case of Afghanistan. Through their civic engagement, they have gained skills, visibility and developed links with different stakeholders that has helped to develop their political path. They have a chance to influence public policies, bringing in their experiences of social youth activism. This is exemplified through Ashma James, a former Radio and News Presenter at 98.1 Radio who has been appointed by a Government Commissioner to be a member of the Independent Media Commission; Francis Ben Kaifala, a lawyer now heading the Anti-corruption Commission; Umar Paran Tawaralie, a Clerk of Parliament; and Umaru Napoleon Koroma, the chairman of the National Commission of Privatisation.

2.8 Youth civic engagement: special contributions to peacebuilding

A key common perceived impact was that youth-led activities, especially peace education activities in schools, art in the public space, campaigns, festivals, and dialogue spaces help to depolarise societies. These activities create spaces where a common future can be envisioned and coexistence among different groups can take place.

A second key common perceived impact is that it is in civic engagement activities that young people learn fundamental civic and peacebuilding skills (especially when formal education systems do not organise quality citizenship or peace education activities). This is vital as young people can apply later on in their lives when they take different kinds of leadership roles. It was reported that many youth who develop their leadership skills in civil society organisations, later on, become government officials, academics or management staff of



Flyer of youth-led mentorship program by Passion for Humanity Sierra Leone, November 2017.

lead organisations, still at a young age. In this way, they bring the communication and dialogue skills gained during their previous civic engagement activities.

In the four countries, an important perceived impact is related to the creation of job opportunities for young people by young people. The case of the Okada Riders and peer-to-peer small loans systems in Sierra Leone, urban gardens in Colombia, new startups in Libya and Afghanistan are illustrative examples. These activities may not appear so evidently as civic engagement activities, yet they are of vital importance in contexts of high unemployment and contexts of high political instability. Youth get together and seek survival strategies in an attempt to mitigate the disastrous effects of human insecurity where the basic economic and livelihood systems have collapsed. Through the creation of social enterprises, they have shown their coping and leadership skills and formed bonds of solidarity. Youth are able to satisfy their basic needs and regain hope with prospects for the future. This is key in volatile environments in which youth can be

targeted through manipulation or recruitment by gangs or armed groups. Contributing to youth employment and sense of inclusion is indispensable to contribute to the prevention of violence and strengthening a fragile stability and thus, peacebuilding efforts.

It is important to note that there is no direct nor simple causal link between youth unemployment and the engagement of youth in violence, rather it is one of the contributing factors, therefore, contributing to youth employment and economic inclusion should not be considered as the main or only way of working towards more peaceful societies.

As important as addressing survival and well-being (economic) needs are the needs for identity and freedom (in Galtung´s terms, 2006), feeling a sense of belonging and inclusion. This is why youth-led civic activities represent a key socialisation and inclusion factor for young people in conflict contexts, where societal and political structures eroded by the conflict and related power struggles seem not apt or capable of channeling youth aspirations.

2.9 Success in context: scaling up youth civic engagement

The research in the four countries documented that it is the inner drive of young people to change the reality around them that is a key impulse for their civic engagement. They are able to engage and their activities flourish when they have family and community support; that is, youth-friendly places where they feel safe, listened to, find like-minded persons and develop their own leadership skills. Examples of youth-friendly spaces are schools where youth are given the space to organise extra-curricular activities, youth-led associations and civil society organisations where youth can access educational opportunities and be supported when deciding to engage in civic actions, spaces facilitated by the community such as social centres or arts centres where youth can develop artistic activities and express their opinions freely, consultative spaces facilitated by governments where youth feel they are taken seriously. In other words, spaces and activities where youth participation is meaningful and which could be categorised in Hart's "Ladder of Participation" in the upper rungs (youth take the lead, youth decide together with adults).

Considering the major limiting factors in conflict contexts, such as insecurity (and limiting of mobility), civil and political freedoms, the creation and safeguarding of youth-friendly, youth-led, gender-sensitive, safe and pluralistic spaces is vital. This is why opportunities for engagement and spaces created by civil society and community organisations are fundamental to enable youth civic engagement. This is particularly critical for those that are not associated with any political party or ideology, or that creates a pluralistic environment are those that most effectively support peace processes. These activities create chances for young people to develop their own identities and views, and at the same time, learn about the "other" in less biased and more respectful ways. Taken together, this contributes to diffuse negative perceptions of "others" and humanise all groups in polarised and wounded societies.

Supporting, sustaining, enhancing and scaling up these youth spaces is fundamental to keep nurturing the development of democratisation and peacebuilding efforts.

Considering the major limiting factors in conflict contexts such as insecurity (and limiting of mobility), civil and political freedoms, the creation and safeguarding of youth-friendly, youth-led, gender-sensitive, safe and pluralistic spaces is vital.

3. Youth-led research: a learning experience

This research project was youth-led and participatory in nature. Its outcomes are thus not only research findings and knowledge, but importantly, the research competencies gained by those involved, particularly the local researchers. For most of the eight local researchers it was the first time they were engaged in this form of project and had to develop their social research skills. The learning process was supported by an initial joint training seminar in The Hague, The Netherlands, where they were trained in the use of the



Research Training, Local Researcher using a Conflict Analysis Tool (Conflict Tree)The Hague, March 2018.

chosen methods and the group discussed the overall methodological approach. Throughout the data collection phase, they were supported by three project staff and more experienced members of their own organisations on methodological and logistical matters.

Local researchers expressed that they gained many of insights on the topic but also developed a wide range of skills, detailed below.

Organisational skills

- Planning and logistical skills to organise the conversations, focus group discussions and interviews;
- problem solving skills;
- mapping stakeholders; and
- time and stress management.

Social research skills

- Conflict and context analysis tools;
- interviewing and active listening skills, including showing empathy and a specially sensitivity when listening to young people in vulnerable situations;
- probing without expressing disagreement with what the person was saying;
- detecting trauma and being careful when speaking about sensitive issues;
- analytical skills, through interpretation of findings, clustering information, identification of trends, similarities and differences among the four countries;
- gender analysis; and
- reporting.

Communication and intercultural skills

- Presentation skills;
- English language skills, considering that for 6 of the 8 local researchers English is their second language; and
- interacting in a multicultural team.

ICT skills

- Using software to make presentations; and
- using excel sheets and word.

The following excerpts illustrate the learning of the local researchers in this project:

"I studied sociology and this was the first time I did research. I loved working as a researcher (...) I found it healing to use the listening and learning method, to listen to the civic activities they are doing, it was very comforting from my side, they were sharing and I was sharing, as it is very rare in a country life Afghanistan to listen to people on things that you really want to share"

Local researcher from Afghanistan

"It was inspiring to meet so many young people who are passionate and committed to building a better country (...) Everyone's opinion is important. No matter age, sex, race, even if they don't actively work in civic processes, everyone has something to say and it is important to give value to that thought."

Local researcher from Colombia

"It was an eye opener to be a local researcher. I had worked with civil society organisations but sitting in front of a person and see a lot of good work and the challenges they faced was a learning experience. It made me see part of the youth who are full of hope."

Local researcher from Libya

"Being a local researcher brings opportunity for testing one's personal leadership skills as well as helping you to understand mediation, dialogue, opinion and perspectives"

Local researcher from Sierra Leone

4. Conclusions

Despite the many challenges and limitations that youth face in conflict-affected countries, they engage in a wide range of civic activities for peace. They are highly-driven and find encouragement in supportive environments made possible by peers, families, communities, civil society and governmental actors.

Characteristics of civic engagement in conflict-affected contexts

The majority of activities led by young people are advocacy and educational activities, in which they could feel safe, comfortable and owners of the space and process. They avoided spaces in which they felt manipulated or used. Young people prefer activities that allow youth to express themselves, through artistic expressions like murals or through writing in media and social media. Youth also started social enterprises to address the negative effects of unemployment on young people.

Notably, few engage in political parties and electoral processes, with the exception of Sierra Leone and Colombia in which youth was reported to be actively engaged in campaigns and organising the elections with main political parties. Though the type of activities appear similar, and the distrust with traditional politics is present in all four countries, it seems that more young people are active in advocacy and participation in party politics in those countries in which there is more (relatively) political stability and political freedoms (Sierra Leone and Colombia) . Security and basic freedoms are necessary enablers of mobilisation. In situations where security and political instability are more acute, there is a greater presence of active youth in humanitarian activities.

This report describes a wide range of activities led by youth, from activities in schools and universities to campaigns in social media, from humanitarian and community-based activities to social enterprises. Previous studies have focused on activities for youth, rather than those led by youth. For particular types of activities, those studied were largely part of more formalised spaces such as demobilisation or employment programmes. This research opened up the spectrum of activities to demonstrate the numerous ways in which young people carve out social space to find ways of expression and contribute to the betterment of their communities.

Key motivators and limiting factors

The main motivating factors are the inner-drive of young people to contribute to the betterment of their communities. This is a key finding, as studies in youth activism had often explained it as a result of anger due to unaddressed grievances (protest movements) or group interests (political activism through formal channels). The testimonies of young people interviewed illustrate the genuine drive and impulse to engage. This is important, as reports and statements often refer to the motivation and energy of youth, yet this is rarely documented and harnessed.

Youth are also motivated by the need to feel their engagement was meaningful for their personal and professional development. For example, they appreciate the opportunities for learning when engaging in civic activities.

The enabling contextual factors mentioned are the respect for civil and political rights such as freedom of expression, safe spaces and the support and opportunities mainly offered by civil society organisations, often facilitated by youth, and sometimes with the support of the government. The support of family and friends was both an important motivator and enabler.

The primary limiting factor is the structural restriction imposed by poverty and unemployment, especially on youth of disadvantaged backgrounds who are unable to access educational opportunities, information or possess the mobility to participate in civic activities. The second factor is the negative perceptions of the community toward on youth and youth engagement, particularly in relation to young women stepping out of more traditional caring and reproductive roles. Related to these general negative social perceptions is the lack of recognition of youth by political actors, who largely fail to meaningfully involve them meaningfully in most cases. This is, at the same time, linked to the deprioritisation of youth participation in governmental agendas. Finally, it was reported that, for some youth, it is difficult to engage in peace and reconciliation activities due to the still open wounds as a result of the conflict.

Perceived impacts

Though most respondents struggled to identify specific impacts that they could neatly attribute to their activities, the amount and types of youth-led civic activities taking place despite numerous of barriers and limitations shows that the inner drive, creativity and courage of young people prevails. This strong motivation leads them to seek opportunities and create spaces of change as they constructively address conflict and look to a more peaceful future.

Youth reached consensus on their perception that youth engagement has increased awareness of the importance of peace and reconciliation, and the key role of youth as positive agents of change. In Libya and Colombia, a sense of growing solidarity among young people due to challenging situations and new political opportunities was emphasised. This is noteworthy, as polarised and fragmented societies require initiatives that contribute to depolarise societies and create positive perceptions of all groups, helping facilitate dialogue and the normalisation of relations among groups previously opposed to each other. Youth bridge the divides, as former gang-members create peace initiatives in Sierra Leone, or as young women who have faced discrimination find their own voice and strength to create new enterprises. Youth show resilience and the capacity to imagine better futures and put their ideas into practice.

In Afghanistan and Sierra Leone, youth that had been active youth leaders become members of parliament and the government, bringing in their youth civic engagement experiences to

influence policy. This fosters leadership that is able to look beyond dividing lines, with the capacity to find common ground and pursue common goals.

Finally, youth appear as creators of social enterprises to address youth unemployment, contribute to mitigating the devastating effects of conflict on the economy and on the basic sense of social trust and feelings of solidarity.

Scaling up success

The research findings demonstrate that there is a strong inner drive of young people to change the reality around them. They are able to engage when they had family and community support, that is, places where they could feel safe, listened to, find like-minded persons and develop their own leadership skills. Considering major limiting factors in conflict contexts such as insecurity (limiting mobility), civil and political freedoms, the creation and safeguarding of youth-friendly, youth-led, gender-sensitive, safe and pluralistic spaces are vital. These become spaces of refuge amidst turbulent contexts and where the seed of civic engagement grows and matures. They should not be spaces which are protected in a paternalistic way or where youth are kept “occupied”, rather a space where youth can take the lead and experience dialogue and support from both peers and adults.

Opportunities for engagement created by youth themselves or other civil society and community organisations are thus fundamental to enable youth civic engagement. These activities create chances for young people to develop their own identities and views, and at the same time learn about the “other” in less biased and more respectful ways. In turn, this contributes to diffuse negative perceptions of “others” and humanises all groups, particularly in polarised and wounded societies. Supporting, sustaining, enhancing and scaling up these youth spaces is fundamental to keep nurturing the development of democratisation and peacebuilding efforts.

5. Implications for policy and practice

Key finding: It is critical for young people to feel listened to, trusted and positively viewed by the community, without being manipulated. This has been found key to sustain and enhance youth civic engagement. In order to sustain and enhance youth civic engagement for peace:

- Governments and civil society organisations should collaborate to sustain and create meaningful spaces for participation that are not tokenistic, not damaged by tribalism and regionalism, and where true partnership, unity and intergenerational dialogue for peace can take place.
- Governments, donors and civil society organisations should facilitate spaces for partnership and opportunities for young people to work with local and national governments, and importantly, employ young people in positions of responsibility.
- Governments and civil society organisations should support youth initiatives with funding and technical advice, easing bureaucratic procedures.
- More public awareness and communication strategies should be developed to explain what youth are doing to challenge fears and negative perceptions of both youth and youth civic engagement, especially for young women as social norms often discourage them from participating. Specifically, activities should be organised to address perceptions of youth as troublemakers or incompetent. The media should be more committed to covering positive youth stories.

Key finding: Educational and training opportunities are an important enabler of youth civic engagement for peace. Youth have the inner drive to become change agents, yet often require the appropriate skills. To address this gap:

- Governments and organisations should make efforts to sustain and develop activities which enhance peacebuilding and democratic competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) so that youth can become more effective change agents and leaders.
- Governments should work on educational reform and improve access to quality education so as to both improve citizenship competences as well as youth employability.

Key finding: It is important for young people to feel secure and safe, especially for young females, young people with disabilities, the LGBTIQ+ community and youth from minority groups. It is important for them to feel their needs and preferences are

considered and that they own the spaces, feeling free to express their opinions. To promote and ensure this inclusive approach:

- Civil society, governmental and private actors should make sure the spaces they facilitate are youth-friendly and inclusive, addressing less visible barriers to participation.
- Organisations, should work on inclusiveness, including gender mainstreaming efforts or training young males to be advocates for gender equality, and ensure they de-centre, become aware of the dominating role in decision-making which affect the type of activities organised.
- Police, security forces and the justice system should be sensitised about the work of youth-led groups and organisations and show exemplary behaviour, including respect for human rights.

6. References

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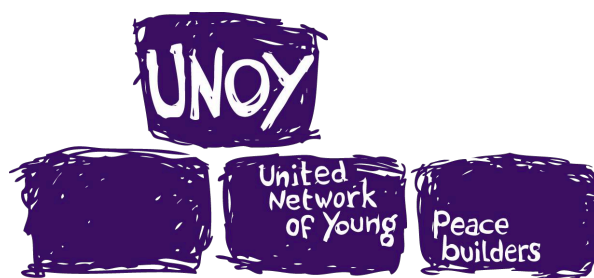
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Annex 1: Organisations

United Network of Young Peacebuilders

The United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY Peacebuilders) is shaping the global agenda for youth, peace and security in partnership with 93 locally grounded organisations. UNOY Peacebuilders has members, in over 50 countries, which reached nearly 5 million young people in 2017.

UNOY Peacebuilders creates a safe space for dialogue, enhancing members' ability to transform conflict. United around the vision of a world free from violence, the far reaching network empowers and enables young peacebuilders to keep pushing for peace in their communities. The network is tackling various challenges such as reconciliation, preventing "violence of exclusion" and gender based violence.



By translating local peacebuilding work into international policy, UNOY Peacebuilders is strengthening the capacities of young people and connecting partners throughout the network to develop joint approaches to common peace and security challenges.

It amplifies the voices of young peacebuilders and highlights their work to policy makers on a local, regional and global level. UNOY Peacebuilders campaigned the UN to recognise the positive role of youth in peacebuilding. In 2015 the UN Security Council resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security was adopted. It now work towards its widespread implementation.

Only by working together and reaching across generations, as well as divides, can lasting peace be achieved. UNOY Peacebuilders goal is to create a world where young people have the opportunity and skills to contribute to peace.

Afghans for Progressive Thinking



Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT) is a non-profit organization registered with the Ministry of Economy of Afghanistan, founded in Kabul in 2010. It works to encourage and empower university students to work toward the development of a free and peaceful society by offering lectures, workshops and learning resources that allow them to critically engage in contemporary issues.

APT was founded by a young college graduate who had the vision of a peaceful, tolerant, open and progressive Afghan society, a vision which is shared by hundreds of thousands of other Afghan youths. Prior to founding APT, he had begun the journey toward his vision by organizing intercultural dialogues between Afghans and internationals in Lucknow, India, where he was working to earn his bachelor's degree in Political Science.

APT uses two social theories of change: critical thinking theory and contact theory. The ability to think critically builds an individual's capacity to potentially challenge existing social, political, economic and cultural systems in constructive and transformative ways. In addition, contact theory stipulates that an increased contact with 'the other' opens channels of communication, creates shared spaces and experiences, builds the understanding of the challenges and realities of the other's contexts, which, in turn challenges misconceptions, reduces prejudices and fosters respect towards diversity. Since its inception, APT has worked with over 20,000 university students in partnership with more than thirty five universities in Kabul, Mazar, Herat, Faizabad, Samangan and Jalalabad. Our goal is to take APT's message to all 34 provinces within Afghanistan by 2030.

Fundación Escuelas de Paz

Schools of Peace Foundation (Fundación Escuelas de Paz, FEP) in Colombia, Bogota, has been working during America's longest violent conflict, and now that a peace deal has been brokered the organisation continues to focus on educating in a culture of peace based on the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, sustainable development, democratic citizenship, cosmopolitan and civic ethics based on tolerance and intercultural solidarity.



FEP is a place of meeting and dialogue, an institute for training and research, an information and documentation center, providing equipment advice as well as, mediation and intervention in schools., as well as a tool for critical analysis and reporting. Its focus is on educating in a culture of peace based on the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, sustainable development, democratic citizenship, cosmopolitan and civic ethics based on tolerance and intercultural solidarity.

Its objective is to make education an effective tool that allows communities to build collective dreams of peace and social justice through their own personal and institutional example. They are composed of an interdisciplinary team of professionals and young people. The foundation is part of a wide network of national and international institutions that promote peace building and youth empowerment in this.

The organisation has been focusing on post-conflict areas where in 2017 over 500 young pupils, teachers and school staff improved their skills in participation, gender equity, reconciliation and peacebuilding. As a result, the national public policy project spreading peace education progressed in areas of Colombia most affected by the conflict. Improved school coexistence and effective participation of the entire educational community has been noticed in all areas of intervention.

Together We Build it!

Together We Build It (TWBI) is an intergenerational, non-profit organization that was founded and launched in 2011 to support a peaceful democratic transition in Libya, through empowering women and youth to participate in the political and public sphere and emphasizing the relevant role of women and youth in the peacemaking and building process, by using the UNSCR 1325 women peace & security, and the UNSCR 2250 as a reference framework to ensure the important role both actors

play towards sustainable peace. TWBI works via a multi-dimensional approach focusing on Advocacy, Awareness, and researching as tools to enhance women and youth participation in decision making. TWBI consists of an intergenerational management team and all its programs and activities are based on a strong intergenerational exchange in the field of peace and security.

One of its most prominent projects is 1325 network in Libya, composed of over 30 women organizations and activists across the country, the network enables a better outreach to advocate and raise awareness for the 1325 agendas on ground, while also monitors the implementation process.



Its latest project (2018) is called "You Are Missing the Full Picture"; highlighting the international community's very gender-blind approach to Libyan women rights in meaningful participation in the political and peace building process illustrating the limited efforts being made by the UNSMIL and state members to include women in important political meetings and peace negotiations. Strongly delivering the message that "all Libyan national issues are pure Libyan women issues, and vice versa, Libyan women issues are Libyan national issues."

Youth Participation in Peace and Development Sierra Leone



Youth Participation in Peace and Development - Sierra Leone (YPPD-SL), is a youth-led, community based, organisation registered with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs since 2012.

The mission of YPPD-SL is to to minimise marginalisation and inadequate justice at community levels and enhance the socio-economic and health conditions of youth. YPPD-SL envisions a society where there is an enhanced rights' understanding, social justice and community development programmes for youth; particularly focussing on young women and youth with disabilities. The understanding of rights by these groups is supported by YPPD-SL through training social justice providers to resolve disputes in adherence to human rights standards.

YPPD-SL has utilised its capacity over the years to engage youth in awareness and sensitisation fora enhancing them not to only be mere beneficiaries, but rather the owners who have a stake in the issues that affect them. In this regard, YPPD-SL engages young people as members of their team, giving them the opportunity to take responsibilities and leadership roles as a means of empowerment and make them live in peace. This also helps the organisation to better understand and meet the needs of young people as they engage and work with their peers, who most often understand best the issues that affect them.

YPPD-SL is geared towards enhancing the capacity of youths to be self-starters in the positive and peaceful co-existence that is needed for the wellbeing of the communities they live in.