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Youth's contribution towards peacebuilding processes in the Horn of Africa. An Intergenerational approach

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Abstract

Political instability in the Horn of Africa impacts the entire population in the region. Therefore, including the youths in decision-making and peace-building processes becomes significant in attaining sustainable peace. The young population has different insights that can be integrated with ideas from the adults in improving the quality of the peace-building process. Achieving sustainable peace is a process that requires collective input. However, generating a platform that allows youth to engage the adult population in the peace process ensures that there is collective participation. A mentorship initiative is a form of intergenerational approach to young engagement. The approach allows youth to network and build a relationship with experienced peace experts. Most young people in the Horn of Africa have benefitted from various types of mentorships. The decision by the United Nations Security Council to adopt a resolution on Youth, Peace, and Security UNSCR 2250 and subsequent resolutions, as well as AU Continental Framework on Youth Peace and Security, affirm the role of young people in peace processes. The recognition was critical in bringing the young people on board for mentorship. The Security Council comprises experienced experts. Therefore, the interactions between the young people and these aficionados enable youths to gain required information that will give them the ability to engage in the peace processes. Some youths already in the peace-building process in other regions have transformed the thinking about youth's contribution. As a result, some countries are creating safe places for intergenerational dialogues to enable engagement in peace-building conversations. Young people bring new ideas to the peace-building process. The insights are integrated into the process to have reliable peace processes.

Key words: Horn of Africa, Peace, Conflict, Youth

Introduction

Context: Conflict in the Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa region is among the most complex and conflicted regions globally. Nation-states in the Horn of Africa—Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Kenya—suffer from protracted political strife, arising from local and national grievance, identity politics, and regional inter-state rivalries. For over a century, the region has witnessed strategic power struggles—such as Britain's demand to control the Red Sea, Egypt's attempt to control the Nile Waters, and the Cold War confrontation in which each country in the Horn switched sides. Currently, United States' "War on Terror" has a footing in the region.

As a result, the peace-building process in most parts of the Horn of Africa requires collective commitment. The impact of violence in the region has caught the attention of various players both at the domestic and international levels.

Youth participation in peace processes in the Horn of Africa

In the Horn of Africa (specifically Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Ethiopia) there are 104 million youth: 51 million young men, and 52 million young women. In such demographic realities, the potential youth hold for change and positive action is the subject of growing research agenda and this is particularly the case with the recent wave of social upheavals and humanitarian crises in different parts of the world.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 (2015) marked a shift in the understanding of who young people are and their role in peace and security. This first resolution was followed by two more resolutions: 2419 (2018) and 2535(2020). The resolutions task countries to take young people's participation and views into account when negotiating and implementing peace agreements. That includes considering their special needs, supporting local youth peace initiatives, and empowering youth in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Both UNSCR 2250 and AU Continental Framework on Youth Peace and Security are explicit on partnerships among their target audience, which provides an avenue for purposeful and sustained intergenerational collaboration.

On a global scale, young people are actively engaged in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. They need their opinions and perspectives heard in peace negotiations. Youth

leadership in peace processes at the grassroots level offers a great opportunity for developing bottom-up methods to complement top-down formal mediation activities.

In many peace process contexts, youth-led mediation activities rely on the creativity and innovation of the youth as well as locally embedded trust-based relationships between the youth and community members. Youth signatories to peace agreements in Kenya during the Nakuru Peace Accord in 2012 and the Myanmar Bilateral Peace Agreement of 2013 making references to promoting youth and women participation in political processes illustrate the legitimacy of peace agreements in the eyes of the youth when their inclusion and participation is meaningful and considered. Perhaps the best illustration of the participation and involvement of Somali youth in peace processes is the establishment of the Joint Galkayo Youth Committee (JGYC) in 2018.

Local youth-led organizations with support from the UN and peacebuilding organizations pushed for the establishment of a Joint Galkayo Youth Committee JGYC. The Committee entails equal youth representatives from each side of Galkayo (14 young people in total). Members of the JGYC hold the main role of acting as interlocutors to the elder-led Peace Committee. A similar structure has since emerged for women, known as the Women's Committee. The JGYC is a space for youth that is structured and formal to engage in the peace process, playing the role of conducting voices and recommendations from the wider youth population into the decision-making processes.

JGYC members are elected by young people from North and South Galkayo, which recognizes legitimate representation by youth across both sides of the divide. The Committee further enables resourceful stakeholders like the UN and other organizations to better provide young representatives with technical and functional support. However, despite its proximity to the peace process, the JGYC has faced difficulties in being viewed as credible partners and having their youth voices heard by the community elders.

During the peace negotiations in South Sudan that culminated in the adoption of ARCISS in August 2015, a youth participant attending the negotiations reported that two youth participated on the government side, and another two on the opposition side. However, members of the South Sudanese Youth Union said, the two youth from the government were present for tokenism.

The Youth Union was not asked to nominate any representatives to the peace talks. Young people at the HLRF also collaborated with the representatives of women for the inclusion of refugees in the negotiations. This was critical for bringing in issues around resettlement in collaboration with young refugee representatives. Lastly, youth participation

at the HLRF positively influenced the implementation phase of the agreement, through the allocation of roles in different technical committees to highly motivated young people.

The 2007/8 post-election in Kenya marked a watershed moment in the analysis and understanding of contemporary peacebuilding in Kenya specifically the roles and contributions of the youth. Despite the tragedy an unintended consequence of the violence and the visible roles of young people involvement in the peace process that triggered a national dialogue on youth issues. This altered policy thinking on youth, women, and other minority groups, including triggering a national policy on youth in Kenya. Youth and Women's participation and leadership in the peace process is invaluable through their unique lived experiences and expertise, stemming from the varied roles they hold at a community, county, and national level.

Intergenerational Approaches for Youth's Contribution

Besides, the peace-building process in the region has necessitated the participation of the people regardless of their age and gender. In the region, peace initiatives targeting youth tend to favor young men, while young women remain largely seen as passive victims and are often left out. This approach ignores the diverse and complex roles and experiences of young women in conflict-affected contexts.

Similarly, young women tend to be excluded from initiatives aimed at engaging women's leadership and participation in peace processes, as they may be considered too young. The absence of legitimate youth participation in the process may contribute to a blurred dividing line between youth agency and manipulability in these processes.

The youth in general and more particularly young women lack experience in mediation, this limits their engagement in technical teams and implementation bodies such as ceasefire monitoring teams, or truth and reconciliation bodies. It also limits their participation in actual dialogue and mediation processes in their communities and amongst their peers.

Mediation has been considered an elite process, which also requires resources to enable participation, and the socio-economic status of the youth, more particularly of the young women limits them from engaging in formal peace processes. Further, political processes are not easily accessible to young women with some of these processes linked to political and military elites as well as linked to community leaders and elders who are often men.

Further, the training for women conducted by organizations mandating mediation intervention often target diplomats or seasoned women mediators and mediation experts, leaving no (or limited) slots for young women interested or working in mediation and other peace processes.

The exclusion some stakeholders in mediation continues to create a rift in the mediation capacities of women, threatening continuity of effective women's engagement in mediation. Looking at the women who lead mediation processes, one thing that is common for all of them is the leadership position they held. There is, therefore, a need to identify strategies to reach out to, train, and mentor young women leaders on mediation, bridge the capacity gaps of women on mediation, and prepare them to support current and future mediation efforts now. It is against this background that IPHRD-Africa is committed to contributing to efforts that ensure youth are at the forefront of peace processes.

The intergenerational approach has proven to be the best in peace-building assignments in the horn of Africa. The coordination between the young and the adult population has benefitted the peace-building process. Youth and older people are knowledgeable on the local risks that can affect them. Youth experience the aggression coming from their social environment and are therefore able to point out the most important causes of the hostility. On the other hand, older people can not only bring their knowledge and experience on what has been done in the past to avoid this violent behavior but also promote common social values within their community.

The peace-building process aims at assisting people impacted by different conflicts either directly or indirectly. Therefore, youths' participation enables the young population to articulate their concerns together with other people. Better understanding about the cause and the impact of conflicts is critical in peace-building processes. Some youths may have valid information on these conflicts. The information may be acquired from those who participate in the violence either directly or indirectly. Furthermore, local youths made have observed certain occurrence that improves decision-making in peace-building processes.

Mentorship is a crucial informational and experience exchange between youths and aged experts. Also, recognizing the success of youths in engaging in peaceful initiatives entices more youngsters to create a peaceful environment at different levels. The intergenerational approach allows youths to feel part of making their societies safe.

Mentorship

The peace-building process is a detailed undertaking that requires the allocation of duties. Therefore, the leaders ensure that there is a defined strategy that enables the participants to be actively involved. A mentorship is a powerful approach that allows experienced peace experts to involve the young peace experts. The interactions through working create a suitable space for the share insights and experiences. Gradually youths are empowered through mentoring to become crucial in the peace-building process. Frequently, youths are perceived to be attracted to chaos than being peacekeepers. Therefore, the mentoring process provides a platform for young people to show their attitude towards the peace-building process in the horn of Africa.

The third resolution on Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS): UNSCR 2535 from the United Nations Security Council was a strong gesture and goodwill. The resolution confirmed that youths were critical in the peace-building process. Therefore, the mentoring initiatives gained more public trust. Youths made have an adequate understanding of certain conflicts. Engaging youths through mentoring enables peace experts to mold the young generation into a peaceful community. Besides, mentors benefit from the information shared in the mentoring programs. Most countries in the horn of Africa have a history of civil war or resource-based conflicts. Hence, the mentorship process considers the history of individual countries. Youths mentored as expected to be beneficial to their nations.

As a result, having adequate and reliable information about the history of conflict increases the accuracy of the peace-building process. As experts who qualify to be mentors decide to guide the youths through mentoring process acquire new ideas from the young population. Therefore, as the mentoring process focuses mainly on the youths, other players benefit from the importance of youngsters in the peace-building process. The third resolution on Youth, Peace, and Security was a global recognition. However, the resolution incited more young people to join in politics.

The peace-building process in the horn of Africa targets the affected communities. Unfortunately, the underrepresentation of adolescents has disadvantaged most of them since some of their concerns are ignored. Ignoring most youths has compromised the efforts of obtaining accurate information about their recovery process. Similarly, some activities to create a peaceful environment for the youths have failed due to inaccurate information. The collaboration between adults and young people has been a problem. Generational rigidities have been a primary hindrance to youth's contribution to the peace-building process in the horn of Africa. Mentorship programs allow adults and youths to share the same space.

The proximity is crucial in streamlining the rapport between the adults and youths. Streamlining the relationship creates a suitable environment for adolescents to participate in the process aimed at creating a peaceful environment. Lack of conceptual framework that solidifies intergenerational approach has also made it hard for adult-youth collaboration in peace-building processes.

With a fast-growing youth population, youths in the horn of Africa become crucial players in determining the safety of the region. Unfortunately, overlooking the young population exposes the region to new chaos. Marginalized youths may decide to frustrate the peace-building process due to a lack of their participation. Adults and youths are both victims and vulnerable to more chaos prone to happen in the horn of Africa. The coordination between the youths and adults benefits the region. Collective responsibility in the peace-building process grants most people a sense of satisfaction. As a result, there will be peace and a state of tranquility.

Mentoring programs are broad. As a result, many youths in the horn of Africa can be involved in various peace-building activities. The peace-building process is a detailed engagement especially when conflict spread over more than a single country. Most countries in the horn of Africa have experienced different types of conflicts. Therefore, mentoring programs create a platform that will enable youths to join the rest in peacebuilding. Mentoring activities conducted in learning institutions and the after-school duration transform the perception of youths towards the peace-building process.

Therefore, the youths susceptible to interfering with peace in their countries are converted to be crucial stakeholders in the peace-building process. Some peace treaties involve youths. Currently, the world has 1.8 billion youths. The statistics represent the highest number of young people that has existed.

Young people have been recognized for their contributions to peace-building initiatives. The recognition also acknowledges the role of the young population in the horn of Africa. Mentoring programs structured to engage young people allows youth's contributions in peace-building operations to be felt. Mentoring allows experts to train youths to become more fruitful in peace-building activities. Occasionally, youths in Africa are misused to cause chaos. Therefore, mentoring the young generation in matters related to peace safeguards the horn of Africa from turmoil.

Policy support for young people involved in peacebuilding initiatives

The peacebuilding process engages different stakeholders. Therefore, policies ensure that there is the coordination of critical players. Having policies that recognize youths' contributions towards creating a peaceful environment benefits intergenerational approaches for peacebuilding. The policies make youths comfortable while engaging in peacebuilding initiatives.

The existence of policies such as Article 17 of the AYC stamps youth's contribution to the peacebuilding process. Besides, the adults are compelled to develop strategies that will enable the integration of young people in peacebuilding activities.

In Kenya, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) rolled out a nationwide campaign to promote peace ahead of the 2022 General Election. The campaign involved women and youths. The road map targeted mostly Kenyan youths who are mainly used by politicians to cause chaos. Having such road maps and other safe environments for youths to articulate their positions on the peace-building process benefit the country. Therefore, engaging the majority in the peacebuilding process will facilitate a peaceful election. The roadmap incorporates elders from different counties, peace actors, community representatives, and youths. Arguably, the roadmap adheres to an intergenerational approach to peacebuilding.

Youth groups working in security and peace can articulate a range of issues influencing peacebuilding in their region. Besides, most youths in the horn of Africa are either directly or indirectly affected by disagreements and conflicts. Somalia and Sudan are some of the countries in the horn of Africa struggling with political instabilities. Unfortunately, youths are among the victims of the skirmishes in these countries. Therefore, including young people in the peacebuilding process reduce their susceptibility to various types of conflicts. The presence of policies that support youth's contribution to peacebuilding provides a suitable framework.

The collaboration between the refugees and host communities in the region restored peace and stability. In the DitniTek collaboration, the stakeholders involved ensured that the youth's from both sides contributed to peace restoration. On most occasions where youths are involved in the peacebuilding process, the stakeholders have benefitted. Young people are active in the field and generate new insights. Therefore, creating a collaborative environment between the youths and other stakeholders help the countries in the horn of Africa to attain the desired atmosphere.

Conclusion

The peacebuilding process in the horn of Africa cannot be successful when youths are ignored. Most countries in the region that have incorporated youths in peacebuilding initiatives have realized youth's significant role. Unfortunately, high unemployment rates among the youths have exposed most young people to being misused to cause chaos. The region has the highest number of youths. Therefore, overlooking young people is tantamount to abandoning many people in the peacebuilding process. Besides, the peacebuilding engagements aim the region. Mentoring the youths and creating a suitable environment for their involvement entice more youths. Youth's contribution may be in different approaches. The policies should support youth's direct or indirect involvement in promoting peace.

Occasionally, the aged population has expressed concerns about working with young people due to intergenerational conflicts. However, on occasions where there is a collaboration of young and experience stakeholders in peacebuilding the process has become successful. The collaboration allows players to integrate various ideas. The horn of Africa has many youths. Unfortunately, some of these youths are misused to cause chaos. Therefore, using these young people in the peacebuilding process ensure that they are productive. Most youths have ideas that are beneficial once these insights are integrated into peacebuilding initiatives. Ignoring youths in the peacebuilding process increases the chances of the process failing.

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