

# HORN OF AFRICA BULLETIN

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## Youthquake in the Horn: UNSCR 2250 and Youth, Peace & Security

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## About Life & Peace Institute

Since its formation, LPI has carried out programmes for conflict transformation in a variety of countries, conducted research, and produced numerous publications on nonviolent conflict transformation and the role of religion in conflict and peacebuilding. The main focus of our work has been on Africa, with the Horn of Africa Programme being established and well-known in the 1990s, not least our work in Somalia. Other initiatives have been carried out in Congo-Brazzaville, Croatia, Sri Lanka and East Timor. We have strengthened the capacity of our civil society partners to address the conflicts in their own context, in some of the most difficult and war-torn countries.

Currently, we run conflict transformation programmes in the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes regions in partnership with local civil society organisations and universities in Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and the DRC. There is also a common programme including publications, policy work and methodology design based in Sweden.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

In 2015 the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 2250 (UNSCR 2250), the first resolution on youth, peace and security. The resolution identified, participation, partnerships, prevention, protection and disengagement and re-integration as five pillars for action to facilitate young people's contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution. UNSCR 2250 also required the Secretary General to carry out a Progress Study on youth's contributions to the peace processes and conflict resolution and to present the results to the Member States of the United Nations. In 2017, Life & Peace Institute (LPI) through its country programs working on 'Sustained Dialogue' projects in Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya, was asked to showcase its work with youth by participating in the Progress Study on UNSCR 2250.

The January-February 2018 issue of the Horn of Africa Bulletin seeks to explore and interrogate the correlations between youth on the one hand, and conflict and peace dynamics on the other. During episodes of political instability and conflict, we have become acclimatized to images on social media, television and print media foregrounding youth as participants, leaders and their issues as the causal dynamics threatening authoritarian regimes and the global status-quo. This visual bombardment has in a way prepared the ground for academic and media narratives that postulate a linkage between 'youth' and the dynamics of peace and conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa. Narratives on the Arab Spring and political Islam in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) which explain political instability in terms of youth issues and agency bear a striking resemblance to the earlier mentioned discourse. Recent political instability in several countries of the Horn such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan and Kenya, has once again pushed youth and youth issues into the limelight. Youth have been in the forefront in recent anti-government protests in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan.<sup>[1]</sup>

The role of youth in contemporary political crises has become a global analytical trope. Youth agency and issues have been foregrounded to explain the upsurge in support for Corbyn's assumption of the Labour party leadership in the United Kingdom (UK) and the surprisingly strong support for Bernie Sander's candidacy in the 2016 US elections. In 2016 and 2017, youth agency in the political sphere had become so pronounced that the term 'youthquake' was picked by Oxford Dictionaries as the word of the year for 2017.<sup>[2]</sup>

Who are the youth? How do we define youth in our contexts? These questions are not merely abstract in their implications but have a material bearing when it comes to conversations on youth in the Horn of Africa. Government statistics seldom question the prominence of youth as a substantial proportion of the population. However, apart from the absence of regular and dependable census figures regarding population structures in the Horn, the varying definitions of the youth complicates the picture. The government of Kenya defines youth as people in the age bracket 15-30, while the Ethiopian government defines youth as people in the age bracket 15-24, and the government of Uganda defines youth as people in the age bracket 15-19. These variations replicate the deeper contestations over defining youth as it could be argued that the dissonances between the age based, physiological and social construct conceptualizations of youth, showcase the shifting and contextual dependent meaning of youth.

A striking feature of the literature (academic or otherwise) on youth and conflict in the African and the MENA has been its tendency to conceptualize the youth as an undifferentiated mass. Several articles in this issue of the HAB critique this aspect of the youth and conflict literature. Dr. Balcha's article discussing the draft IGAD youth strategy underlines the importance of distinguishing between the demographic status and the social positioning of youth. This has led he argues to the tendency to homogenize youth in the policy realm and the formulation of

policies which seek to exploit youth concerns and agency. The following article by Feseha interrogates a central trope of the theoretical literature on the youth and conflict nexus. Feseha's article critiques 'youth bulge' theories which postulate a positive correlation between conflict and a large youth cohort in a population. In the article he uses evidence to showcase how large youth cohorts do not on their own lead to conflict and stability and goes on to argue that even in combination with socio-economic marginalization a youth bulge does not inevitably herald instability and conflict.

The issues raised by the two authors are also echoed in the aforementioned submission to the UNSCR 2250 progress study. LPI's contribution to the progress study questions the tendency to homogenize youth in policy discourse and furthermore also critiques the instrumental definition and pigeonholing of certain issues as 'youth issues'.<sup>[3]</sup>

More nuanced perspectives while not abandoning the youth as a category understand the supposedly destabilizing effects of a large youth population as being mediated by other critical variables. The nuanced view of youth agency and its impact on phenomenon such as violent extremism is exemplified in the article by Hassan-Kayd, a consultant and youth activist in the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) realm. Hassan-Kayd's article emphasises the linkage between socio-economic exclusion and youth recruitment in Violent Extremist movements. His article also exemplifies the benefits to be derived from the active participation of youth in CVE programs. The final article in this issue of the HAB by Ms. Haileselassie focuses on discussing the main pillars of UNSCR 2250 and also the parallels in the policy discourse on youth at the global, continental, regional and national levels. In the article, Haileselassie argues that policy discourses on youth have a reductionist and simplifying tendency in either hailing youth as a 'demographic dividend' or alternatively as a threat in the form of a 'youth bulge'. She argues that policy formulation and implementation on youth has to shift away from these simplistic verities and address the critical issues of youth political empowerment and inclusion in decision making spaces. She concludes by putting forward the case for an intersectional lens on youth issues.

There are several common threads that tie together the articles in this issue of the HAB. The authors critique age-based and physiological definitions of youth while arguing for a more nuanced conceptualization of youth as a complex and differentiated entity. The articles also reject the rigid causal linkages drawn between youth bulges on the one hand, and, political instability and conflict on the other. The authors welcome the policy focus on youth while critiquing the simplistic and instrumental conceptualization of youth and youth issues in the Horn.

The prominence of youth in recent political instability in the region bears several lessons for policy makers and policy formulation of youth issues. A clear takeaway is the critique of the simplistic linkage between a large youth population and conflict which is complex and mediated by a range of variables. Recent political events also showcase the perils of single minded focus on economic growth based on liberal or neo-liberal orthodoxies which does not create employment and whose benefits may be inequitable. These events also underline the importance of understanding youth empowerment and participation as being inextricably linked to larger issues of political space and democratization.

**Demessie Fantaye**, Editor

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## Three Points towards an Effective IGAD Regional Youth Strategy

By Eyob Balcha Gebremariam

One of the most common challenges of youth focused policies is their technocratic approach to address the challenges of youth and young people. When technocratic approaches dominate, policies and strategies are loaded with the discourses of good governance and instrumentalise young people either as ‘dividend’ or ‘bulge’.<sup>[1]</sup> At the core of such policies lies an apolitical approach towards analysing either the nominal inclusion or structural exclusion/marginalisation of young people. The apolitical tone and content of youth focused policy frameworks enables setting stronger normative thresholds but paradoxically is ineffective in practically reshaping the lives of young people.

This essay aims to put forward the following three interrelated points towards the forthcoming regional youth strategy by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) as indicated in the Regional Strategy 2016 -2020.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **Conceptual clarity on ‘Youth’, ‘Young People’ & ‘Youthfulness’**

Conceptual clarity is a major step towards an effective policy. Hence, it is imperative to make a distinction between young people as members of a society and ‘youth’ as a social category. Young people are persons who share the same age cohort. The African Union Youth Charter for example sets 15 to 35 as age boundaries to define young people.<sup>[3]</sup> Hence, when we talk about young people, we are talking about a specific segment of the population. In this segment of the population, we have men and women, students, workers, farmers, traders, parents etc.

Moreover, depending on the existing socio-economic and political dynamics, young people may also have a leading presence within different aspects of societal dynamics. For example, the expanding young population in most IGAD countries inevitably leads to an increasing presence of young people in political processes such as elections and popular protests as well as other dominant socio-economic trends such as migration. The salience and visibility of young people in politics, conflict and post-conflict situations as well as in the informal economy can be a sufficient ground for youth focused policies. However, I argue that youth focused policies need to go beyond recognising the increasing presence of young people within society. Policies should have a broader aim towards positively shaping the quintessential shared identity of young people, i.e. their ‘youthfulness’.<sup>[4]</sup> This requires approaching youth as a social position.

Youthfulness is ‘a distinct social location between childhood and adulthood’.<sup>[5]</sup> In such position of liminality, young people are less constrained by responsibilities unlike their adult counterparts. But they are also inhibited by minimum experiences, skill, economic, political and social resources and power. Age is one factor in shaping this social position of youth but not *the only* factor. Rather, the most crucial elements in affecting the social



position of youth are shared dispositions, common challenges and opportunities, aspirations and desperations, lifestyle, fashion and identity.<sup>[6]</sup>

Youthfulness is hardly a granted social position. Rather, it is a fluid state defined by constant processes of contestation and negotiation both among the youth as well as between youth and adults in positions of power. The contestation for youthfulness is well-captured in the notions of 'stuck' and 'waithood'.<sup>[7]</sup> By taking the case of rural youth in Rwanda, Sommers explained how young men's youthfulness is compromised by their failure in 'building a house'.<sup>[8]</sup> Young men's constrained youthfulness is also reflected on young women's inability to pass through socially acceptable route of being an adult through marriage. On a similar vein, Honwana adopted the concept of waithood to explain how youthfulness can be shaped by socio-economic and political structures. The notion of waithood also addresses how young people navigate through the terrains of socio-economic and political structures to claim and fulfil their 'youthfulness'.<sup>[9]</sup>

One way of ensuring the effectiveness of the forthcoming IGAD youth strategy is through according equal recognition to both the demographic status and the social position of youth. Often times, these two distinct but not unrelated positions are conflated. Failure to differentiate these two positions leads to generalising young people either as a 'dividend' or a 'time bomb'. Such homogenising discourse hardly recognises the diversity among youth across gender, socio-economic status, cultural background, religious lines etc.

Concerted effort towards understanding how youthfulness is claimed and experienced among young people of the IGAD member states can open ample room not only to recognise but also to value the diversity among youth. For example, youthfulness in the pastoral communities of the IGAD region has distinct experiences and manifestations than agricultural communities. Likewise, new social phenomena such as the emergence of digital technologies as vital spheres of social interaction also affect young peoples' lives to a various degree. On the one hand, social media can serve as a created space of exercising civil and political rights that are curtailed in the formal structures of political mobilisation.<sup>[10]</sup> On the other hand, digital technologies can also play a vital role in facilitating young peoples' pursuit for better life opportunities through migration. Both the similarities and diversities among youth can be well-captured only if policies can transcend the categorisation of youth as a mere demographic group. Recognition of youthfulness is also a vital departure point to understand and enable youth agency.

### **The Double Edges of Youth Agency**

The notion of youth agency can explain both individual and collective efforts of young people towards 'claiming and reclaiming their youthfulness'.<sup>[11]</sup> Such conceptualisation of youth agency can offer a nuanced perspective to discern whether the exercise of youth agency is primarily serving the youth or the power elites. It is also important to emphasise the vital role of power relations between youth and powerful elites in understanding youth agency. Since agency is contingent on the constraining or enabling role of structures, power elites in a privileged position of socio-economic and political

structures can manipulate youth agency. In other contexts, the youth can also exercise their agency to resist and challenge asymmetrical power relations or to survive the pressures of structural inequality.

This entails that there are different forms of exercising youth agency. For example, in Ethiopia and Uganda, young people are co-opted and mobilised by the respective ruling parties to constitute a youth wing or a pro-government militia group.<sup>[12]</sup> This shows how political elites can take advantage of the numerical dominance of young people within society to consolidate and legitimise their political power. The result of such manipulation is a prevalence of ‘tokenism’, nominal inclusion or participation of young people in mainstream politics.<sup>[13]</sup>

On the contrary, youth agency can also help us understand how youth are constantly engaged in activities of claiming and reclaiming their youthfulness towards ensuring smoother transition into adulthood. Examples of exercising such kinds of youth agency include ‘getting by’ or ‘[to] eke out a living’, ‘hustling’ and ‘side-hustling’.<sup>[14]</sup> Di Nunzio’s notion of hustling explains the ‘varieties of activities of survival’ by marginalised youth in inner city Addis Ababa whereas, Mwaura’s ‘side hustling’ explores how educated young people in Kenya are engaged in alternative income earning activities.<sup>[15]</sup>

The forthcoming IGAD regional youth strategy needs to recognise that youth agency is a double edge sword. It can be manipulated to satisfy the political ambition of political elites as well as to enable youth in their navigation towards achieving socially acceptable status of adulthood. The following point will further elaborate the vital role of political dynamics in influencing youth agency and youthfulness.

### **The salient role of politics**

Last but not least, it is important to note the underpinning role of politics in shaping both youthfulness and youth agency. Politics can be understood as the processes of negotiation, co-operation and contestation in the production, control and distribution of resources.<sup>[16]</sup> Both the demographic dominance of young people as well as prevailing narratives about youth can contribute to the ways in which political elites pursue their politics. This means the power of political elites to control the distribution and access of resources that the youth can potentially access inevitably influences the experiences of youthfulness. With this regard, the evolution of youth employment focused policy frameworks in Ethiopia over the last 18 years can be a good example.

Ethiopian legal and policy frameworks that focused on youth employment evolved from framing young people as ‘dangerous vagrants’ to ‘marginalised social forces’ and, more recently, as ‘seeds of democracy and development’.<sup>[17]</sup> In 2004 the Ethiopian government issued a Vagrancy Control Proclamation (VCP) and National Youth Policy (NYP) consecutively with contradicting narratives. On the one hand, the VCP criminalised youth survival activities such as youth hustling, proposes punishment as remedy with police, courts and rehabilitation centres playing a key role, while also adopting a purely technocratic policy to address youth marginalisation and enhancing youth participation with the active role of government and civil society.<sup>[18]</sup> The criminalising discourse of the



VCP created a sour relationship between the youth and the government in the build-up to the 2005 elections. The NYP on its part played a negligible role either in addressing youth marginalisation or softening state-youth relations.

The political dynamics after the highly contested 2005 elections put politics at the center of state-youth relations. A post-election political crisis brought thousands of protesting urban youth to the street. As a response, the government formulated a new policy framework called the Youth Development Package (YDP) in 2006. Compared to the previous youth focused documents, the YDP carried better leverage in shaping the socio-economic and political life of urban youth especially in Addis Ababa. The policy document problematized the structural and institutional manifestations of youth marginalisation with practical political remedies. The government initiated a youth consultation platform called Youth Forum in Addis Ababa, which has continued to serve as an invited space of youth participation. Similarly, the government also augmented its efforts of resource distribution targeting young people through micro and small scale enterprises. Both the youth forum and the job creation programs have continued to serve as invited spaces of shaping the relationship between the government and urban youth in particular. This confirms how politics as a process of co-operation and negotiation in the distribution of resources can directly affect the way young people can claim and exercise their youthfulness or youth agency.

The Ethiopian government has clearly demonstrated its strong commitment to use distribution of resources and facilitation of economic opportunities as key political strategy in its relation with young people. With this regard, the revision of the micro and small scale enterprises strategy in 2011, the two consecutive Growth and Transformation Plans (2010; 2015) and the recently adopted Revolving Youth Fund (2016) are solid validations. However, recent political developments tend to show that a political strategy that attempts to solve only one side of the equation – economic opportunities, can hardly sustain unless it is accompanied by, at least, proportional political reform.

As mentioned in the beginning, the aim of this piece is to put forward three interrelated points towards the proposed regional youth strategy in IGAD. To summarise, making a clear distinction between young people as a demographic section or youth as a social position helps to avoid a homogenising approach. Likewise, recognising the inherent power relations in the exercise of youth agency allows understanding both the constraining and enabling role of socio-economic and political structures towards youthfulness. Finally, the ‘primacy’ of politics in shaping policy narratives as well as the distribution of resources proves that apolitical youth focused policies will always remain ineffective in influencing the lived realities of youth.

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## The Nexus between Youth Bulge and Armed Conflict

By Minas Feseha

### Introduction

Youth in most developing countries are a demographically significant section of the population. Most see themselves as an outcast minority and they are treated that way, which has been a challenge to most developing countries. In the discourse on youth, the issue of the multifaceted exclusion of youth is routinely overshadowed by youth bulge concerns, which are illuminated by quantitative data and correlations, not the views of the youth. This has led to a tendency which views young people as an undifferentiated mass who lack the necessary conditions for transition from childhood to adulthood. The reality arguably is far more prosaic. Even in the most when desperate and humiliating circumstances, the majority of youth resist engaging in violence or remain more or less peaceful with only a small minority engaging in armed violence. This article is divided into three parts – a brief introduction, the correlation between youth bulge and armed conflict and a conclusion.

### Youth Bulge and Armed Conflict

Youth bulge is a common phenomenon in many developing countries, and especially in the least developed countries. A central dynamic that explains the youth bulge phenomenon in developing countries is the situation where a country succeeds in reducing infant mortality, but mothers still have a high fertility rate. This leads to a situation where children and youth make up a large portion of population<sup>[1]</sup>. Youth bulge has both advantages and disadvantages. Demographic dividends can be achieved when a country enjoyed the benefits of a youthful population which is absorbed into the labour market and contributes to socio-economic development. On the other hand, also entails that national level policy makers should emphasize the expansion of and job-skills training programs coupled with a focus on job-creation and housing<sup>[2]</sup>.

Youth often play an important role in political violence and the presence of a 'youth bulge' has been linked with political crisis.<sup>[3]</sup> Youth bulge discourse in the sphere of peace and conflict studies is often mistakenly understood as a cause-effect relationship, when it is better described as a correlation mediated by the impact of several intervening variables. In other words, it assumed that the youth bulge increases the risk of armed violence and such risk is mediated by the effect of two factors; structural conditions and social agency of young people. Structural conditions, similar to structural violence, refer to institutions or processes that create or assist in maintaining institutionalized and patterned systems of inequality and exclusion.<sup>[4]</sup> There are institutions or practices of doing things that promotes inequality, marginalisation, exclusion and injustices, which blocks certain groups from fulfilling their potential or discriminate against them and constrain them from exercising their citizenship. Such systems are not natural but socially constructed historically.<sup>[5]</sup>

The 2007 World Development Report conceptualized the five stages in the transitions

from youth to adulthood; acquiring knowledge through education to young adults starting to work, attaining new lifestyle to establishing families and taking active role in citizenship as structural conditionings.<sup>[6]</sup> There are certain structures that are put in place in society either to facilitate so that young people have these transitions in those five areas efficiently or the lack of it in developing society that impede young people from having those transitions. In such cases, it would lead them into violence. For example, a key takeaway from the recent episode of electoral violence in Kenya is that youth unemployment, which was about 22.17 per cent, can easily escalate into explode the political violence and civil unrest.<sup>[7]</sup> According to a World Bank survey in the year 2011, nearly 40% of people who took part in rebel movements mentioned unemployment as a factor in leading them to join insurgent movements.<sup>[8]</sup> It is these structural conditions in the context of a youth bulge that require proper attention.

The transition from child to adulthood has been restructured in recent years by a mixture of demographic, economic and cultural changes in which the transition from education to employment is at the heart of the challenge facing youth, especially in the global south.<sup>[9]</sup> In recent years, there has been a gradual change from debates about 'children' as the victims of violence to 'young people' as a risk to security and stability. Furthermore, there have been manifold claims that a surging youth bulge; combined with joblessness and other related factors, leads to violence.<sup>[10]</sup> For instance, Africa's population is growing relatively fast and is projected to reach around 2.4 billion in 2050, which is about two times its current level. By that time, it has been predicted that 40 per-cent of Africa's population will be below the age of 15 years and 60 per-cent below 25 years.<sup>[11]</sup> It is now widely recognised that creating acceptable livelihood opportunities for young people is a pressing challenge facing Africa today and denial of those conditionings would lead them in to violence.<sup>[12]</sup>

As indicated above, we should have to understand that youth bulge is not synonymous with armed violence. A statistical connection cannot be taken as a predicator of war as many countries with youth bulges have not experienced bouts of violent conflict. Malawi, Zambia and Botswana can be taken as instances where states with a relatively high youth bulge are free from armed conflict.<sup>[13]</sup> It can also be argued that youth bulge presents a 'demographic window of opportunity' if it is backed by economic opportunities in countries like China, South Korea and Japan. In strong governance settings with healthy political and social systems, incompatible interests are managed and ways found for various groups to pursue their goals peacefully, but when there is poor governance and weak social and political systems, complaints, disagreements and rivalry for resources are more likely to become violent.<sup>[14]</sup> For example, an expanding corpus of works explains the Arab Spring and the expansion of religious extremist movements in the Middle East through demographic shifts and the youth bulges.

What makes the issues of youth bulge and attaining those five transitions more challenging is that the transitions are interconnected and can negatively affect each other. Libya, during Muammar Gaddafi's rule, possessed an extensive social welfare system, but politics was characterized by the absence of popular participation and transitions in citizenship. The structural conditionings or transitions are interlinked and

affect each other, and the Libyan experience arguably exemplifies their interdependence. The argument could be made that in spite of the Gaddafi regime assuring some of the structural conditions for its youth, it was the regime's failure to ensure other 'structural conditionings' that led to armed conflict in the Libya.

The second reason is the social agency of young people themselves. Disrupted transitions do not lead invariably to a large proportion of the youth becoming recruited into, or volunteering for rebel movements. It is only a small proportion that embraces the option of violence. Youth agency refers to the capacity of young people to process what is going on around them, rationalise it, articulate strategies of survival, define their own agendas, gather resources to pursue their agenda, form alliances with different groups and push their own agenda.<sup>[15]</sup> In the context of armed conflicts, the social agency of young people is often marked by survival, social mobility, social status, agenda setting for social change, resiliencies to test exclusion, manipulation, social injustice, political operation, etc.

The available evidence clearly shows that more nuanced analysis and understanding of the linkages between the youth bulge phenomenon and violent conflict is necessary to better understand the predictors of violent conflict. The available evidence shows that even in the event of blocked transitions or absent structural conditions, youth do not invariably opt for violence. The factors that potentially affect the decision to engage in violence include basic survival, material wealth, setting their own agenda, acquiring certain status, co-optation into power structures, opportunity to circulate ideological orientations that justifies them to challenge injustices and so many other related reasons. An apt illustration of the above dynamic is research from the conflict in Liberia which reveals that for many youth, economic challenges and the incentives of employment and the promise of loot functioned as the major motivator for young soldiers loyal to Charles Taylor in Liberia.<sup>[16]</sup> A key aspect of the relationship between youth bulges and political violence that is often elided in the literature is the instrumental role and function of violence. Youth engagement in violence is often a strategy for upward social mobility.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Conclusion

Youth bulge by itself is not the main factor that encourages youth to commit violence, rather it is lack of structural conditioning that are essential for transition from childhood to adulthood. The five fundamental transitions, namely; education, employment, new life style, family formation and exercising citizenship are essential elements for the well-being of the youth. Failures to provide for these rudiments would highly motivate young people to engage in armed violence.

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## Time to Empower and Engage Youth on Countering Violent Extremism

By Abdishakur Hassan-Kayd

Over the past two decades the violent extremism became an issue of discussion and emerged as a critical threat to many governments. The Horn of Africa has witnessed an increase in deadly terror attacks mainly affecting the people of Somalia and also targeting neighbouring countries.

Al-Shabaab initially emerged as a component within the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) which, in 2006, was engaged in a conflict with a coalition of warlords more formally known as the, 'Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism'. It was in the aftermath of the defeat of the ICU and the involvement of the Ethiopian army in Somalia that allowed Al-Shabaab a golden opportunity to recruit youth using the lure of defending Somalia from the alleged Ethiopian invasion. Many youth both in Somalia and from the Somali diaspora were lured into the conflict and participated in the so called 'holy war' in the process strengthening the Al-Shabaab and shoring up its legitimacy.

The absence of a consensus regarding terrorism and violent extremism, has not prevented violent extremism from emerging as a priority for decision-makers' in East Africa and the Horn of Africa under the embryonic Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) approach. Violent extremism and conflict have generated immense suffering for the peoples of the Horn and poses an existential threat to the stability of states and governance in the Horn of Africa. Violent extremism may also exacerbate intra- and inter-religious tensions in the region. In this article, I will elaborate how youth empowerment and engagement will contribute the prevention and countering violent extremism in the region.

### Why Youth?

The Horn of Africa has an unprecedented number of young, vibrant, and energetic people who, although economically productive, have little to no power or say on issues of importance to them or their families. The countries in the region has number of challenges in common including high rates of illiteracy and limited access to formal education and skills development, poverty and mass unemployment, youth migration, socioeconomic and political exclusion. The region also experienced bouts of inter-state and intra-state conflicts. In the Horn of Africa region countering youth radicalization and violent extremism have emerged as top priorities to stabilize the region and ensure peaceful co-existence of peoples in this region.

In the past three years during my travels around the region, I have carried out a range of discussions with youth on violent extremism and youth perspectives on CVE. The discussions revealed a rich and interesting diversity of views and opinions- in Somalia (mainly Mogadishu), the issues of terrorism, CVE, and Al-Shabab are often perceived as taboo that youth feel little inclination in exploring unless interlocutors and 'spaces' are

perceived as trustworthy or familiar. In Kenya the situation was more mixed with some youth expressing themselves freely while others preferred to remain silent. On the other hand, youth in Uganda and Somaliland were willing to openly discuss violent extremism and CVE. In Djibouti, it seemed that youth were less informed on issues such as violent extremism and CVE but still expressed feelings of incomprehension and opposition to violence perpetrated by organizations such as the Al-Shabab.

The results and takeaways from the series of discussions with youth from several countries from the Horn seem to show that many youth have limited information regarding the threat posed by violent extremism in the Horn. Therefore, I piloted an activity of visiting universities in Hargeisa (University of Hargeisa, Golis University and New Generation University) to deliver series of lectures on youth empowerment (motivational speech), CVE informational talks and concluding with a question of what youth can contribute to the CVE effort. The outcome was positive and number of students requested to voluntarily take the floor and share something.

The youth has more energy that will be exploited and they are the largest age groups in the regions' population. If not guided well they will fall the trap of peace spoilers as religious terrorism, politically motivated spoilers, organized criminal syndicates (smugglers, human traffickers, drug dealers), and insurgencies. Emphasis and attention to youth concerns will ensure that youth will contribute to national and regional development and will furthermore protect them from violent ideologies.

### **Why Countering Violent Extremism?**

The Horn of Africa has been affected by attacks from groups such as the Al-Shabaab based in parts of Somalia. Al-Shabaab has carried out hundreds of attacks in Somalia and also neighboring countries in the region - Kenya, Uganda, Somaliland and Djibouti. Al-Shabaab an Arabic term which means "Youth"- suggests the saliency of CVE approaches that foreground youth and youth issues.

The challenge posed by violent extremism —and the instability it produces—is a major global and regional concern due to the recognition that development is unlikely to take root in countries experiencing conflict and where violent extremist groups possess a foothold. The process of countering violent extremism and terrorism should address the long-term social and economic impact on communities with an emphasis on youth. This process must put the community at the centre of the P/CVE.

According to the panellists of my two round Delphi method survey in 2016, a number of factors facilitate youth radicalization in the Horn of Africa. The survey results suggest that internal and regional factors such as- the inability of governments' to improve social and economic conditions for youth; unemployment and economic grievances; the socio-cultural impact of decades of fighting and warlordism; and poor quality of education and the misinterpretations of Islamic religion guidelines, all play a role in youth recruitment into violent extremist organizations. The survey results also pointed to the saliency of external factors such as online radicalization through social media platforms that targets diaspora youth; and more specifically foreign intervention in

Somalia.<sup>[1]</sup>

CVE projects and programs should avoid 'one-off' interventions but instead adopt a long term process approach that targets both the ideological arguments and the structural dynamics that create a conducive environment for violent extremism. Radicalization and recruitment often occurs in local social spheres, such as universities, schools, social media platforms, and among disadvantaged youth groups who are unemployed, vulnerable to drug addiction, schools drop-outs and so on. In other words, CVE should adopt a more explicitly youth focus and more specifically target the different spaces and phases involved in radicalization.

It is also clear that CVE programs and projects should exercise caution in terms of stigmatizing communities and exacerbating the very conditions that give rise to violent extremism. According to one study, In Somalia, the global counter-terror agenda has excused a range of counter-productive behaviour by national, regional and western actors that have undermined efforts to build lasting peace and the focus on terrorism has oversimplified Somalia's conflict, and obscured the complex reasons why individuals choose to affiliate with or join the Al-Shabaab group.<sup>[2]</sup> Another study argues that the lessons from Africa on terrorism and CVE suggest that state responses to terrorism risk making the problem worse.<sup>[3]</sup> Policies that are guided by fear will not solve the problem, but only long-term policy responses based on a human security approach that addresses the conditions that drive people to terrorism, is the only viable option.<sup>[4]</sup>

Davies argued that, "three linked problems need surfacing - definitions, causes and targets. First are the difficulties of definition in our wicked problem. Given the multiplicity of types of extremism (political, ethnic, sectarian, separatist, criminal), there are no internationally agreed definitions of extremism, nor of violent extremism, nor therefore of what CVE or preventing violent extremism (PVE) actually targets".<sup>[5]</sup> Davies' argument suggests the pitfalls associated with conventional CVE practice where any and all interventions are tagged as CVE. We need to think site, region or country specific approaches to CVE.

Mahmood argues that one of the biggest gaps in contemporary CVE efforts centres on the absence of ideological and religious systematic knowledge before formulating counter radicalization policies. The author goes on to argue that policy makers must possess a knowledge of religion, intra-religious polemics and disputes and their role in facilitating or obstructing violent extremism.<sup>[6]</sup> Radicalization is a complex, time dependent and dynamic process with affected youth going through several distinct stages.

### **Why empower and engage youth on CVE?**

To better define the significance of the problem, a question to ask is: Why is it important to empower/invest in the youth? Young people are a major human resource for development, often acting as key agents for social change, economic growth and innovation. Their imagination, ideals, energy and vision are essential for the future prosperity and stability of the Horn. Setting up an appropriate framework to support

young people and equip them with quality education, skills, and resources will first and foremost result in their empowerment.

The participation of youth and their perspectives are important to the success of not only CVE programming but also broader processes of conflict transformation and sustaining peace. Youth have to be the central focus of CVE if governments and civil society desire to halt recruitment into violent extremist groups. Youth are linked with the violent extremism as targets, drivers, menders, and change makers for solidarity and resilience.

From personal experience, I had witnessed how youth are affected by violent extremism - I became a target, victim (professionally, travel and physically), mentor (as a CVE activist and reach youth to be informed and inspired to contribute), and dream to contribute building networks of youth on CVE in the region to play the role as change maker for solidarity and resilience.

### **It is time to act!**

Between July and September 2017, I conducted a field research on youth empowerment and engagement on CVE. A central objective of the research project was to explore and understanding the varied meanings of violent extremism and CVE from the perspectives of different social groups and sectors. I interviewed 63 research participants from Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya and Somaliland. The categories of the interviewees included: youth 35%, development worker 21%, security professional 17%, religious figure 6%, teacher 6%, elder 5%, policy maker 5%, family member 3%, victim of terrorist 2%.

In order to establish context for respondents' attitudes towards empowerment the first question asked participants to define what youth empowerment meant to them. All the respondents mentioned the importance of youth empowerment. A summarized overview of the findings of the research findings grouped under thematic areas is presented below.

#### *Attitudes towards empowerment*

Respondents identified three issues as opportunities to empower and engage youth - education, economic development and participation. Most of the respondents spoke about the need for empowering and engaging the youth on diverse national issues and the positive impact that this will have on the efforts to counter violent extremism. They also emphasized the importance of strengthening and improving the education system for empowering and engaging youth.

#### *Attitudes towards the threat (Al-Shabaab)*

Respondents' attitudes towards the threat of Al-Shabaab coalesced around three main issues: Radicalization/Spiritual persuasion - youth with little knowledge of their religion are susceptible to be radicalized; Recruitment of youth - Exploiting the vulnerabilities of the youth such as unemployment, the lack of channels for participation, diverse forms of exclusion, and social media.; Operations - Civilian casualties - Killing innocent civilians and transforming youth into suicide bombers.

Some interviewees particularly the security professionals and development workers



were more sensitive to the threat posed by violent extremist groups using religious means to persuade youth. More specifically these respondents in their responses highlighted how poverty, lack of proper education and lawlessness in some regions in Somalia assisted the Al-Shabaab in their ostensible goals of bringing justice, rule of law and security allowing it to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the youth. Another view point in the responses argued that since groups such as the Al-Shabaab use religion i.e. ideological arguments, as a tool for recruitment, therefore CVE programming should also explore utilizing ideology instead of relying on military means.

#### *Social and cross-cutting issues*

According to the respondents on the social and other cross-cutting issues two areas received more attention; The Role of Religious Leaders - Religious figures should take on a leading role in preaching to prevent radicalization; Sensitization of the threat of *(Youth Radicalization and Violent Extremism)*. Responses also addressed the importance of raising mass awareness about the dangers of violent extremism, and also poverty reduction efforts to reduce youth vulnerability.

Al-Shabaab and similar groups such as ISIS use graphic violence intentionally. The media gives huge coverage to these atrocities and amplifies this threat. A number of respondents raised the need for religious leaders' intervention for counter violent extremism and the role of media coverage on their efforts.

#### *Countering Violent Extremism*

The research participants expressed a desire of collective actions on countering violent extremisms. Regardless of the existing focus on countering violent extremism activities as the primary preventive method to fight terrorism, yet the understanding of what is effective is still an open question. The recommendations raised include: Awareness raising campaigns led by religious leaders; Protection and promotion of human security; Governments should devote more resources to raise public awareness about the dangers of violent extremism and develop policies and plans on CVE; Strengthening education system and establishment of recreation centres for the youth; and employment creation opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

Contemporary CVE programming while emphasizing poverty reduction, employment creation, counter-messaging and rehabilitation and re-education, has not completely ruled out relying on force. During the designing and CVE programming the voices of the grassroots are not heard by the policy makers as well as the implementing organizations. To defeat violent extremism, a paradigm shift is necessary which entails a focus not on the symptoms but the 'virus' itself. Terrorism itself is not an ideology but a tactic used by a group with motive and agenda. It is a complex challenge deserving a complex and variegated set of response.

Tackling violent extremism requires a comprehensive and dynamic grasp of the process or processes associated that give rise to it, which would then point to the most appropriate solution. Youth empowerment and engagement is crucial because it will

enhance participation and involve one of the most vulnerable groups susceptible to violent extremism. Our youth will never be safe as long as they are not well informed, not empowered and not engaged in CVE activities in their localities because they are far more susceptible to radicalization than adults.

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## Beyond the Normative: Youth, Peace and Security

By Sewit Haile Selassie Tadesse

Personally, the youth discourse has held little to no interest to me nor has youth as an age group. It is, after all, just one more aspect of my identity reinforcing my marginality and exclusion from decision making. As far as marginalized identities go, youth in itself is a relatively new conceptual category, denoting the stage between childhood and adulthood but not really quite either; a period of ‘wait hood’ right before adulthood. Each culture or region has its very own socio-cultural criteria to mark the transition from ‘wait hood’ to adulthood. <sup>[1]</sup>

Estimates now show that by 2100, Africa will account for 3.2 billion of the projected 4 billion increase in the global population. The global working age population is projected to increase by an estimated 2.1 billion, compared to a net global increase of 2 billion over the same time frame.<sup>[2]</sup> This transition has important socio-economic ramifications; making youth the new buzz word, along with ‘harnessing the demographic dividend’, ‘youth engagement’ and ‘investing in youth’ among others, making the growing young population a major agenda in the global peace and security discourse.

### **Youth, Peace and Security Resolution 2250**

In December 2015, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), unanimously adopted Resolution 2250 (UNSCR 2250) on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS). The Resolution, which was adopted in December 2015 referencing the Women, Peace and security agenda, acknowledges that today’s population of youth is the “largest the world has ever known”. The resolution is the first to recognize the important and positive role young women and men play in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security; expressing concern that youth are the most adversely affected by armed conflict while also recognizing the role that young people play in peace building while acknowledging that to involve young people in peace building processes, they must in turn be recognized as stakeholders.

Therefore, the resolution calls for “inclusive and youth friendly policies” to tap into the potential of youth today in order to build sustainable peace and economic development. The resolution further identifies the varied intersecting identities of youth with different backgrounds under the five pillars of participation, protection, prevention, partnership as well as disengagement and integration. The first pillar participation calls for an increased inclusive representation of youth in decision making in prevention and resolution of conflict; including taking into account the participation and views of youth when negotiating and implementing peace agreement. The second pillar of protection calls for the respect for human rights for all individuals, including youth, within their territory, including protection from sexual and gender based violence.

The third pillar looks at prevention in terms of facilitation of enabling environments where young women and men are recognized and provided support to implement violence prevention activities and promote social cohesion. This pillar calls for the

promotion of a culture of peace, tolerance, intercultural and interreligious dialogue involving youth. The pillar on partnership calls for partnerships that take into account the needs as well as participation of youth in peace efforts, including the engagement of local and international stakeholders to counter the ‘violent extremist’ narrative. Finally, the fifth pillar calls for disengagement and integration, calling for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration activities to consider the needs of youth affected by armed conflict. This includes skill and capacity building through educational systems designed to build a culture of peace. The resolution further requested the Secretary General to commission a progress study on young people’s positive roles in the YPS agenda.

### **The Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security (UNSCR 2250)**

On August 2016, the Secretary-General appointed an independent lead author, Graeme Simpson, to develop the Study, as well as an Advisory Group of Experts, including 21 scholars, practitioners and young leaders. The progress study is an independent report which has been documenting young people’s positive involvement in sustaining peace and will identify innovative practices on the ground. The Progress Study models this intent through an inclusive and participatory methodology where young people are given an opportunity to substantively contribute to the discussions on peace and security issues in their communities, and to identify solutions for and indicators of the progress for the YPS agenda.

As of October 2017 seven regional consultations with youth from civil society were held, involving youth from 157 countries. The process also encompassed studies on specific countries and led to the completion of 14 country case-studies and over 120 focus group discussions with “hard-to-reach youth” and 20 thematic papers were developed. As a follow up to the regional consultation on the progress study on the UNSC resolution 2250, a validation consultation for the Progress study in Youth, Peace and Security took place in New York in November 2017. The validation featured discussions on the findings and recommendations identified by the study. The findings of the progress study will be launched on February 2018 with a ‘forward looking agenda’.

### **Widening the scope, enabling the intersectionality of youth**

A somewhat cynical dissection of the current discussions on youth oscillates between one of abstract utopic potential exemplified by the now popular ‘demographic dividend rhetoric to that of youth as faceless masses of persons – “underclass, unruly, male, challengingly out of place-morally immature and physically powerful enough to seize from their elders”.<sup>[3]</sup> Shifting from the preoccupation that every new generation as being constantly hell bent to erase the past and build anew, the current policy fixation in the ‘youth bulge’ is the optimal opportunity to finally redirect that pattern.

Hierarchical relationships with the youth are soon losing their viability in this fast paced reality; especially at the decision making levels, this can even be self-defeating. A condescending instrumental view of youth is no longer viable and policymakers would do better to focus on building new patterns of interaction between young people and states

that should use youth led political participation as a process to cultivate or renew ‘civic trust’. Furthermore, addressing the gendered dimension of decision making as it intersects with age based gendered hierarchies that alienate young women from decision making processes can be offset by ensuring that young women have safe spaces for participation.

The key may be embracing the intersecting identities of youth in policy making and enabling young people to participate in youth led spaces including but not limited to peace building processes as well as ensuring intergenerational experience sharing platforms and mentorship to enable intergenerational leaning. While it is a simpler policy option to lump young people as one faceless and usually masculine mass in search of economic opportunities, the reality may be vastly different. Young men and women’s intersecting identities transcends gender and race. Recognition of this fact entails abandoning the romanticization of youth as a source of boundless potential for change and a focus on the more mundane task of appeasing a growing diverse demographic reality. This paradigm shift on the part of policy stakeholders may guarantee that the next generation will not have to entirely ‘reinvent the wheel’, leaving space for social innovation and dare I hope, peace.

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