Policy Brief

African Union's Securitization of Youth: A milestone for Regional Coordination of Youth Programmes in Peace and Security[1]

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Executive Summary

African youth make up a third of the continent's population[2], however, they are vulnerable to human security issues that range from ethno-religious crises, political violence, piracy and maritime insecurity[3] to an upsurge of religious fundamentalism, violent extremism and terrorism[4]. Despite the pervasive state of anomie that African youth are constantly drawn into, they are also actively involved in transforming conflict and building peace as noted in the 2017 Interpeace annual report on "Youth at the Center of Peacebuilding". In relation to Africa, the report noted, for example, how youth are becoming central actors in the pursuit of sustainable and lasting peace through providing spaces for inclusive dialogue in Burundi, Rwanda and DRC. In realization of the roles youth play and their contributions to peace and security on the continent, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) dedicated its 807th meeting on 8 November 2018 to the first ever Open Session on the theme: "Youth, Peace and Security," in commemoration of the Africa Youth Day. The Open Session was the culmination in a series of youth-related activities in peace and security initiated by the Youth for Peace programme (Y4P) that was launched in September 2018. The PSC noted the grave importance of the theme and its session therefore releasing a communique[5] that emphasized the prioritization of African youth as custodians of peace and security on the continent. Indeed, the establishment of the Y4P programme, the 807th meeting communique recommendations for the establishment of the Youth Envoy and a study on youth contribution to peace and security in Africa is a renewed hope for space in the arena for African Youth. Nonetheless, Y4P programme needs the support and collaboration from the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the Regional Mechanisms (RMs), member states, international and national organizations, and academia for sustainable programming on youth work in peace and security in Africa.

Key Points

- Although African youth have always played a significant contribution to peace and security on the continent, the popularized stereotyping narratives only show that their actual contribution hasn't been well documented.

- The launch of the AU - Youth for Peace programme (Y4P) in September 2018 is a veritable initiative to streamline regional youth programmes on peace and security in Africa as well as to document Youth roles and contributions in the field.

- The creation of the AU-Y4P is a welcome indication of the regional recognition and commitment to promote the active involvement of youth in peace and security matters. The PSC-mandated study on the roles and contributions of youth to peace and security in Africa provides the Y4P and youth organizations the platform to highlight the magnitude of such positive roles while highlighting the challenges for optimal contributions.

- The effectiveness of Y4P programme is now dependent on the political willingness of the AU/RECs/RMs; Member States; Youth, Youth-led/-oriented organizations and the private sector, to promote effective collaboration to synchronize all peace and security work under this working group. This is an important anecdote to best understand and address the gaps of youth contribution in peace and security.

Introduction

Youth have consistently played a role in Africa's peace and security beginning with the central role during the liberation of the continent [6] including involvements protests and movements for independence in the 1960s. However, despite the positive contributions the youth have made to peace and security on the continent, including liberation and independence struggles as noted above, the popular and unfortunately dominant narrative of African youth is that they are perpetrators of violence. This simplistic stereotyping of youth shows the existing gap in understanding the overall contribution they have made to state and national building, thus the African Union commissioned study to document the youths roles and contributions in peace and security is to fill this gap (PSC/PR/COMM (DCCCVII)).

While commemorating the Africa Youth Day in November 2018, the PSC held its 807th meeting, an Open Session under the theme: "Youth, Peace and Security". Following the Open Session, the PSC, released a communiqué wherein it took note of the importance of youth in promoting peace security based on information presented by youth organizations at the session. The communiqué noted that it is imperative to have more information on the positive roles and contributions of youth to peace and security on the continent. The Council therefore mandated that the Commission, through the Y4P, conduct a regional study on youth roles and contributions to peace and security in Africa[7]. The PSC communique[8] also reinstated the need to protect the youth in armed conflict situations against all form of exploitation in respect to the international legal framework, and to also recognize the challenges of misrepresentation and stereotyping confronting youth within the peace and security framework. This communiqué unequivocally lays a foundation on which the PSC is to ensure an inclusive

adequate framework to promote a culture of peace and tolerance. Even though this directive has come in November 2018, there has been a process under which the AU has gradually made significant strides towards securitizing youth on the continent.

During the 12- 14 December 2018 youth consultative meeting, for instance, the acting Head of the Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division of the AU-PSD, Ambassador Frederick Ngoga, highlighted that the African Union is making headway in making sure that all of its processes are inclusive of youth and, particularly young women. He added that this is a period of "open engagement" and that there is a need to create creative and innovative ways of engaging youth in early warning and prevention of conflicts on the continent.

The African Union process of securitizing Youth

There are a number of international youth instruments that beckon the role of youth in peace and security. This includes both the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 2250 (2015), which is the first resolution on youth, peace and security that emphasis the importance of youth as change agents in peace and security. The resolution mandated a Youth4Peace portal and a Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding [9] to document and provide guidance and support for action and contributions of young people in peace processes and conflict resolutions. Their efforts are in alignment with the practice of the five pillars; Participation, Partnerships, Prevention, Protection and Disengagement and Re-integration. The UN youth study "The Missing Peace"[10], affirms young people as "the connective tissue that bridges the silos of development, human rights, humanitarian affairs and peace and security, from the local to the global level. The study also recognizes the

distrust youth have in their governments and the multilateral system.

Regionally, the African Union in 2018 made significant strides towards laying a continental framework for the contribution African youth have made in peace and security. However, this journey is inextricably linked to the earlier normative frameworks that underlie these more recent initiatives, activities and outcomes. These include:

• Article 3(f) of the AU Constitutive Act[11];
• Article 17 of the 2006 African Youth Charter [12] which "recognizes the importance of youth in promoting peace and nonviolence, and working to end physical and psychological scars that result from involvement in violent armed conflict and war";
• Article 20 of the Protocol relating to the establishment of the PSC[13]; and
• Aspiration 4 and 6 of Agenda 2063 [14] which projects for an "integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in international arena".

Several decisions of authorities in the African Union have also implicated the recognition and involvement of youth in the peace and security arena. In 2017, The African Union Assembly/AU/Dec.591 (XXVI) [15] decision adopted the 2017 theme as "Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in the Youth," laid the foundation for the mainstreaming of youth in the programmes of the AU Commission. Notably, the presentation by youth organizations at the Open Session informed the decision of the PSC to mandate the study which will provide further insights as well as highlight the challenges youth face in making their positive contributions to peace and security. The study will also enable the PSC to make the necessary policy decisions for the future.

Youth 4 Peace (Y4P) programme and its benchmark on African youth in peace and security

AU-Y4P programme was launched in Lagos, Nigeria in September 2018, with the mandate to implement all relevant AU, regional and international instruments relating to the role of youth in the promotion of peace and security in Africa. Simply, the Y4P aims to mainstream youth into the peace and security agenda of the Africa Union. Y4P is a benchmarking programme for the African Union towards internationalization and securitization of youth on the continent.

More so, the PSC- 807 meeting communique highlighted the concrete mandate for the Y4P Programme, the establishment of the Office of the Youth Envoy and regional ambassadors. This meeting also emphasized the need for a Youth study to address the existing gaps in documenting the contribution of African youth in promoting peace and security on the continent. Therefore, the Y4P has prioritized this task since the PSC mandated the study. However, it is noteworthy that even before the PSC Open Session, during its inaugural consultative engagement with youth organizations under the theme "Towards a Continental Strategic Framework for Youth Engagement in Conflict Prevention" the Y4P had noted the gaps in knowledge products on youth in peace and security.

As a follow-up to the innaugural consultation, another consultative engagement was held at the AUC headquarters in Addis-Ababa between 5- 6 November 2018 on "Harnessing African Youth Contributions to Peace and Security". An important outcome of this forum included the presentation made to the PSC at its 807th meeting that underlined the decisions reached by the council. Subsequent upon the PSC decision that mandated the Y4P to carry out the study, a methodological consultative meeting

was held at the AUC headquarters in Addis Ababa between 14 -16 December 2018. Here, participants deliberated on applicable methodological ways to approach the study; knowledge products; publication strategies amongst others.

Also, the participants of the convened consultations collaged a number of recommendations addressed to individual youth and youth groups, Regional Economic Communities and the African Union - Peace and Security Council for on the one hand, the effectiveness of the ongoing African youth in peace and security documentation process and, on the another, to continue the spirit of centring youth on peace and security issues.

Recommendations

Youth and youth groups ought to:

1. Reflect on their roles and contributions to peace and security at local levels and how these feed into the national, regional and continental narratives.
2. Document their contributions from an experiential perspective to contribute to the overall Y4P 2019 youth study.
3. Mobilize with existing local, national and regional youth consortiums, religious groups and the private sector to bridge the gap between youth work and the overall AU youth and Y4P programme
4. Harmonize their work in collaboration with AU-Y4P programme to best create awareness at the regional institutional level.

Regional Economic Communities (RECS) should:

1. Be transparent in communication on the activities and opportunities being convened on youth so that youth can identify how to engage and support these initiatives, in particular, in peace and security
2. Adopt the initiative of the Youth Envoy and Youth Peace Ambassadors at the Regional level
3. Support the Y4P programme by creating a youth engagement strategy for their independent regions to ensure youth are inclusive in all consultations convened on peace and security.

AU/ PSC/ Y4P programme in collaboration with the Youth Envoy and regional ambassadors

1. The African Union should:

   a. Streamline and institutionalize an annual week of activities dedicated to the overall contribution of Youth on peace and security on the continent;

   i. This as an addition to the open session dedicated to "Youth, Peace and Security in Africa".

   ii. To also be complemented with increased number of youth participants in the open session (PSC/PR/COMM. (DCCCVII))[16].

   b. Encourage member states to streamline the Y4P programme through their National Councils and other youth decentralized structures, with a special mandate to create national plans on peace and security.

2. The PSC should:

   a. Include periodic open sessions dedicated to "Youth, Peace and Security in Africa".

b.   Put a side an independent budget for all of Y4P programmes as an affirmative action to bridge the generation gap in the recognition of youth in peace and security at the regional and national level.

3.   The Y4P programme in collaboration with the Youth Envoy and regional ambassadors should;

a.   Convene joint consultations with the RECS/RMs and the AU Youth Desks and consolidate the overall Y4P strategy. This will guide the holistic approach of the programme.

b.   Capitalize on the office of the AU-Youth envoy, and enrich it with regional Youth Peace Ambassadors

c.   Continue to organize consultative youth workshops and streamline all youth work on peace and security with a transparent clear strategy (including clear communication channels) and work plan

d.   Ensure that the existing youth opportunities are transparent, competitive and have equal gender representation

e.   Identify the skill gaps of youth on the continent, facilitate need based capacity building as well as provide mentorship avenues through collaborating with existing peacebuilding networks as well as peer to peer knowledge sharing.

f.   Identify centres of excellence on the continent and create join avenues on how to best support youth capacity building needs, in particular, through joint mobilization of resources with RECs and member states.

About the Author

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End notes

[1] This policy brief and for most part of it, its recommendations are a collective contributions of all youth led and youth organizations in attendance at the AU Youth consultation meeting, 14 -16 December 2018 in Addis Ababa hosted by the AU Youth for Peace Programme.

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