



Young people as drivers of peace – the role of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda in building and sustaining peace

Meeting Note from Expert-Level Discussion

Introduction

On March 1, 2019, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (DHF), the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), and the International Peace Institute (IPI), held the third meeting in a series of roundtable discussion to examine the operationalization of peacebuilding and sustaining peace. The meeting focused on the role of youth as peacebuilders and leaders in sustaining peace, and the synergies between the implementation of the UN’s Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace approach, and the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda.

The roundtable explored the ways in which the Sustaining Peace approach can be used to strengthen and catalyze the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions (SCRs) 2250 and 2419 on YPS and the Independent [Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security](#). The event also focused on ways in which young people contribute to peacebuilding and sustaining peace in their communities and concrete recommendations to ensure that their work is recognized and adequately supported.

The following note is a short summary of the discussion and the key recommendations.

The linkages between implementation of the YPS Agenda and Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace approach

The UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace include a strong reference to the role of youth in peacebuilding, and call upon Member States and the UN “to consider ways to increase meaningful and inclusive participation of youth in peacebuilding efforts through creating policies, including in partnership with private sector where relevant, that would enhance youth capacities and skills, and create youth employment to actively contribute to sustaining peace.”¹

¹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2282: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/sres2282.php> and General Assembly Resolution 70/262: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/262

The UN's Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions place strong emphasis on addressing drivers of conflict such as poverty or unemployment, "[recognizing] the important contributions of the United Nations development system to peacebuilding, particularly through economic development and poverty eradication."² This is in line with the YPS agenda, wherein youth access to economic opportunities is an important element.³ Finally, the strong emphasis on the importance of *inclusive* national ownership further aligns Sustaining Peace with the YPS agenda, since inclusion of youth in conflict prevention and peacebuilding is at the core of the latter.

The references to the UN's Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions in the Resolution 2250 are less pronounced, in part because SCR 2250 (Dec 2015) preceded the Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions (April 2016). SCR 2419 (June 2018) does make explicit recognition of the important role young people play in peacebuilding and sustaining peace. Both YPS resolutions strive to challenge existing discourse on the role of youth in peacebuilding to show the value young people can play in peacebuilding writ large, and include references to specific issues relevant to sustaining peace such as gender equality, rule of law and preventing violent extremism.

Both the resolutions on YPS and peacebuilding and sustaining peace have moved into the operationalization phase. As part of the implementation of SCR 2250, an independent progress study on youth peace and security was conducted with its final report released in March 2018. The study showcased the contributions of young people to peacebuilding and sustaining peace, and analysed the barriers and challenges they face. In parallel, the Secretary-General has requested his Envoy on Youth to lead the development of a UN Youth Strategy, with an aim to "scale up global, regional and national actions to meet young people's needs, realize their rights and tap their possibilities as agents of change."⁴

As a next step in reporting on progress towards implementation of the peacebuilding and sustaining peace resolutions, the Secretary-General will be presenting an interim report in June 2019 which will identify actions taken within the system at Headquarters and country level to take forward the recommendations of the resolution and the previous SG's report of 2018. This will be followed by a full report outlining progress towards implementation in connection with the 2020 review of the UN's work on peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

However, the effort to show exactly how these two implementation processes can and should integrate at a country and regional level is still a "work in progress" that needs continued focus by a broad coalition of stakeholders working at different levels.

The [UN Youth Strategy](#) provides a potentially strong foundation for the alignment of the two agendas, both because it aims to provide an umbrella framework to guide the UN in its

² United Nations Security Council Resolution 2282: <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/sres2282.php> and General Assembly Resolution 70/262: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/262

³ See, for example, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, OP11: "Stresses the importance of creating policies for youth that would positively contribute to peacebuilding efforts, including social and economic development, supporting projects designed to grow local economies, and provide youth employment opportunities".

⁴ Youth 2030: The UN Youth Strategy: <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-un/>

engagement of young people across the work of its three pillars – Peace and Security, Human Rights and Development – and because one of its five priority areas is explicitly focused on “Peace and Resilience Building”. The roundtable discussion explored five key areas, in which the two agendas can strengthen each other:

- **Localization and inclusion**

There are many parallels that can be made between the YPS agenda and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, including that both originated at the country level and were the result of sustained advocacy from local and grassroots actors.

The methodology of the independent Progress Study was highly participatory and inclusive, engaging over 4,000 young people over the course of almost two years. To ensure that its implementation is equally participatory, it is necessary to take a strongly localized approach, being mindful not to forget that it originated at the local level. The Progress Study demonstrated that young people are already contributing to peace and security, and emphasized the need for greater collaboration in supporting these efforts and ensuring that young women and men are meaningfully included in decision-making. This messaging is key. There still is a disproportionate focus on young people in connection to violent extremism and terrorism which dismisses the positive work young people are undertaking in their local contexts. In advancing implementation of the YPS agenda in different country contexts, efforts must be taken to ensure the full remit of this agenda is understood rather than a narrow focus on CVE/PVE and protection issues. In line with this, implementation should include support to ongoing youth-led initiatives, including strengthening networks between them, and opening up new spaces for these young people to actively and meaningfully engage.

The UN’s Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions very much align with this approach, highlighting the need to look at resilience on the ground and work in a more inclusive and coherent manner with local actors. As UN Country Teams shift their working methods accordingly, as called for also in the reform of the UN Development system, this offers an opportunity to ensure the focus on young men and women is central. To guarantee that this positive development is fully capitalized on, it is necessary to recognize the role of young people in sustaining peace, and the need to include them as key drivers in the operationalization of the Sustaining Peace resolutions.

In this context, a challenge that needs to be addressed in advancing the YPS and Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions is how to identify existing initiatives and youth networks, and how to effectively support them, without depriving them of their agency.

The Progress Study offers examples and recommendations that can inform efforts to operationalize this cross-sectoral approach, in particular the strong message that efforts to engage youth should not focus solely on job creation, but rather increasing inclusion of youth in developmental initiatives, economic opportunities and political decision-making. The focus should thus be on creating an enabling environment for young people to have the information,

skills, encouragement and opportunities to participate in the public sphere and private sector, rather than taking a narrow approach of providing employment.

- **Young people’s participation and political agency**

At its core, YPS is about young people’s political agency and their role as political actors. As such, it cannot be effectively implemented without guaranteeing full and meaningful participation of young people in decision-making.

However, in practice, YPS has been misused and misinterpreted as a “catch-all” agenda for all security issues related to youth. This weakens the focus of the agenda and – consequently – its operationalization.

To counter this, when defining the role of youth in operationalizing UN’s Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions, stakeholders should include in the interpretation of YPS the roles of young people as political actors, besides their contributions in the economic, social and cultural spheres. The UN’s Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions recognize that effective prevention and peacebuilding is a long-term and political process. This necessitates the acknowledgement of political agency and participation as a key tenet of conflict prevention, and thus a critical component of all discussions on peace and security, including on YPS. The potential of the UN Peacebuilding Commission to use its function as a platform to convene relevant actors within and outside the UN in political discussions, including youth, should be further explored.

- **Evidence-based approach and messaging**

Sustaining Peace requires conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities that are based on thorough, gender-sensitive analysis of the local context and needs. Through its operationalizing and in particular the Progress Study, the YPS agenda offers a solid evidence base, documenting concrete contributions that young people have made to preventing conflict and building peace, and the obstacles and barriers that they face, which can support the operationalizing of Sustaining Peace.

To effectively leverage the strength of YPS to operationalize the Sustaining Peace resolutions, and vice versa, it is necessary to ensure the collection of age and gender disaggregated data in all programming as well as in analyses such as the Common Country Assessment (CCA) that are used as a basis for the UN’s Development Assessment Framework (UNDAF). It is also important to ensure that all UN analysis adequately reflects young people’s experiences. This will help further document the diverse roles of young people and challenge the stereotypes of young men as perpetrators and young women as victims. Such in-depth analysis of young people’s roles is necessary for effective planning of efforts to implement both the YPS agenda, and the Sustaining Peace approach. In this regard, it is crucial to build the UN country offices staff capacity to work with young people, and to effectively document their experiences.

Experiences from the Field: Young Women for Peace and Leadership in the Philippines

The event featured a young peacebuilder from the Philippines, who shared her perspective on peacebuilding, and her efforts to sustain peace in the communities where she is working.

Lynrose Jane D. Genon is a member of GNWP's Young Women for Peace and Leadership Program. She spoke of her work in the Marawi City, which faced a siege that displaced more than 350,000 individuals, including many young women and men. Since the siege, Marawi has faced a challenging security situation. She emphasized that young women and men are the most vulnerable sector of the Marawi society, since they are often targeted by extremist groups, and are also the most likely to be falsely accused of belonging to an extremist organization.

Ms. Genon emphasized, however, that far from being helpless victims, youth actively work to challenge stereotypes and foster a culture of peace. One example is the YACAP (Youth Amplifying, Co-Creating and Advocating Peace) project, which she co-founded together with other young volunteers during the Marawi Siege. The project created a space for the youth of Mindanao (the province where Marawi is situated) to share and amplify stories of peace, and challenge negative stereotypes. This contributes to improving social cohesion in the context, where negative messaging has long been used to justify violence against different groups.

She emphasized that there are many similar initiatives led by young people, and called for stakeholders operationalizing Sustaining Peace to recognize the agency of the youth. She also stressed the importance of intergenerational responsibility as a means of ensuring sustainability – the need for young people to have access to mentorship, materials, and technical support. She emphasized that while young people are capable of acting as agents of peace on their own, they could benefit from guidance and support from more senior activists. She also highlighted the importance of access to financial resources. “Not only are the funds available to young people limited, but moreover the access to these funds is almost impossible, since most youth organizations are unable to meet the technical and bureaucratic requirements outlined by donors” she stressed.

- **Accessible funding**

Securing financing for peacebuilding and sustaining peace is an issue raised in both the resolutions and the Secretary-General's 2018 report. Ensuring funding that is accessible to grassroots organizations is necessary for effective implementation of Sustaining Peace, for which local leadership is a key principle.

This is particularly challenging when it comes to youth-led organizations, which may have less technical capacity or experience in applying for grants than organizations with more senior leadership. While the indicators on the percentage of funding dedicated to supporting youth-centered initiatives are usually high, it is necessary to shift the focus from “youth-centered” to youth-led initiatives.

The efforts to operationalize the UN's Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace approach should include a reflection on how to make funding for peace and security more accessible to youth-led organizations, especially at the grassroots level given the challenges referenced above. This will need to include efforts to address donor concerns about the high transaction costs and risks of funding a large number of smaller projects or organisations.

In this context, the Peacebuilding Fund's Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative (GYPI) is an important step towards ensuring adequate funding for youth participation. However, to ensure that initiatives such as GYPI achieve their objective, monitoring of Sustaining Peace implementation should include monitoring not only of the percentage of funding disbursed to youth-led projects or initiatives, but also the quality of these projects, and the quality indicators should include a consideration of the extent to which youth was included in the design, planning and implementation of the project.

Conclusion

The YPS agenda and Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace approach share a focus on inclusivity; the imperative of local leadership; and the cross-sectoral approach to peace and security. Strengthening efforts to ensure an integrated implementation of the YPS and Sustaining Peace resolutions would lead to more successful results for both. The Sustaining Peace agenda also offers an opportunity to re-focus YPS on youth political agency and to identify concrete ways to implement the agenda on the ground.

For the Sustaining Peace agenda, strong inclusion of youth offers the opportunity to better actualize inclusivity for achieving lasting peace, and to build on existing initiatives led by young peacebuilders to prevent conflict and sustain peace.

The following key **recommendations** can be formulated based on the discussion:

- 1. The Peacebuilding Commission, UN Country Teams and other relevant actors involved in the operationalization of the Sustaining Peace resolutions should consider developing a strategy for engaging young people as drivers and agents in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This could be integrated into or build on the PBC's gender strategy.**
- 2. Member States, UN agencies and civil society should reinforce the messaging in the YPS progress study and the Sustaining Peace resolutions explicitly recognizing the role of young people in pursuing peace and sustainable development, not as future leaders but rather based on their present agency, emphasizing in particular their roles as political actors, and political participation as a necessary aspect of effective conflict prevention and peacebuilding.**
- 3. UN agencies and civil society engaged in the implementation of Sustaining Peace resolutions should explore opportunities to foster inter-generational dialogue on**

Sustaining Peace, and consider using mentorship programs that create an enabling environment for young people's economic and political participation as a mechanism for the operationalization of Sustaining Peace.

- 4. The donor community, including Member States, UN agencies and the Peacebuilding Fund should strengthen and explore new mechanisms and channels to make funding for peacebuilding activities more accessible to youth and youth-led organizations, especially at the grassroots level.**