Youth, Peace and Security: Social Policy and Conflict Prevention in Africa
2018–2021

Concept Note

I. Introduction
Youth in Africa is often perceived as the main perpetrator of political violence, social unrest and violent extremism. Popular protests across the continent are often explained by the socio-economic and political marginalization of youth. Likewise, the surge in the proliferation of arms, and violent extremism in the past 15 years also tends to be associated with the political and socio-economic disaffection of young men, and increasingly young women. While young people are particularly susceptible to violence and crime, they are also disproportionately burdened by social and economic insecurities, and are often victims of violence, political unrest and terrorism themselves. However, the burden borne by youths is underemphasized as focus is often placed on the risk youth are seen to pose in society. It is in this vein that the Division of Social Policy and Development (DSPD) at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC) of the Office of Disarmament Affairs (ODA) have jointly developed the project Youth, Peace and Security: Social Policy and Conflict Prevention in Africa.

The project is aimed at strengthening the capacities of governments and civil society, including youth and youth-led organizations, for evidence-based policy formulation, and the evaluation of policies and programmes to ensure that they address the concerns of the youth as stipulated in Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security. Through these activities, DESA/DSPD and UNREC intend to address questions such as how to increase access to education and vocational training for youth that can increase their chances of employment, and job creation, thereby reducing their vulnerability to radicalization and violent extremism. The project will be carried out in six countries over three years, starting in 2018: Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Togo, in West Africa; and Kenya, Somalia and Uganda in East Africa and the Horn.

II. Mandate
UNREC provides support and technical assistance to Member States in Africa, at their request, in the promotion of disarmament, peace and security through capacity-building, advocacy, research and information sharing. It works in partnership with the African Union and African regional organizations, other intergovernmental organizations, academic and research institutions and civil society organizations in the implementation of its programmes, projects and other activities. In the light of the specific nature of security and disarmament issues in Africa, the Centre continues to place a big focus on the role of youth in combatting the proliferation of arms.

UN DESA promotes and supports international cooperation in the pursuit of sustainable development for all. The DSPD is mandated to assist Member States in the establishment and review of their national policies and action plans on youth social development. As the UN body responsible for the implementation of the UN World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), DSPD ensures the establishment of coherent and holistic approaches on youth development by providing greater ownership and relevance to local contexts, and to young people themselves, with critical support from national governments. The Division supports
capacity development and multi-stakeholder productive dialogue on critical issues on youth social development policies. It has already been developing work in this area in Africa, specifically in Togo and Burkina Faso since 2017, through a pilot grant provided by the United Nations Development Account. These projects developed by UN DESA, which it hopes to enrich through collaboration with UNREC, focus on the social dimensions of the youth peace and security agenda.

III. Context and justification
Too often, the role of youth in preventing conflicts, building peace and advancing political development is ignored or underemphasized. For example, many young women and men have been opposing unlawful constitutional changes in their countries, exercising their participatory citizenship through popular protests. Many have been at the forefront of policy and decision-making processes at local and national levels. In reality, the role of youth in peace and security is more complex than some stereotypes may suggest, and requires a much deeper understanding.

Thematic Focus: Youth, Peace and Security
Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security is therefore a timely international policy framework towards understanding the important role of youth in peace and security. The resolution is the first international instrument to recognize youth not just as perpetrators and victims of conflict, violence and extremism but also as fundamental drivers and critical partners in global efforts to prevent conflict and promote lasting peace. This resolution is indeed ground-breaking by enhancing the positive contributions young women and men in peace and security.

The resolution comes at a time when youth constitutes the vast majority of the world’s population, and an estimated 600 million young women and men live in fragile and conflict-affected settings, and in the midst of rising radicalization and violent extremism. The resolution aims to broaden the opportunities for youth to participate in formal conflict prevention and peace processes by calling for the inclusion of young women and men in peace negotiations and peacebuilding efforts. It urges and encourages Member States to consider innovative ways to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels - from discussions about the peace and security issues facing their communities, to the identification of mechanisms for prevention and resolution of conflicts as well as for peacebuilding and sustaining peace nationally.

More broadly, resolution 2250 connects directly to the earlier Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on Women, Peace and Security, which emphasizes the pivotal role of young women in conflict prevention and sustaining peace. The idea of sustainable peace is intrinsically linked to development. In this sense, both resolutions recognize young women and men’s role as key actors in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the advancement of “peaceful, just and inclusive societies”.

Overview of the Regional Situation
The two regions selected for this project are East and West Africa, both experiencing serious challenges with regard to youth social policies in peace, security and development.

West Africa
The threat of radicalization and terrorism is a major concern in most West Africa. In Burkina Faso since 2015, terrorist groups such as the Al-Mourabitoun group of Moktar Belmoktar and the Macina Liberation Front of Amadoun Kouffa — both affiliated with Al-Qaida in the
Islamic Maghreb - have been targeting Burkina Faso. Another important aspect of the youth peace and security agenda in Burkina Faso is young people’s social and political engagement. During the political uprisings of November 2014 that removed President Blaise Compaoré from office, young people were at the forefront of the street protests. They established several youth-led organizations such as Le Balai Citoyen (The Citizen’s Broom) and Ca Suffit (Enough!) some of which continue to be a platform for youth engagement and participation in social and political processes, alongside institutions like the National Youth Council and the youth leagues of political parties. Burkinabe youth are also involved in a number of civic associations focusing on issues as varied as environmental protection, human rights, gender equity and the like.

Similarly, Togo has been through series of political upheavals, and young people have been at the forefront of political and social protests. For example, during the recent anti-government protests, young Togolese took to the streets of the capital, Lomé, to protest against a potential re-election bid by President Faure Gnassingbé against the presidential term limit stipulated in the constitution. Although terrorism and violent extremist attacks have not taken place in Togo, the fact that this problem is affecting a number of neighboring countries raises serious concerns, and the authorities are committed to addressing the root causes of youth socio-economic marginalization and disaffection. This is crucially important as young people represent nearly 60% of the population, with about 40% under 15 and 20% under 25 (2016 Census). Youth unemployment and underemployment rates are extremely high, and most young Togolese struggle to have gainful employed and decent jobs.

In Ivory Coast, young people have been both victims and perpetrators of violence during the civil war and in the political and ethnic conflicts that followed the presidential elections of 2010. Despite recent economic recovery, young Ivorians continue to face major challenges in terms of unemployment, engagement in violence and political participation. Young people who are not in formal education and employment represented more than 35% of the youth population aged between 15-29 years of age. Over 60% of the youth in Ivory Coast is unemployed. Many of these unemployed youths were involved in the last conflict, and today have neither sustainable livelihoods nor decent prospects for the future. These volatile conditions make young people vulnerable to recruitment into violence.

East Africa and the Horn

East Africa’s population is one of the youngest in the world. In Kenya and Uganda, for example, about 70% of the population is below the age of 30, and the majority struggle to meet their basic needs and find their place in society. Lack of economic opportunities for youth lead to rural-urban migration, which increases violence and criminal activities in the major cities. The disintegration of traditional family and community structures, and a lack of sustainable livelihoods, and the absence of spaces for free expression and political participation make many youths vulnerable to recruitment into violence. Political violence in Kenya almost always involves many disaffected young people who are often victims of manipulation by political parties. Following the highly contested election results in 2007, tensions and violent confrontations between Kalenjin and Kikuyus let to several deaths, among them many young people. Youth were both victims and perpetrators of violence in these conflicts. A commission of inquiry found evidence that political parties and business leaders had co-opted young people to orchestrate the post-election violence.

Somalia’s protracted conflict and its impact on neighbouring countries have created vulnerabilities that the al-Qaeda linked group, al-Shabaab, is exploiting among the region’s youth. Al-Shabaab looks for new recruits in neighbouring countries. Violent extremist
organizations like Al Shabaab employ diverse strategies to enlist youth into their ranks, offering them a strong sense of purpose, community, and even financial compensation. These radical organizations understand and prey upon a combination of political realities, socioeconomic factors, and individual characteristics that render youth in East Africa vulnerable to recruitment. Al-Shabaab recruiters prey upon the feelings of otherness and marginalization among the Somali youths in East African cities such as Addis Ababa, Dar-es-Salaam, Kampala, Mombasa, and Nairobi. But Al-Shabaab also preys on young people from all these East African countries by converting and radicalizing them to engage in violent extremist activities.

Kenya has been the scene of several terrorist attacks since the 1990s. More recently Al-Shabaab associated gunmen targeted and shot customers at Nairobi's Westgate Shopping Mall in 2013 killing at least 67 people; and in 2015 Al-Shabaab attackers stormed the Garissa University College, killing almost 150 people and wounding several others. Uganda has also been victim of Al-Shabaab terror attacks, such as in July 2010, when Al-Shabaab suicide bombings were carried out against crowds watching the World Cup Final match at two locations in Kampala, leaving 74 people dead and many more injured.

From the aforementioned brief overview, there is no doubt that young people are at the same time positive drivers of conflict prevention and peace-building in their societies, perpetrators of terrorism and violent extremism, and victims of political violence, structural and gang violence, social unrest and terrorism. It is this complex web that needs to be unpacked and understood by looking at the variety of social, economic, environmental, cultural and religious factors that impact the lives of young women and men in the developing world.

IV. Project Objective
The project’s long term objective is to support the development and implementation of social policy that addresses the challenges of youth and end the cycle of youth exclusion for more sustainable peace.

V. Activities
The project aims to achieve this objective by implementing the following activities.

1. Gathering of evidence-based empirical data on key aspects of the youth peace and security nexus in each of the countries, including a review of existing youth policies regarding peace and security issues, through collaboration with international and national organizations and partners;
2. Focus Group discussions at local and community level (about five per country) - to be undertaken by trained youth from civil society organizations to foster youth-on-youth discussions and debates, to feed back into priorities for youth national policy;
3. Development of a training package on youth, peace and security, focusing on issues of conflict prevention, peace education, youth participation and engagement in disarmament and prevention of small arms proliferation and well as on peace-building and sustaining peace;
4. Organization, in collaboration with local and national stakeholders, of a series of training workshops on youth, peace and security issues for young people through youth civil society associations and organizations at national, provincial and community level;
5. Organization of roundtable discussions (three per country) involving youth civil society associations and organisations at various levels with relevant partners in government, international organisations, civil society and the private sector to foster
productive multi-stakeholder dialogues and exchanges and identify gaps and priorities for action in order to advance the formulation of effective social policies on youth, peace and security;

6. Organization of one regional workshop on youth, peace and security involving the six countries;

7. Development and implementation of mass-media and social-media based outreach and awareness campaigns towards the youth, civil society players and opinion leaders on disarmament and prevention of small arms proliferation and well as on peacebuilding and sustaining peace;

8. Provision of capacity development activities with ministries for youth and support for youth outreach activities developed by these ministries, such as radio, television and social media programmes for youth.

VI. Expected Outcomes

(i) Increased capacity in - government ministries, civil society groups including youth and youth-led organizations – in the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of social policies that will contribute to youth engagement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding at national and community levels.

(ii) Increased youth civil society knowledge and awareness of critical issues regarding youth peace and security, particularly in relation to conflict prevention, peace education, youth participation and engagement in disarmament and prevention of small arms proliferation and well as on peacebuilding and sustaining peace;

(iii) Productive dialogues and stronger interactions between government institutions and youth-led civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders on issues of youth peace and security;

(iv) Specific policy recommendations for strengthening social policies and action plans aimed at preventing youth radicalization and involvement in violent conflict and violent extremism; as well as at promoting youth political participation and involvement in conflict prevention and sustainable peace.

VII. Target Group

Critical to the success of the project is the active engagement and full inclusion of all stakeholders in all stages of the project. The project will therefore target a wide range of actors engaged with youth peace and security issues in these six countries, including government officials, civil society organizations, youth leaders, young activists and youth-led organizations.

VIII. Partners

Critical partners within the UN system will be: UN Country Teams, the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the UN Office for East Africa; ODA; the Department of Political Affairs, the Peace Building Support Office and the UN Economic Commission for Africa.

IX. Budget

The provisional budget is in the attached Excel sheet. For an implementation period of 36 months in six countries, USD 1,319,917 is required, of which USD 319,917 is expected to be provided by UN DESA.