



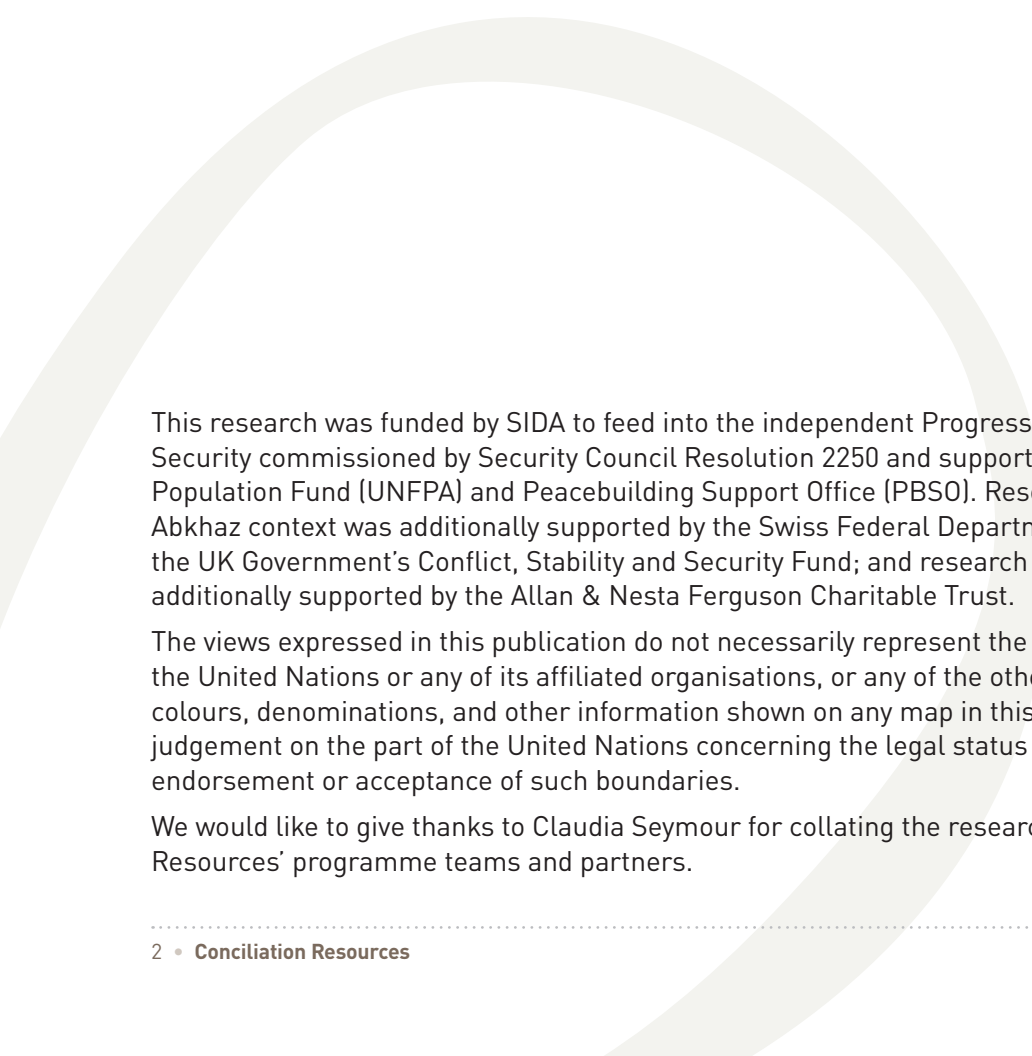
Report

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Youth aspirations for peace and security



**CONCILIATION
RESOURCES**
working together for peace



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The Ingur'i bridge, main crossing point across the Georgian-Abkhaz boundary. © Ibragim Chkadua

I. Executive summary

United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security requested the Secretary-General to carry out a Progress Study on 'youth's positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution, in order to recommend effective responses at local, national, regional and international levels'. Conciliation Resources was invited by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to contribute to the Progress Report through a set of case studies.

In identifying input, Conciliation Resources selected regions that had significant experience of violent conflict, but where the perspectives of those affected are not often heard. Consultations with youth took place in **Afghanistan**, the **Georgian-Abkhaz** context, **Jammu and Kashmir**, **South Sudan**, and among **Ogaden diaspora youth living in the UK**.

The current trend in international policy to focus on the prevention of extremist violence is a discourse which portrays youth as a threat to be managed. Yet, the consultations showed the great power of youth to act for peace and development, as well as their vision and ideas to achieve this.

In the face of tremendous challenges, many young people are actively engaging in their communities, and are making positive contributions in countless ways. Yet, many also lack the means or opportunities to do so. The consultations yielded numerous ideas from youth as to how to address these challenges, and demonstrate that youth should be involved in the design of any responses.

Key findings

1. Support youth visions of peace

Despite their experience of conflict, many youth maintain a clear vision of what peace should be, and of a future without violence. Peace is seen as a combination of development and social justice, inextricably linked to prosperity and opportunity. Peace processes need to actively seek opportunities to harness this ambition through meaningful inclusion of youth in their design.

2. Create space for youth to engage in political processes

Youth feel excluded from making meaningful contributions to political processes, often due

to corruption or co-option by political elites. Specific challenges confront women and girls, including attitudes to accessing public spaces, work and education, as well as domestic violence. Political changes and sustained and resourced commitments from governments are needed to improve the conditions for youth and to rebuild their trust and confidence in governments.

3. Facilitate and support dignified livelihoods

Greater economic opportunities for youth, including access to jobs, are necessary to motivate youth to pursue peaceful and productive paths in their lives. Rather than aid, a just and equitable environment for work is necessary, as well as the opportunity to learn skills, and develop entrepreneurial capacities.

4. Support education and capacity-building for peace

Access to education is fundamental for facilitating young people's positive engagement in peace. Youth put forward many ideas in this domain, including: scholarships for youth from underprivileged communities and marginalised areas; educational reforms and civic education to reduce social prejudice and enhance tolerance of diversity in schools; development of students' and teachers' skills in peace education and peacebuilding; and practical and specific information about ways to support peace.

5. Facilitate inter-community dialogue and exchanges

Initiatives which foster continuous dialogue and engagement between youth from different communities, and between youth and other parts of society, parliament and security agencies, can help in reducing stereotypes and prejudice, and overcoming the prevailing trust deficit. Engaging with those who have been directly victimised by conflict is particularly important. Youth should be at the forefront of efforts to channel social media's positive potential as a tool for peace and to mitigate its risks.

II. Introduction

Overview

Conciliation Resources is a peacebuilding organisation committed to making significant and documented contributions to preventing, transforming and ending violent conflicts and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies. In doing so, Conciliation Resources works with young people around the world to support them in building long-term, sustainable peace in their communities.

Conciliation Resources was invited by UNFPA to contribute to the Progress Report on UNSCR 2250. In identifying case studies upon which to base the input it was important to select regions that had significant experience of violent conflict but where the perspectives of those affected are not often heard. Given the complexity of working in conflict regions, contexts were selected where Conciliation Resources is undertaking work and therefore has trusted relationships to enable work to be completed in a short time frame. Relationships with partners in each context have meant that Conciliation Resources and its partners have been able to reach out to and engage young people navigating the complexities and legacies of violent conflict in their everyday lives. Between July and September 2017, Conciliation Resources conducted research with 494 young people living in **Afghanistan, Jammu and Kashmir¹, South Sudan, the Georgian-Abkhaz context, and among youth of the Ogaden diaspora living in the United Kingdom.**

Accepting the demographic label of 'youth' to describe a wide range of ages and vast diversity of experiences, requires attention to nuance and variation across and within societies. Youth is defined differently across contexts; while the United Nations defines youth as 15-24 years,² some states expand the category to 35 years of age, accounting for different social, cultural and economic roles and responsibilities of young people. Even within states, such roles and responsibilities are variously applied, and dependent on any number of characteristics that might include sex, gender, marriage

1. The term 'Jammu and Kashmir' is usually used to refer to all the regions of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. These include the India-administered state of Jammu and Kashmir (which consists of Jammu, the Kashmir Valley, and Ladakh), and the Pakistan-administered territories of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan.
2. See: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>



Figure 1: Locations of Conciliation Resources' case studies

status, education level, livelihood and economic situation, cultural or ethnic identity, and rural or urban location. In most regions, youth represent a significant demographic proportion of the population, while in a few post-Soviet contexts, they are a minority. Youth experiences are heavily influenced by the political geography of conflict, and outcomes can be highly contingent depending on time and place.

The case studies selected for these consultations cover a wide range of the conflict spectrum, from ongoing violence in South Sudan, to ongoing contestation in Jammu and Kashmir, to an internationally militarised conflict in Afghanistan, to the protracted but at present not highly violent Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, to a struggle for autonomy and more democratic governance in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. Youth experiences of violence across this spectrum vary accordingly.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the highly contested Line of Control has profoundly shaped youth visions and experiences. National politics in India and tensions between Pakistan and India are played out on the front lines, while disillusionment with the established political system and the collapse of the Bilateral Comprehensive Dialogue – the latest and short-lived attempt at an official process between India and Pakistan which commenced at the end of 2015 and was derailed by an attack on an Indian airbase in January 2016 – have contributed to heightened tensions. For young

people living close to the Line of Control in the Kashmir Valley, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Jammu, the conflict continues to have a strong impact on their lives, including through displacement, damage to property due to cross-firing, and disruption to their education. Youth have a significant place in the recent upsurge of violence in the Kashmir Valley, which was sparked when 22-year-old Burhan Wani was killed by security forces in July 2016. Local protests following the killing of this young militant attest to the deep sense of alienation and simmering hostility, exacerbated by a crackdown by the Indian security forces that led to the killing of 90 civilians and the injury of an estimated 10,000 others.

Afghanistan has also been plagued by protracted conflict. The past forty years of Afghan history have been defined by a near constant state of upheaval and war. Consultations with young Afghans highlighted the important role that youth have served in contemporary political movements: in the 1920s, a group of youth known as the *Afghanan-e Jawan* (Young Afghans) pushed for Afghanistan's first Constitution, while in the 1960s and 1970s, Kabul University became a centre of political activism as radical Islamist groups formed on the right and communist groups on the left, all opposed to the monarchy. More than 68% of the current Afghan population is younger than 25 years of age. Despite the current lack of political space offered to young Afghans, youth participants are aware of their significant potential influence in Afghanistan.

Although hopes were high following South Sudan's independence in 2011, by the end of 2013, conflict had regained the capital of Juba and spread to other parts of the country. According to the South Sudanese youth consulted, young people have a central role in society, with a high level of responsibility and social duties, as throughout contemporary history, young people have served as the defenders of local causes, and have also been used by political entrepreneurs to mobilise around their causes, often through violence. In rural areas, the link between livelihood and security is especially evident as youth farm, herd, hunt, and protect villages from external threats, including cattle raiders. South Sudanese noted the importance of learning about life beyond conflict, as most of today's youth were born during the war time and have never seen a better life; there is a need to expose youth to what life might be like without violent conflict.

In the Georgian-Abkhaz context, violent conflict that erupted in 1992 remains unresolved and thus constrains young peoples' development. Youth on the Abkhaz side reported a lack of opportunities, where international restrictions on trade and travel have closed in on youth horizons, leading to frustration, apathy, and rising conservatism. Participants on the Georgian side have been able to experience a greater diversity of opportunities but noted that, among young people, certain groups face more insecurity than others within their own societies. For youth on both sides, safety and security in their own communities was more immediately relevant than the Georgian-Abkhaz peace process, which itself presents barriers to youth participation.

Even youth who have been able to escape zones of conflict remain tied to their countries of origin and to the violence and constrained opportunities that result. The Ogaden youth consulted for this research were mostly born in the UK and other European countries, but their parents are from the Somali region of Ethiopia (commonly referred to as Ogaden). The region, one of the nine units in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, is overwhelmingly Somali speaking and has historically suffered from armed conflict including conventional inter-state conflict, irredentist-inspired wars, varying levels of insurgency activity – most recently by the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) – and counter-insurgency. As a result of these conflicts, successive generations of Somalis from Ethiopia had fled to Somalia, Kenya, Middle East, Europe and the US, creating large Ogaden diaspora communities in these countries. The last decade has seen marked improvements in socio-economic indicators and consolidation of administrative and security of the Somali regional state government (Ogaden administration), but lack of institutional depth, closure of political space, and security measures have, to date, limited the possibilities for addressing the underlying causes of the conflict. As children of refugees and asylum seekers from Ethiopia, the views of the Ogaden youth consulted in this report are largely critical of the Ethiopian government; however, they represent a voice of youth that is important to hear, particularly in consideration of their advocacy for non-violent political engagement and their efforts to reach out to local youth.

Despite the vastly divergent contexts of the five case studies, common themes emerge. As will

be elaborated in this report—and as detailed in the individual case studies—powerful testimony offered by youth participants reveals some of their shared main concerns:

- The changes that are needed to improve the conditions for youth are political, and require sustained—and resourced—commitment by governments, which is not yet forthcoming.
- Youth are eager to be engaged in the political processes for peace and development. They have the will and the vision to contribute productively and peacefully in their societies, yet continue to face significant barriers against dignified expression of their political aspirations.
- Youth are preoccupied with being able to achieve dignified livelihoods. This requires the skills and capacities to be able to work in an environment that is just and equitable, and where human rights are ensured. Unfortunately, the attainment of basic material conditions remains elusive for most, a situation made even more precarious in contexts where militarised and violent conflict continues.
- The inability to earn a dignified livelihood has clear developmental outcomes, including on impacts on youth mental health and perspectives for the future. As youth lose hope and sense increased marginalisation from their own governments, they are less willing to engage in the system constructively. As a result, many either disengage, yield to a sense of subjugation, focus on emigration, or consider violence as the last remaining alternative.
- Youth lack confidence and trust in their governments. They emphasise the role of ‘corruption’ and self-interest as the biggest blockages to effective governance. Concretely, they mention that corruption results in a lack of possibilities for employment, blocked access to higher education, and restricted availability of health services.
- Youth called attention to the specific challenges confronting women and girls. Gender attitudes about accessing public spaces, work and education, and the prevalence of domestic violence, were raised as key areas for change. Concerns were also raised about bullying and discrimination faced by some young people.
- Youth would benefit from capacity-building support for peacebuilding in their communities and among their peers. Teachers and educators also need strengthened capacity to deal with issues relating to peacebuilding, youth development and dealing with diversity.
- Social media is transforming social relations, including those that relate to war and peace. While it offers unprecedented opportunities for young people to communicate across conflict lines, it also presents key risks in terms of discrimination, bullying and the spread of conflict-inducing messages. Today’s youth are at the forefront of this social transformation, and should be actively engaged to lead in maximising the peace potential of social media.
- Despite facing tremendous challenges, youth are actively organising themselves in groups, with minimal government or external support. These young people are creative, visionary and can envision a future without violence. They can also be at the nexus of governance, peacebuilding and development. Those who have been able to participate in peace talks and dialogues—e.g. in South Sudan—have gained skills and experiences that can be shared more widely and built upon.

Methodological approach

The main priority for this research was to capture the voices of young people and to document their perspectives on peace and security. To this end, an analytical framework was elaborated to elicit youth perspectives on topics relating to their everyday lives, the security challenges they face, and their conceptions of peace. Youth were asked about the opportunities available to them to contribute to peace activities, as well as the kind of support they would need to more effectively engage as actors of peace in their societies.

Participative research relied primarily on focus group discussions (FGDs), led and facilitated by Conciliation Resources and its partners. These partners have a recognised track record of working on peacebuilding issues in the case study contexts and enjoy established relationships of trust with the local communities. The FGDs were either mixed women and men or sex-disaggregated, depending on the socio-cultural context, and

drew on participants ranging in age from 17-35 years. Participants represented a wide socio-economic, geographical and political range, and included students, professionals, young people with disabilities, young people from ethnic minorities, LGBT youth, young people engaged in armed groups, and formerly imprisoned youth. In the Georgian-Abkhaz case study, individual interviews with young people and leaders were also conducted.

Research participants

A total of 494 youth (189 female, 305 male) participated in this research. In Afghanistan, a total of 145 youth (35 female, 110 male) participated in nine FGDs held in Kabul, Nangarhar and Kandahar. In Jammu and Kashmir, a total of 114 youth (60 female, 54 male) were consulted in 12 FGDs held in the regions of the Kashmir Valley, Ladakh and Jammu, AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan. In South Sudan, a total of 106 youth participated (34 female, 72 male) in 12 FGDs and workshops in Juba, Mingkaman, Akobo, and Yambio. On the Georgian side, a total of 73 youth (27 female, 46 male) were consulted through nine FGDs held in Tbilisi, Marneuli, Shida Kartli region and Zugdidi; an additional 2 youth (1 female, 1 male) participated in individual interviews. On the Abkhaz side, a total of 24 youth (17 female, 6 male) were consulted through five FGDs held in Sukhum/i and Gudauta; one interview was also held with a young man. Consultations with diaspora youth from the Ogaden community living in London, Birmingham and Manchester in the UK included two FGDs with 30 youth (15 female, 15 male).

Limitations and learning

Due to the short time frame and funding constraints, only a limited number of consultations could be undertaken. The sample size was further constrained by the security situation in certain contexts; in areas where conflict remains active, or where political tensions were too high to seek participation without doing further harm, youth were not consulted. The findings of this report are thus not intended to be representative of all youth, nor to provide a sociologically rigorous reflection on the situation in any of the case study contexts. However, the voices which are represented are diverse, reflect a range of perspectives and views within their communities and should be heard by global audiences.

In Afghanistan, open and frank conversations about politics and security are challenging. In each of the group discussions, participants were initially hesitant to discuss politics. With careful moderation, however, conversations eventually became more open. Youth especially appreciated that the consultations offered them the opportunity to share ideas with peers of different backgrounds. Although representing diverse perspectives, youth enjoyed the process of consensus building and discussion on the common problems and challenges that youth face.

In Jammu and Kashmir, holding open and frank conversations on these issues is also challenging, due to the sensitive nature of the Kashmir issue and the positions of Delhi and Islamabad vis-à-vis Kashmir. The divisions and

Research site	Number of youth consulted	Female	Male	Number of FGDs
Afghanistan	145	35	110	9
Abkhaz side	24	17	7	5
Georgian side	75	28	47	9
Jammu and Kashmir	114	60	54	8
South Sudan	106	34	72	12
United Kingdom	30	15	15	2
Total	494	189	305	45

Breakdown of youth participants per context

tensions, which exist between different regions – such as between the Kashmir Valley and Jammu on the Indian side, and AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan on the Pakistani side – mean that the facilitation of conversations can be difficult, in particular when the youth leading on the research interact with youth in other regions. Issues relating to coordination and the reach of partners (as well as few opportunities for travel to other regions due to limited resources) similarly posed challenges.

In South Sudan, engaging with young women required more time and effort, especially in rural areas, where female participants felt uncomfortable speaking in the presence of men. Separate group discussions were thus organised for women, and in some cases, permission first had to be sought from the parents of young women so that they could participate in the consultations.

In the Georgian-Abkhaz context, the trust gap was addressed by engaging partners with a long-standing presence and who already knew a number of youth participants. Pre-existing relationships and established trust allowed for more open conversations, even if this introduced a selection bias towards youth who already had some level of engagement with civil society. Youth who had not previously been engaged on issues relating to peace and security sometimes found discussing political matters challenging. In some cases, the lack of engagement of youth in political issues and their lack of information regarding the peace process meant that they did not speak in detail about the conflict itself, although they provided ample testimony on the ways in which structural violence and discrimination affect their lives.

In some cases, participation in this consultation presented youth with their first opportunity to

express their views on matters relating to peace and security. While they were grateful for the opportunity, a significant ethical responsibility comes with such processes of consultation. It is therefore hoped that results of this global consultation will be meaningful and evident, and will be relayed back to the youth who participated in this study.

This report presents the narratives of young people in two main sections. In Section II, youth perspectives on violence and insecurity have been synthesised and categorised in line with the main themes emerging from the consultations across the five case-study contexts. Issues relating to the lack of livelihood opportunities, the lack of trust in governments and themes of exclusion are detailed, as are youth concerns relating to psychosocial health, and sectarian and identity-based tensions. Youth engagement with violence and radicalisation are briefly touched upon, as are intergenerational issues. This section also raises gender-based concerns, as well as the role of the media, including social media, in perpetuating violence.

Section III presents youth as agents of peace. It documents their visions of peace, and articulates their perspectives on what is needed to advance the youth, peace and security agenda at local, regional and global levels. Their recommendations include the need to prioritise dignified livelihood outcomes, provide youth opportunities for meaningful political engagement, and to offer capacity support and education for peacebuilding. The role of social media, both its positive potential for peacebuilding as well as its associated risks, is also discussed.

Section IV concludes the synthesis of the findings from the five case studies.

III. Youth perspectives on violence and insecurity

Among the key aims of the UN Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security is to document 'youth's positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution, in order to recommend effective responses at local, national, regional and international levels'. An essential prerequisite towards the fulfilment of this aim is to understand more about the lived experiences of youth, as articulated in their own words. This section synthesises the main concerns raised by youth in the five case study contexts.

Lack of livelihood opportunities

Unemployment is a concern for youth worldwide, yet in conflict-affected contexts, the situation can be especially dire. The recurring theme across all research sites was the impact that violence has had on the economic situation of young people, particularly the related difficulties in gaining access to work and livelihoods.

As stated by a participant in a group of displaced Georgian youth:

People have such serious personal needs that they cannot think of anything else. When a 25-year-old man needs to support a family, he will not think about how to build peace. He is worried about the short-term perspective...When a young man is experiencing financial problems in the family and should have elementary food, there is no point in talking to him about peace.

The inability to ensure their livelihoods has a negative impact on how youth conceive of their role in society. As stated by one young Abkhaz person:

Financial independence is necessary. When you are taking pocket money from your mother, it is hard to talk about how you can benefit the country.

Young Georgians expressed similar worries; as described by students in Tbilisi:

Today's youth are first and foremost concerned with ensuring their own material wellbeing and only after that can they start thinking about others, about human rights, about good relations. It's hard to talk to a hungry person about the rights of others and to get him to think about that.

Youth in the Kashmir Valley expressed the fundamental need to resolve the on-going political conflict, and this as a prerequisite for any meaningful economic development. A young person in AJK, Pakistan-administered Kashmir, considered how the lack of resolution of the political conflict is intimately related to the high levels of unemployment in the region. These interrelated problems in turn lead to a deep sense of frustration among youth:

[Unemployment] is a big challenge to societal peace as there is deeper frustration among young people ... this is due to the unresolved issue of Jammu and Kashmir.

In Jammu, poverty due to a lack of economic opportunities was identified as a particular problem in remote tribal areas and areas close to the Line of Control. A lack of skills development was identified as a setback for many young people. Child labour (in particular domestic labour in the cities) was also cited by some as a serious concern.

Young South Sudanese clearly perceive the need to first be able to access resources so that they may lift themselves out of poverty. Only once they are freed from such resource constraints do they believe they will be able to engage individually and collectively in the search for peace and the



Boy with cattle in South Sudan – cattle raiding is a major cause of conflict in parts of the country.

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prosperity of their country and its communities. A clear link was drawn by youth between difficulties in earning a dignified livelihood and recourse to violence.

Violence in South Sudan was clearly described as an effective mechanism for competition over scarce resources. As noted by one young South Sudanese man:

Violent cattle raiding and child abduction are the major causes of death in Jonglei... In a single raid in June-July 2013, combined Nuer and Dinka were believed to have raided over 10,000 heads of cattle, killed more than 2,000 people and hundreds of children were abducted – it all happened in less than three weeks.

Youth participants in South Sudan described how the proliferation of small arms and light weapons among civilians increases the level of insecurity. Having known only conflict, some young people have developed a perspective on violence that is functional and reflects the political and economic structures of their environment. As explained by one young cattle raider:

My gun is my salary, and I have to raid to get something.

Another young man explained how violence had been useful to him:

I got three guns in 2014 after killing the owners, and I bought some cows and used them in paying dowry in my recently concluded marriage.

A simple conclusion was offered by a young South Sudanese man:

War with benefit is better than peace without benefit.

Lack of trust in government

The lives of youth participating in this research have been profoundly shaped by conflicts that have been active for all or most of their lifetime. In contexts dominated by violence, a general sense emerges that youth are severely constrained by the socio-political structures in which they are embedded. Youth expressed a deep sense of disillusionment and a lack of confidence in their governments and authorities at various levels.

In the Kashmir Valley, there is a strong sense of alienation and anger among youth, who considered the ways and means employed by the state to control the sociological, psychological, and economic aspects of life as major challenges to work for just peace. The uncertainty in behaviour of the youth has been captured in one of the testimonies from the Kashmir Valley as follows:

The youth look ok, calm and within moments they can be protesting and clashing using stones, risking their lives, against the fully armed police and military with armoured vehicles....

A recurring theme was the perception of rampant government corruption. Because discussions of corruption can tend to elide different co-occurring problems, it can often be more useful to distil what is meant by 'corruption'. When youth mentioned corruption, they did so in terms of restricted access to livelihood opportunities, education, or even basic services such as healthcare.

Frustration about corruption was particularly strong in Afghanistan, where youth resent the dominance of a ruling class that controls the economy and access to jobs:

Government positions are sold in the market and if you pay a specific amount of money, you can buy a position...even if you are illiterate and uneducated.

Few Afghan youth had any hope that government corruption would decrease in the near term.

One respondent suggested that anti-corruption task forces set up in recent years were mostly there to "hide corruption from the public eye." Criticism was strong on how government officials manipulate state structures and processes to their advantage. This lack of confidence is of consequence, as the very guardians of the 'rule of law' are perceived by youth to be stealing national resources with impunity. Youth reported that police are often the worst offenders, but justice and education authorities are also thought to be culpable.

Youth participants described the ways in which government corruption had spread to local leaders, for example through the Community Development Councils, which had originally been set up to distribute international and government development aid. The lack of equity in terms of resource distribution has made youth highly distrustful of their own leaders, as well as their international funders:

The Americans also know about the corruption in the government by influential figures... Rude warlords challenge the government and rob government property purchased with American money... [yet still] the American government is giving these people contracts. On the one hand, they teach us about democracy and rule of law, and on the other hand they keep making deals with warlords and criminals.

Relatedly, several young Afghans attributed the conflict's intractability to the many vested interests that are benefiting from the violence. They noted that government corruption had led local leaders to form factions and battle against each other for resources, which has resulted in an increase in violence as insurgents have benefitted from the instability and political divides. Young people also believe that the international community is benefitting from the war economy that has grown up around the conflict; according to participants, international actors are in Afghanistan largely for their own gain and have little concern for the welfare of ordinary Afghans. As one respondent from Kandahar commented:

[The international community] does not invest in our country. Instead they are making money by contracting out most of their projects to their own companies and the money is going back to their countries.

Corruption was also described by youth in the Georgian-Abkhaz context to be a serious concern. According to one young Georgian:

The majority of MPs do not think about peace and security, nor about the people. Their main concern is the purchase of new homes and cars... Even when the state carries out any projects, it primarily defends its interests and takes little account of the opinion and needs of ordinary people.

A young Abkhaz noted:

Corruption is everywhere. It permeates everything. Kindergartens, schools, universities, etc, etc... We all have examples. We don't trust the state structures we encounter.

The lack of trust in government practices has been worsened by a pervasive sense of fear in some of the case study contexts. In the Kashmir Valley, where youth pointed to pervasive practices of the state to exert control over people, including surveillance:

We do not know how what we say gets twisted because we live in a surveillance society.

Another young person in the Kashmir Valley explained:

It is like psychological censorship, we have to think before we think.

Feelings of being silenced and censored were also observed in Afghanistan. As noted by one Afghan youth:

If we express our ideas and criticise those in the government, certain people who have power in the province will send us threats and warnings.

Although some Afghan youth suggested that censorship had led to an increased reliance on social media in the hope of increased anonymity, others claimed that they were being monitored. One young man described receiving repeated online threats after having posted a political message on his Facebook page.

This problem is not limited to conflict zones. Even youth from the Ogaden diaspora living in the UK described that their activities are monitored by Ethiopian authorities, and youth are pressured to self-censure or dis-engage from human rights advocacy and campaigns and political activism in response to threats of arrest and jail for relatives who remain behind in the Ogaden region.

Exclusion and voicelessness

In each of the case studies, youth expressed a strong sense of frustration in not having their voices heard. As described by one young South Sudanese woman:

We are always under-represented and our needs ignored, with decisions being made on our behalf.

A lack of self-confidence among some South Sudanese youth in their abilities to participate peacefully in society was noted to especially affect young women and youth living in rural areas. As described by one young man:

Our society has made us to believe that we lack knowledge, are ignorant of political processes, and cannot engage in constructive peace making without the involvement of older people or politicians. We are excluded from local decision making. We are always struggling to find an avenue where we can prove our worth, experiment with new ideas or participate in the wider political process. Lack of space to contribute to peacebuilding makes us more likely to approve of and engage in violence. Violence is the only avenue more or less left for young people.

Youth in Afghanistan expressed their disappointment in not being included in political discussions relating to peace. Young Afghan women in particular reported feeling silenced:

We have few opportunities to act politically outside the house, let alone take part in the peace process on either a local or national level.

In the Kashmir Valley, youth lamented the wide disconnect between political leaders and people on the ground. This includes both the official political leadership – which many young people see as unrepresentative – as well as the leadership of the separatist movement. The participants from the Kashmir Valley felt that part of the problem is that new leadership is unable to come forth, a sentiment echoed by one youth from the AJK:

Bad governance has squeezed opportunities for the youth and they are feeling isolated and disconnected. Presence of forces in such a large number on both sides of the Line of Control and their frequent movement have psychological impacts on youth in particular.

As described by one Sudanese youth:

Young people find themselves excluded from decision making at all levels and lack exposure to the experiences that would enable them to participate, even when permitted. Young women are doubly discriminated against, as they are excluded from political engagement and expected to marry at or near puberty.



Young people take part in consultations in South Sudan. © Conciliation Resources

Few South Sudanese youth were able to describe more than token participation in discussions relating to the peace process.

Young people in the Georgian-Abkhaz context also reported feeling excluded from political processes, including on those relating to conflict and peace. The failure to include young people in the peace process was especially frustrating for youth who believe that young people could do a better job than current elites, as they are not tainted by the past. One Georgian youth who had been in prison explained:

The level of trust [in young people] is generally quite low. This prevents us... from realising our abilities. 'You're younger than me, what can you teach me?' is a common attitude... In such cases, you lose both your motivation and your confidence... Our opinion is rarely taken into account. I'm very upset about this.

This sense of exclusion is widely felt. One young person in Georgia described the kinds of exclusion faced by people living with disabilities:

People with disabilities rarely participate in conventional programmes... Naturally, there are physical barriers. These include an environment that has not been adapted for disabled people and the fact that the state has no appropriate services such as guides and interpreters. A family cannot always help a person with disabilities... In general, diplomacy is a matter for elites. This is a closed sphere, especially for needy and socially unprotected people. And people with disabilities understand

this well. Accordingly, they do not believe that they can somehow have influence in this sphere, and therefore avoid it entirely... People with disabilities live in permanent isolation from the rest of society. Their social circle includes only their family, neighbours, relatives and school. Affected by a lack of abilities and skills, people with disabilities do not have the abilities necessary to participate in such processes.

Participants from both sides of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict noted that, among young people, certain groups faced insecurity within their own societies. Groups identified by different participants include women, LGBTQ people, disabled people and ethnic minorities. For many people from these groups, safety and security in their own communities was more immediately relevant than the Georgian-Abkhaz peace process. Of the five case study contexts, only in Georgia were issues relating to sexual identity raised within discussions on the exclusion of youth, displaying the nature of the problem but also a greater degree of openness to discuss it:

From a legal standpoint, there are equal opportunities for all, but some groups in society are left out of these processes. For example, at this stage, processes not involving religious groups, non-traditional religions, as well as representatives of sexual minorities. Before the law everyone is equal, but society creates specific barriers... we must admit that when society rejects any certain group, this is not accidental...

Psychosocial impacts of unresolved conflict and lack of hope

The impact of protracted conflict, combined with the lack of faith in the government and a sense of exclusion from political processes, has led many young people to believe that they will not be able to change their situation in the near term. This lack of hope has notable psychosocial and emotional impacts on young people.

Youth in South Sudan explained how the lack of prospects to construct a more positive future have led to a situation where:

[Young people] have lost their dignity and their freedom.

Youth in the Kashmir Valley described the negative impact of continued militarisation of public and private spaces. The desperate responses of youth and their anger at the situation and towards the Indian state are also of great significance.

In AJK and Jammu, those living close to the Line of Control highlighted the fear of violence as a direct result of India-Pakistan hostilities:

In an environment where we are under constant fear of cross firing at the LoC, and then we do not have any platforms or space, or even recognition of the role we could play in ensuring peace, one can imagine our vulnerabilities.

Youth in Jammu identified confrontation between India and Pakistan – including cross firing and land mines – as serious security concerns. They stated that the existent threats both curtail free movement and impact traditional livelihoods. The fate of divided families (split by the Line of Control) was also identified as a major problem in Jammu.

The fear of violence has many negative spill-over effects. A teacher in the Kashmir Valley explained the situation:

Today youth live under such insecurity and pressure, they have no faith in society and very limited patience to wait for long-term solutions. So many of them resort to the use of drugs, a lot of them suffer from chronic and serious psychiatric disorders.

Drug abuse was also cited as a serious problem affecting youth in Ladakh, Jammu and in the Kashmir Valley. Youth in Ladakh explained that young people's vulnerability to drug abuse is either through peer pressure or as a way to deal with the challenges and stresses in their lives.

Addiction was also reported as a serious problem facing Abkhaz youth:

If you look at the youth separately, criminality and drug abuse have a very strong influence. Young people suffer a lot from drug addiction in our society and it leads to criminality.

Uncertainty discourages young people from investing in their future, and leads to a short-term outlook. This is felt tangibly by young people in the Georgian-Abkhaz context, where future perspectives are affected by the uncertainty and sense of instability that accompanies the unresolved conflict:

Young people are lost, and our thinking is broken. We do not think of the long-term perspective as we are not sure about our own future...

Despite almost a decade since the last incidents of violence in their area, Georgian youth living near the boundary with South Ossetia described how:

The war has created the fear factor. We are afraid that we will be expelled. We are afraid we will lose our homes. We do not know what awaits us tomorrow. We can lose everything that we built and created our whole life in a single day.

Sectarian and identity-based tensions

In all case study contexts, youth expressed sectarian and identity-based divisions as a persisting problem.

For young people in Gilgit-Baltistan, in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, sectarian divides present a major security challenge. As described during one group discussion:

We are divided into various communities based on religious sects and castes. This makes our life difficult.

Youth from Ladakh described the name-calling, stereotypes, and prejudice they faced in regions outside of Ladakh; as described by one student:

Ladakhi students or us who go outside to Delhi or other places, people often ask there 'thappa ji' what do you want?

In Jammu, youth participants expressed concerns about the multiple cleavages that exist in their society, and the discrimination on the basis of religion and caste that is strongly felt. Concerns were also raised in relation to Kashmiri Pandit migrants who were displaced from the Kashmir Valley 25 years ago and many of them continue to live in distressing

conditions in Jammu. Youth there also described the deplorable conditions among other refugee and displaced populations, including Rohingyas and Biharis.

Youth in Afghanistan noted how identities were being imposed on young people by the older generation, and how this was linked to access to jobs and other resources. As described by a youth in Kandahar:

Favouritism and nepotism based on ethnic and tribal relationships are very high. Here, everyone has to belong to a powerful tribe, such as the Popalzai, Alakozay, Noorzai or Achakzai [in order to get a job or other position]. Positions in government are based on these relationships. For those from other provinces or from weaker groups, it is very difficult in Kandahar to survive and they must obey the order of influential tribal figures.

Identity-based distrust was also raised as a prominent issue in South Sudan. According to a female university student:

The lack of unity between youth from different ethnicities is preventing the development of collective youth groups... In the University of Juba, youth are forced to align their views with youth from the same ethnic group... For example, I can only speak with those from Gogrial because other youth do not trust me. If I approach them, they think I am there to collect and report information to government.

Youth of the Ogaden diaspora living in the UK noted their own sense of identity crisis due to multiple identities; as one young woman pointed out:

I am a female, Somali, Muslim – where is the room to say Ogadeni?

This sense of identity crisis was deepened by the perceived impossibility of Ogaden youth of the diaspora to return to their families' country of origin.

Where can you call home? What if your children ask you where you come from?

Youth are conscious of the difficulties in traveling to the Ogaden region. Among those who took part in the focus group discussions there is a perception that in order to travel to the region it is necessary to demonstrate support for the government and its policies in the region. This would be considered difficult for those engaged in human rights advocacy, which means that for some family reunions are not possible. One participant mentioned not having seen his family

for more than 20 years; furthermore, he noted that there is no guarantee that he would be safe once arriving in the Ogaden region.

Youth on both sides of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict divide noted with regret the divisions in their societies. This division is especially difficult for ethnic minorities, such as ethnic Georgians and Armenians living on the Abkhaz side, and Azeris living on the Georgian side. As perceived locally, people from ruling ethnic groups are believed to have more access to employment and education than ethnic minority groups. As one Abkhaz youth stated:

The future conflict that is brewing is Armenian-Abkhaz. It is ethnic. This is a time bomb. Our people are rude [to them]... Armenians will sooner or later get tired of this and there can be a conflict.

Violence and the threat of radicalisation

Youth engagement in violence and the threat of radicalisation were raised by youth in Jammu and Kashmir. According to participants, there exist few prospects for an India-Pakistan peace process to affect the situation for them; accordingly, many young people have come to believe that violence is the most effective way forward. As young people in Pakistan-administered Kashmir explained:

It's really difficult to initiate the peacebuilding process since people believe that armed struggle could yield some results. They do not see dialogue happening, negotiations are not working to halt the violence on the Indian side of Kashmir. So, in fact, an absence of peacebuilding processes has created more space for armed struggle.

A young person in the Kashmir Valley, where support for the separatist struggle is high, described how:

Individuals who are resorting to violent rebellion see no other feasible means to resist.

According to youth in the Kashmir Valley, extreme responses among some of the youth appear to be linked to their feelings of being let down by the system around them at multiple levels:

The older generations have failed them; democracy and human rights have failed them; the state has failed them; the education system has failed them, the universities, the leadership, the United Nations has failed them.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan-administered Kashmir, youth reported that parents who cannot afford to send their children to government schools are sending them to religious seminaries. Participants saw this as a negative trend that may fuel extremism and cause greater divides in society.

A Georgian youth explained the risk of radicalisation in terms of the lack of education and information:

The first issue is the limited access to education and information. This, in turn, leads to the fact that people easily fall under the influence of various ideologies.

Radicalisation was not mentioned in South Sudan, but young people did express how political entrepreneurs continue to mobilise youth to violence in order to serve their own ends:

The traditional organised forces such as the White Army, Gel-Weng and Arrow Boys are manipulated by higher level political actors who have turned those governance structures into instruments of war, based on ethnicity, in their quest for power and control over land and resources.

Intergenerational factors

Youth in all contexts raised the importance of the relationship between youth and older generations. Youth of the Ogaden diaspora consider young people as the next generation of torch-bearers, continuing the transmission of the history and struggle of their people from one generation to the next. At the same time, youth expressed a sense of marginalisation by their elders, due in part to being born outside of Ogaden:

Members of the older generations can be very pessimistic towards young people being activists and working on issues in the Ogaden region. Some elders make statements such as: "You were not born in the region so what do you know about it?"

Ogaden youth noted other impacts of the intergenerational divide:

The youth tend to engage in advocacy and campaigns in country of residence because they are schooled here, have the right skills and understand the UK system better. While the older generation understands the system of the country of origin (Ethiopia/Ogaden) and tend to focus on political alliances with Somalis and Somalia for example.

In the context of Jammu and Kashmir, youth in Ladakh and in Gilgit-Baltistan alluded more generally to an identity crisis among some young people, due in part to the influence of globalisation, which has pushed youth away from their own traditions, norms, customs, and language. In Ladakh, participants explained that their society is very traditional with strong religious institutions, and that only elders have a say. According to these youth, there are few opportunities for young people to express themselves and challenge societal norms.

The manipulation of youth by older political elites was raised as an issue in Afghanistan; as stated by a young person in Kabul:

The politicians and leaders of Afghanistan misuse youth for their own personal and group gain.

South Sudanese youth noted that youth branches of political parties were not seen as actually helping young people, but were rather being used to gather votes or organise rallies for the political elite. This kind of co-option was seen to further erode the status of young people. Membership in these groups was perceived as more an expression of loyalty to the ruling elite in control of whatever party the group supported, than it was an actual means of furthering a youth agenda.

While some young people can harbour collective grievances inherited from their parents' generation, some Georgian youth were more positive, suggesting that today's generation offer greater possibilities for peace:

Older people often remember the old days, and young people would prefer to think more about the present and look to the future. The older generation finds it hard to forget old wounds and grievances, and young people can start from a clean sheet.

Gender-based concerns

Issues relating to gender were raised across all case study contexts.

According to youth in South Sudan, the near-exclusion of girls from education and the practice of early marriage are fundamental problems:

Illiteracy among young women is so high that women do not know their rights, and cannot claim them.

As stated by one South Sudanese primary school teacher:

Not much can be done about it because parents need dowry. Girls gets married as young as

14 and a mature girl of 18 years and above is perceived to be in less demand and of less value.

While high bride prices and competition over girls for marriage stimulates cattle raiding, sexual violence can also be a conflict driver:

Rape cases are among the most serious, and if not addressed, they can ignite a big fire in concerned communities... If my sister is raped by a young man, and I have not [avenged] her, I will live in shame forever... if another young man provokes a sister, rapes and/or beats her, it is always considered a challenge against her brother, and it is always a duty and responsibility of a brother to avenge by fighting the culprit. Sometimes the conflict between individuals escalates into a fight between groups and creates long lasting animosity between them.

Sexual violence was reported as a prevalent issue in South Sudan, with numbers of rape cases a constant worry. South Sudanese youth went further to explain that material destitution has led to a significant increase in the practice of prostitution due to lack of finance.

The challenges for women who work outside the home were reported in Afghanistan:

A few months ago in Kandahar a woman working for [the UN] had been killed on her way to work and in a separate incident five women working at the airport were killed.

Beyond direct violence, low-level harassment was seen as an even larger problem in Afghanistan. One participant in Kandahar pointed out that most families did not allow women to work outside their homes, but even when they did:

Young women and girls are harassed in their offices and organisations...[and] there is no complaint mechanism in place. Policies and procedures are not being created by the government [to handle cases of harassment].

Another young Afghan woman pointed out that the justice department does little to support women who are victims of domestic abuse. Even laws that have been passed are not being currently enforced, respondents said; one participant described a female school teacher who had recently requested maternity leave, but the request was rejected, supposedly because she was expecting a girl. The failure of the government to protect women led youth in Kandahar to agree that the situation for women, particularly those outside of urban areas, was getting worse instead of better, with

fewer jobs available for women and fewer girls in schools.

Although Afghan youth blamed this discrimination on culture and history, they also consider that the lack of protection for women is deeply intertwined in government corruption and the patriarchal nepotism of the government more generally.

Domestic abuse was also raised as a serious concern among Abkhaz youth. As stated by one young person:

The gender question has been very current of late... in relation to the growing number of cases of domestic violence, including murders. If we stay silent and do not react, we allow this problem to continue. If you look at our parliament, among the deputies there is only one woman. Many consider a woman's place to be at the stove in the kitchen – this is a very old-fashioned point of view. Women and men do not have equal access to many resources, especially in politics.

According to some Abkhaz youth, women generally carry the burden of responsibility for harassment and abuse:

Young girls accept violence. Women are silent about such things. Society will blame the girl and the spotlight will be on her and her family rather than the guy.

According to youth in Ladakh, India-administered Kashmir, 'moral policing' is often done by their parents, who place limits on their daughters because family members do not want to risk damaging their honour. One young person in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan-administered Kashmir, noted the gender inequalities rooted in their language and structures of learning:

Our language, syllabus, are so biased that even we unintentionally undermine the role and predefine the role assigned to women.

In some cases, it was considered inappropriate for young women to be involved in peacebuilding activities. For instance, in AJK one participant mentioned that:

Even if they get a chance to promote peacebuilding initiatives, locals label them as western agents and traitors and suddenly everything moves towards family honour and respect.

Female participants in the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh also discussed challenges such as sexual harassment, especially when they travel for work outside the region, such as to Jammu and Delhi.



Youth from different backgrounds participate in focus group discussions, Kama District of Nangrahar province, Afghanistan.
© Mohammad Munir Salamzai

In Jammu, women not being able to continue their education and being married off young were other problems identified by participants.

Only in Georgia did one Azeri woman describe an improving situation for young women:

Several years ago, the children (girls) did not finish school. And now everyone is learning. In past years, early marriages have happened much more often, now they are relatively fewer. And this is very good. I think that a good young generation is growing up, which is capable of doing good deeds for the benefit of society.

In contrast, LGBT youth in Georgia noted a continued sense of gender-based insecurity:

When we discuss security, it's very important to define whose security we are discussing. For me, as a queer woman, simply leaving the house constitutes the greatest danger I face in everyday life. It is the fear of mental, physical and sexual violence...

Role of media, including social media

The important role of media was discussed especially in the Georgian-Abkhaz context, but also in Jammu and Kashmir, as well as among the Ogaden diaspora youth.

Overall, social media is extensively used by young people, and is considered to give youth a sense of 'connectedness'. As stated by one Abkhaz youth:

Frequently you can observe the dependence that young people have on gadgets, often young people only feel comfortable and safe when they have a telephone in their hands. They want to always be connected and to know what is going on. We understand that 'security' is often interpreted differently, but in the wider sense of that word it seems to me that the attachment to telephones and other gadgets provides a sense of security for young people, as well as other simple benefits.

For many youth, social media is seen as an opportunity for raising and resolving important social issues. As stated by another Abkhaz youth:

Nowadays social media networks, particularly Facebook, have become the most active mechanism [for solving problems]. If we outline the problem, our indignation, how we were treated, the reaction will be swift and the problem will be solved because people do not want publicity. Of course, this is the most straightforward way, but it is effective. But to apply to the appropriate authorities is difficult and takes a lot of time.

However, Abkhaz participants also noted that online political discourse can quickly become toxic:

For me it seems that nothing can be worse than what goes on Facebook... all these negative judgements and opinions do not solve any problems.

Some young people in the Georgian-Abkhaz context perceived that propaganda—much of it disseminated through social media—makes young people unwilling to participate in dialogue. Young people on the Georgian side expressed concern that their counterparts on the Abkhaz and South Ossetian sides were subject to narratives that turned them away from peace processes.

There are also many problems with regard to the reconciliation process. We can and would like to get closer and establish dialogue with the youth on the other side, but they are brought up with the image that we are the enemy. Therefore, it's very difficult to sit with them at the negotiating table.

Young people in Jammu and Kashmir also attributed responsibility to the media for perpetuating the conflict:

Media houses often use language and narratives which are detrimental to peacebuilding process. More specifically, the media of both [India and Pakistan] has a jingoistic nature when it comes to the Kashmir issue.

In Jammu, young people noted that misinformation reinforces false perceptions about other regions, and thus contributes to the conflict.

Among the youth of the Ogaden diaspora, media access to the Ogaden is restricted, with local media sources under the control of the Ethiopian government. According to them, it is very difficult to gain access to information that is independent from the government media sources. Ogaden youth also noted the problem of harassment of young people in social media, which increases young people's fears for their physical security; they noted that harassment is particularly strong against young women.

IV. Youth as agents of peace

In the face of the tremendous challenges facing youth across the five case study contexts, these consultations have also shown the degree to which young people are capable of being agents of peace. Young people are actively engaging in their communities, and are making positive contributions in countless ways. This section documents the narratives of young people and their visions for how youth can be more effectively engaged as peacebuilders.

Support youth visions of peace

Many youth, despite having grown up in a context of protracted violence, maintain a clear vision of what peace should be, and the ideals to which they aspire.

At an immediate level, peace requires the end of militarised hostilities. As stated by a young person in Azad Jammu and Kashmir:

For me when there is no firing and shelling, it is peace. When children do not become victims of mine blasts in my village, it is peace. When I see my mother going to the fields to collect wood and graze animals, it is peace. When I see children playing in the common fields or grounds then I consider it peace.

Beyond the cessation of overt militarised violence, youth across the case study

contexts described peace as a combination of development and social justice, with peace inextricably linked to prosperity and opportunity. Ogaden diaspora youth described peace as a state where freedom of expression and protection of human rights are realised, where the rights to healthcare and education are assured, and where people live free from fear.

Youth in South Sudan expressed a clear vision of their role as peacebuilders, affirming that:

Young people in South Sudan have a visionary outlook and can imagine a future where change is possible... We have a will and energy to make change happen... We have the potential to mobilise and influence one another... we should use this potential to build peace in South Sudan.

Youth in South Sudan noted that young women in particular can serve as bridges between communities as they are permitted to visit relatives and carry messages to other sides of conflict.

Youth also described peace in more existential terms. In Afghanistan, young people linked peace with the concept of "arami" or calmness, and described how ongoing conflict denies youth the opportunity for tranquillity. Young people in Afghanistan also affirmed that youth maintain a level of credibility that older adults lack.

According to them, after so many decades of conflict, young people were the only ones who had not been involved in the conflict actively, and could thus offer new possibilities.

Youth on the Georgian side noted that there is an expectation that young people can make a change:

In general, the level of trust in and expectations of young people is very high. I have heard from ordinary people that only young people can fix our future. I have often met quite young people in positions of responsibility who do a great job. Therefore, I think that the level of public confidence in young people... is quite high. There are simply internal obstacles in the form of social challenges and limited opportunities. Even so, the youth is quite active... young people are less corrupt.

Create space for youth to engage in political processes

Although Afghan youth who are actively engaged in civil society activities expressed a feeling of being meaningfully engaged in peacebuilding activities, most Afghan youth reported that they feel excluded from peace activities and political processes more generally. Some youth noted that although many of the large political parties have youth branches, they are usually co-opted by the leaders of the party and are not actually places where youth can effectively express their political opinions. This gives the perception that youth are involved, even when they are not.

Youth in rural South Sudan affirmed the importance of their role in their communities:

Youth are included in inter community dialogues because elders know that if they are not, they may disrupt peace efforts through their armed presence in cattle camps. Most decisions are nevertheless taken by chiefs and local authority elders and leaders. Thus, while youth may not be taking decisions, their active participation is often seen to increase the likelihood of sustained peace. Furthermore, because youth are both actors and victims in South Sudan conflicts they are the only capable force to implement the peace agreements.

South Sudanese youth also described the significant role they had played at the end of the conflict with Sudan and the new country's referendum vote:

The South Sudanese youth led the campaign for self-determination for South Sudan in 2011,

and their effort contributed to the 98% of the population voting for separation.

However, they expressed deep regret that youth have been marginalised since the referendum. According to them, youth who have been selected by the government to participate in peace talks do not represent youth in general, but rather:

were just handpicked to speak in the political tone of government rather than represent true youth interests.

In some cases, existing youth platforms are working effectively, and can be further supported. According to youth in South Sudan, there are many youth-led civil society organisations. Through supporting these organisations there is potential to increase opportunities and avenues for youth participation in governance. Youth civil society organisations are close to communities and know how to fill the gaps in development, which are less well understood by political leaders. There were positive fora mentioned by some youth: the South Sudan Youth Forum (SSYF) was mentioned as the platform of the national youth councils and non-governmental youth organisations in South Sudan advancing youth policy and youth development.

Youth in South Sudan described how international and local partners had constructed a wrestling centre for youth, as wrestling is one of the sports admired by many people living in rural areas. The occasion brings together rural, urban and youth from neighbouring communities. The events enable youth to establish good communication and friendship among themselves, thereby reducing tensions and conflicts. Similar events held in the past aimed to create friendship and stop the cycle of violence between two communities. Wrestling matches are also used to pass vital information for youth such as peace messages and HIV/AIDS awareness.

Youth in Gilgit-Baltistan, in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, noted:

There should be an increased focus on mainstreaming the voices of youth in politics, as active participation leads to active community engagement.

Youth in Ladakh, in India-administered Kashmir, noted the success of women's empowerment initiatives for the prevention of domestic violence, including through advocacy with the

government for more women in the police force. In Jammu, the need for increased opportunities for youth participation in politics was also identified.

As noted by youth of the Ogaden diaspora in the UK, youth have been effective in raising awareness about the situation of the Ogadeni people. They conduct advocacy on improved protection of human rights at international fora, as well as targeting messages to the UK government. They build networks with other youth networks both nationally and internationally, and offer support to refugees who have fled the region currently living in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya and other refugee camps across the world.

Youth in Afghanistan expressed a priority on uniting youth going forward:

Individually we cannot do much...we cannot risk our lives individually in these risky situations. We need support from the government and other organisations to organise, campaign and motivate youth involvement in peace and security.

Youth in Kabul seemed more optimistic about the role of civil society and non-governmental organisations in shaping politics in the future, and saw the need for individuals from different tribes and ethnic groups to come together actively.

Youth in Abkhazia felt that young people's potential to bring about positive change should be recognised and facilitated through opportunities to engage with decision-makers:

The youth are the part of our society which are open-minded and capable. When they dedicate themselves to solving problems, they have ideas that would not occur to the older generation. The youth have potential. It is necessary to ensure that the initiative shown by youth has a response. Young people should be given the opportunity to interact with all those in power.

Young people living on the Georgian side noted the positive role that young people are playing in community-level peacebuilding activities.

In neighbouring villages, there are volunteer youth groups. With the help of these volunteers one can work with various government structures and interact with human rights protection centres. [The volunteers] ...are much more active than the staff of these centres themselves. Therefore, the main emphasis should be placed on local resources and on young people.

Facilitate and support dignified livelihoods

Across the case study contexts, youth described their deep preoccupation with ensuring their material survival. Greater economic opportunities are needed, and youth articulated how access to the job market would contribute to motivating youth to pursue peaceful and productive paths in their lives.

According to one group of Georgian youth:

The main concern of both young and older generations is to ensure daily well-being, that is, to find a job, get an education. Only after these problems are resolved will it be possible to increase the youth's interest in resolving the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict... so that they do not have a nihilistic attitude to this issue.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan-administered Kashmir, some participants seemed positive about the potential benefits of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). According to one young person:

The benefit of China Pakistan Economic Corridor seems to be yielding results. I see an exponential rise in tourism in this year.

Other youth in Gilgit-Baltistan drew attention to the positive impact of economic investment on the security situation and the implementation of law and order:

The announcement of CPEC changed our security dynamics in a positive way. We have more presence of law and enforcement agencies. They try their best to maintain the law and order situation.

Youth in Jammu and Kashmir recommended increasing support for youth entrepreneurship initiatives, while young people in South Sudan urged greater investment in infrastructure to be able to reach their markets:

Market development is important: if youth products have markets, youth will be motivated to produce more... there is need to link production to markets by constructing roads and bridges.

South Sudanese youth offered further details:

There is a need for concerted efforts to engage youth in productive work to generate income. If the activities are expanded through provision of seed capital, and training in entrepreneurship, the youth can be empowered to help themselves...

Support education and capacity-building for peace

Another clear policy area for government intervention is the need to prioritise youth access to education.

As stated by youth in South Sudan, opportunities for education are fundamental for facilitating young people's positive engagement in peace:

The positive thing is that youth are embracing education and learning... our outlook to the world is different. We need a good life just like any other youth from peaceful societies. The only sad thing is that there is a huge imbalance in education attainment. Girls are disproportionately disadvantaged. My sister had to be pulled out of school so that I can continue with education [due to financial constraints].

Youth in Afghanistan noted the positive impact of attention to education, with overall education rates having risen significantly, particularly for women. In Kabul and other large cities, participants noted that there are now more private universities and a growing emphasis on higher education.

Youth noted that the provision of more scholarships for youth from underprivileged communities and marginalised areas would represent a significant contribution to peace. As noted by a group of young Azeri women living in Georgia:

The only thing that can ensure us a better future is education... Without education, the country will not have a future.

Attention to the subject matter taught and the skills of teachers was also specified as a priority by youth. Educational institutions should be key places to lead on the reduction of social prejudice, but several young people across contexts noted that peace education and peacebuilding are missing from their school curricula. Across the case studies, youth mentioned the need for a supportive learning environment where they can speak their mind and work through complex issues.

One Abkhaz youth noted that civic education would encourage tolerance of diversity and would allow young people to think more freely:

I think that among the youth there is a low level of tolerance. This may be related to the low standard of education and it is necessary to work towards [improving] education.

A student on the Georgian side noted why reforms of the education system need to include equipping teaching staff with the knowledge and capacities to teach supportively:

I had to deal with violence and bullying in school. The management and teachers are principally to blame... We need to take some effective steps, conduct trainings or organise other events to change the situation, bring teachers and children closer.

Youth urged that the education syllabus teach skills in self-criticism and reflection. According to them, peaceful societies need to be capable of serious self-critical reflection.

Education was itself seen by Ogaden youth as a conflict driver. According to diaspora youth living in the UK, the school curricula in Ethiopia is one-sided and perpetuates narratives that ignore history of conflict and suffering in the Ogaden region.

Youth noted the lack of an overall culture to deal with conflicts and diversity constructively, which is felt in daily life, in school and family environment. According to students, teachers are not equipped to help manage conflict and deal with diversity in the classroom, and in some cases, are part of the problem. As described by one youth in Georgia:

I remember the homophobic and racist remarks made by my teachers... Any schoolteacher who admits even the slightest manifestation of homophobia or xenophobia must be removed from access to children.

Another young person in Georgia discussed the pain of bullying and abuse experienced in school:

My friends and classmates sometimes speak about how they miss school. On the contrary, I remember this period of my life with disgust, because it was in school that I had to endure the most abuse and humiliation, not only from students but also from teachers. There were times when the teacher saw other children mock me, but blamed me for it because I brought it on my own head. I complained to the head master but he also took no action... I was left with a terrible sense of injustice and insecurity.

Youth are eager to support peacebuilding initiatives, but suggest that they need more skills for doing so effectively. A group of displaced youth living on the Georgian side described why some youth are reluctant to engage in peacebuilding work:



Young people take part in a workshop, Srinagar in Indian-administered Kashmir. © Conciliation Resources

Young people themselves are not active enough. Some think that their opinion does not interest anyone, some [think] they do not have enough competence.

As noted by youth in South Sudan:

Without proper training in building peace youth may contribute negatively rather than helping the situation.

Young people living on the Georgian side of the conflict divide expressed the desire for concrete, technical information on how they could engage in dialogue. Training of peace cadres or ambassadors was offered as a suggestion by youth in South Sudan to ensure wider dissemination of peace messages throughout communities using local knowledge in two-way communication:

Youth can combine traditional community dialogues with acquired modern peace facilitating techniques to increase youth participation at local, national and international levels.

Young people also suggested that youth centres would provide opportunities to engage as trainers in peacebuilding and to reach out to other youth. They can create forums of engagement, for example, between parliament

and youth, helping to finalise the national youth policy and to provide the necessary resources for it to be implemented. Only by coming together can youth understand and solve their common problems. Creating a platform is recommended as one of the effective ways of addressing youth problems in the country.

Facilitate inter-community dialogue and exchanges

Young people suggested that to overcome the prevailing trust deficit, it is necessary to engage in meaningful conversations with others in society, especially those who have been directly victimised by the conflict.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan-administered Kashmir, participants highlighted the need for initiatives to improve communal relations.

For me, interfaith dialogues are central to peace and the prevalence of such dialogues play a vital role in bridging the gaps between belligerent communities.

A number of participants in Ladakh, Indian-administered Kashmir, expressed the belief that fostering continuous dialogue between youth of various communities will help in reducing stereotypes and prejudice.

When discussing local conflict resolution mechanisms, youth noted that people try to resolve their conflicts through dialogue and negotiation. Youth in AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan-administered Kashmir, mentioned that traditional Jirga are used, and local elders are asked to mediate between youth when local conflicts arise. In Ladakh, Indian-administered Kashmir, some participants pointed to bodies such as the Leh Autonomous Hill Council, which have a key role maintaining harmony.

Religious leaders were mentioned as important partners to engage with youth in peacebuilding efforts. Youth in Afghanistan noted that some imams and mullahs had been effective at standing against the war, using Friday sermons to preach against violence and serving as a moral voice for the community. Religious leaders are considered to be the only figures who may convince political leaders to become more involved in bringing peace to the country.

University students in Juba recommended that increasing inter-community dialogue requires multiple levels of engagement:

Translating peacebuilding documents into language the rural youth understand; create forums of engagement—for example, between parliament and youth... there is need for facilitated dialogue with security agencies; inclusion of peace education and psycho-social support in schools, for example peace clubs.

With regard to getting involved in the peace process, one Georgian participant observed:

First of all, you need an information campaign about at what stage is the process of peace talks at the moment, about where we are now and where we begin, and about which processes we need to be included in. We must very clearly record our desire to resolve the conflict exclusively by peaceful means, through dialogue, and not by swinging our fists. We need to know the specifics of the work, how to behave at the negotiating table and how to communicate with the representatives of the other side. The position of the state should be expressed very clearly. It should be impossible for the state to have one set of priorities and for us to have another. When we know what principles, and tasks the state is guided by, we will also follow this line.

Bringing in youth from marginalised areas was encouraged across the case studies. Youth on the Abkhaz side underlined the benefits they

would get from physical spaces where young people could come together:

There are few sites where young people from different parts of Abkhazia can communicate and share their impressions. When there is more mutual understanding among our youth, it will be easier for them to communicate outside. I do not see options for such get-togethers. Young people would like to be given the chance to participate in serious youth projects.

Abkhaz youth further articulated a sense of isolation from the outside world, and how a lack of new ideas makes it very hard for them to contribute to the development of their society.

The problems of young people are due to the fact that, during their upbringing, we were in a state of blockade. Young people did not have the resources to receive any information from the outside. We stewed in our own juice. There was no way to learn from the experience of other countries.

However, they were able to glimpse beyond their current confines, expanding their horizons to envision a more hopeful, shared future:

We need to do something to ensure our youth can travel to other countries to gain such learning experiences. We could invite [young people] from other countries here.

V. Conclusion

Conciliation Resources' consultations with youth across the case studies of **Afghanistan, the Georgian-Abkhaz context, Jammu and Kashmir, South Sudan**, and among **Ogaden diaspora youth living in the UK**, have highlighted some of the most pressing concerns for youth today. Although the contexts are highly divergent, there are common themes that young people have raised to be their main concerns.

A central theme is the lack of political space or opportunities for youth to engage in the construction and maintenance of peace. Youth are eager to be involved in supporting peace and development, but generally lack the means or opportunities to do so. Young people expressed frustration at the inability or unwillingness of their leaders to resolve conflict, which they know to be the fundamental prerequisite for any kind of sustained youth development. Corruption and co-option by political elites—who in some cases are considered by youth to be benefitting from the conflict—leave youth feeling side-lined and silenced. Many young people see little reason to continue their efforts to push for the peaceful opening of political space; while some turn their focus to emigrating, others have given up entirely, while still others now consider violence as the only viable pathway to political change.

Along with political inclusion, youth clearly expressed their continuing struggles to achieve dignified livelihoods. They are not asking for aid, but rather the necessary structural conditions to make work possible and to be allowed the means to support their entrepreneurial capacities. They need the opportunity to learn the skills and strengthen their capacities to be able to work, but to do so, they need environments that are just and equitable, where human rights and basic protections are ensured.

Young people highlighted the need for broader reforms of their education systems so that they may be better equipped to support peace and to ensure the respect for diversity. Skills in conflict mediation and inter-community dialogue were also suggested as meaningful contributions to support youth as peace actors.

The potential of social media as a tool for peace was also highlighted. Youth noted its capacity to transcend conflict lines and to build positive communities. However, young people also recounted their experiences in which social media had been used as a tool for hate, abuse,

discrimination and incitement to violence. Much attention is thus needed to channel social media's positive potential and to mitigate its risks: youth should be at the forefront of these efforts.

Although the challenges facing youth were clearly articulated during these consultations, young people are and can be actors for peace. Despite the current trend in international policy to focus on the prevention of extremist violence—a corrosive discourse which 'securitises' youth and portrays them as a threat to be managed—these consultations have shown the great power of youth to act for peace and development. They are often doing so on their own, but need support to realise their impressive vision. It is noteworthy that many of the young people consulted by Conciliation Resources had not even heard of UNSCR 2250. As such, this report has focused on transmitting the voices of young people in their own words, in the hopes that they might be heard by international actors leading on the Youth, Peace and Security agenda.

Conciliation Resources is an independent international organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence, resolve conflicts and promote peaceful societies. We believe that building sustainable peace takes time. We provide practical support to help people affected by violent conflict achieve lasting peace. We draw on our shared experiences to improve peacebuilding policies and practice worldwide.

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