Strengthening Youth Engagement

Many youth are already active in promoting peace and development within their communities, but require additional support in ensuring their voices are heard, particularly at the national and international levels. Based on country case studies on youth engagement in Burma/Myanmar and Tunisia, the following identifies how international peace and development NGOs, bilateral donors and UN agencies can strengthen the inclusion of youth. Many of the recommendations are also relevant for local, regional and national actors.

1. Incorporate youth engagement into existing programming, building on local capacities already in place for youth engagement. The engagement of young people should be more systematically streamlined in international efforts to sustain peace, building on lessons learned from implementing other frameworks for inclusion of marginalised groups, in particular the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

2. Strengthen local civil society efforts more broadly. As civil society is where young people have the most space to be active, for youth engagement to be sustainable, CSOs need to be able to operate without fear of repression. International actors can advocate for civic space in their interaction with repressive governments, support the development of CSO networks and provide physical spaces for them to exchange ideas.

3. Tailor support to reflect various needs and perspectives of distinct age groups. Providing financial and technical support to facilitate knowledge and skills training to young people, in particular older youth, is key to ensuring they feel they can contribute to peace and development processes beyond their participation in youth organisations and take on leadership positions with other CSOs or jobs in other sectors.

4. Take concrete steps to engage youth who are particularly vulnerable to exclusion. More time and effort is needed to consult in person with young people, especially in rural areas and within other marginalised communities. In contexts where it is difficult for international actors to reach those most vulnerable due to travel restrictions or security concerns, collaboration with local initiatives and partners is needed.

5. Facilitate peer-to-peer exchange and inter-generational dialogue. The international community can facilitate sharing of successful examples of youth engagement from other country contexts and facilitate exchange with youth from different countries. Physical spaces such as libraries and youth centres, as well as regular meetings, are also needed to promote dialogue and understanding among youth, and between youth and policy makers, traditional and religious leaders, families, civil society, private sector, governments and security sectors.
6. **Support initiatives that provide youth with knowledge and skills training.** International actors should support efforts to build knowledge and capacity among young people on peace and development and political processes, project management, advocacy, communication and navigating the political system, as well as provide vocational training on skills needed for employment. Support of efforts to train teachers—within informal and formal education—on incorporating dialogue and conflict resolution in curricula is also critical.

7. **Use social media strategically, recognising and mitigating their drawbacks.** Social media can be used in schools and libraries as a learning tool in areas where youth may not have access to technology at home. Proper monitoring by law enforcement and civic groups—while ensuring free speech and respect for privacy—is needed to ensure that false information is not spread and that young people are not subjected to violence in the form of intimidation, hate speech, threats and bullying by other citizens or state institutions.

8. **Ensure that young migrants, refugees and diaspora have opportunities to engage in host communities as well as their ‘home’ countries; support reintegration of those who return.** Opportunities should be provided for youth to engage in host communities through schools and universities. For those who return to their country of origin, the international community should work with national governments, CSOs and the private sector in reintegration efforts.

9. **Strengthen cooperation and coordination mechanisms, integrating humanitarian, development and peace efforts and mitigating duplication or gaps.** More effective regular meetings between international and local peace and development organisations working to promote youth engagement are needed, allowing actors to jointly discuss strategies and to take joint actions.

10. **Reform funding structures to enable support to smaller youth initiatives, including at the community level.** Donors should develop flexible funding mechanisms and instruments, combined with technical support, to allow for small-scale grants to youth-led grassroots organisations and networks with little management experience while also finding ways to mitigate high transaction costs. Information on funding opportunities and application forms should be disseminated in local languages, using less technical terminology and ensuring that reporting requirements do not create undue burden. Where feasible, financial and technical support to CSOs should stipulate the inclusion of youth as a funding requirement.