



NARRATIVE RESEARCH REPORT

Youth Consultations on Peace and Security: Findings from Focus Group Discussions and Individual Interviews Including Hard to Reach Youth in Niger

Informing the United Nations Secretary-General's Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security
and the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2250.

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The content of this report does not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations.



Acronyms

FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
HACP:	Haute Autorité à la Consolidation à la Paix
ILT:	Institutional Learning Team
KII:	Key Informant Interview
PBSO:	United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office
SCR 2250:	United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250
Search:	Search for Common Ground
UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund
YLR:	Youth-Led Research
YPS:	Youth Peace & Security

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Context

In 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security. The resolution requests the Secretary-General of the United Nations to “carry out a progress study on the youth’s positive contributions to peace processes and conflict resolution, in order to recommend effective responses at local, national, regional and international levels.”

In 2017, Search for Common Ground held consultations with youth in Niger in order to inform the Secretary General’s Progress Study. These consultations will feed into international policy-making discussions and push forward locally-rooted solutions to the multidimensional conflict dynamics affecting the country, and the wider Sahel. While a lot of research has been conducted on peace and security questions in the Sahel, they often lack the direct consultation of youth who, in Niger, represent 70% of the population, and are therefore essential to better understanding the challenges to peace and security. The current report presents results from research conducted in Niger with youth from the Diffa region (South-East Niger), the Tillabéri region (North-West Niger) and specifically Niamey (Niger’s capital).

1.2 Objectives

The consultations sought to achieve three key objectives:

1. Highlight global and regional trends affecting Niger’s peace and security, as identified and experienced by young people;
2. Provide youth-oriented and locally-rooted solutions to these challenges; and
3. Understand Niger’s experience of youth engagement in peace and security issues and share lessons internationally.

1.3 Methodology

The research in Niger was a youth-based research, where the researchers were young active Nigeriens implicated in all steps of the project. Youth-based research is a powerful tool for youth empowerment and engagement, and for inquiry contributing to improved understanding of community issues.

During this research, two main groups of youths between 18 and 30 years old were targeted: (1) youth that actively participate in their communities and (2) hard to reach youth: youth that are further marginalized by their communities or by social status, gender, or stigmatization and/or that have faced additional hardship. A total of 18 Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were held with the active youth and 19 Key Informant Interviews (KII) were held with hard to reach youth. These consultations took place in nine different localities. In the Tillabéri region: Ayorou, Tillabéri town, Ouallam, Balleyara and Niamey. In the Diffa region: Maïné-Soroa, Diffa ville, Geskéro, and Toumour in Bosso. These activities targeted 135 young people, of which 116 active youth and 19 hard to reach youth. It is important to note that the active youth

are still youth in hard to reach, remote and conflict-affected zones. Equal weight was given to responses from the two different categories of youth.

1.4 Findings

Peace and Security Challenges Affecting the Youth Consulted

Youth identified that economic insecurity, the effect of inadequate security measures and the marginalization of voices are key barriers to peace and security. The youth consulted had all been affected by violence and/or conflicts yet, all rejected the use of violence. They did however, understand and explain why some youth would turn to violent activities. Quick economic gain, ignorance and a response to injustice were the main explanations.

Peacebuilding and Violence Prevention Activities by the Youth

Youth identified themselves mainly as awareness raising actors, but also identified various peacebuilding and violence prevention initiatives or activities in their communities that were youth-led. Many of these initiatives were initiated by youth associations or organizations that sought to strengthen social cohesion.

Factors Preventing and Encouraging Youth Involvement in Building Peace

All respondents thought that their role in their community and as peacebuilding actors was important. Yet, this importance is not recognized by the rest of the community or the authorities. This in turn negatively affects their will to participate but also the impact of their actions. Official youth associations are created but lack the capacity to sustain themselves, shedding a negative light on the real potential of young people. This in turn is also at the cost of positive peacebuilding efforts. While many factors prevent youth involvement in building peace, an important finding that encourages youth is the one of cohesion and solidarity between youth.

Enhancing Youth's Contribution and Leadership in Building Sustainable Peace

In order to enhance youth's contribution and leadership in building sustainable peace, youth need to be and feel included in decision-making processes. They also need to feel that their initiatives and activities are recognized. Moreover, youth associations need to be strengthened to enhance their longevity and impact. This research has however also showed further potential risks and segmented social cohesion as youth's frustrations of constantly being marginalized keeps on rising.

Gender Analysis

There are three main trends that can be noticed in regards to the women consulted. (1) Young women are faced with different types of violence than men are – cases of being forced to marry a Boko Haram members are recurrent; (2) Young women participate differently than men in their communities – women tend to have more informal roles; and (3) Young women seem to be more resilient to recruitment by violent and/or violent extremist groups.

Regional Analysis

The main differences between Diffa and Tillabéri are: (1) Hunger and the lack of proper nutrition plays a more important role in Tillabéri; (2) There is a greater feeling of frustration with the authorities and

international community in Diffa than in Tillabéri; (3) The relations and the level of interaction with the community is better in Diffa than in Tillabéri; and (4) The group of Niamey showed a greater dissatisfaction with the government. For current and future programing, the regional differences need to be taken into consideration as these strongly impact the effect of peacebuilding initiatives.

1.5 Recommendations

Finally, in order to learn from this research and report, a list of 5 different recommendations were developed for different actors within Niger:

1. Increase youth representatives in decision-making positions;
2. Revise security measures in cooperation with youth;
3. Support youth initiatives;
4. Increase economic security; and
5. Increase capacity development initiatives for youth.

2. Context

2.1 Project Context

In December 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2250 (SCR 2250) on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS). SCR 2250 recognizes the important and positive contributions of youth in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, affirms their critical role in the prevention and resolution of violent conflicts and stresses the importance of empowering young men and women as contributors to the sustainability of peace rather than stereotyping them as victims and perpetrators of violence.¹ The resolution also urges Member States to increase inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels, as well as in institutions and mechanisms to prevent and resolve conflict and counter violent extremism.

The resolution requests the Secretary-General of the United Nations to “carry out a progress study on the youth’s positive contributions to peace processes and conflict resolution, in order to recommend effective responses at local, national, regional and international levels.” The study, co-led by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), is designed as an independent, evidence-based research and operational report that will propose a forward-looking agenda for the international community.

As part of the Progress Study’s participatory research process, consultations with youth in all regions of the world were commissioned in order to document youth’s - women and men’s - involvement in peace and security issues. The results of this process will feed into the Progress Study.

In 2017, Search for Common Ground (Search) conducted research activities in five countries to support data collection for the Progress Study in Burundi, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria and Tunisia. The research in Niger is funded by PeaceNexus. The current report presents results from research conducted in Niger with youth from the Diffa region (South-East Niger), the Tillabéri region (North-West Niger) and specifically Niamey (Niger’s capital). In an attempt to be inclusive of a diversity of voices, including those seldom heard in global policy consultations, the research targeted youth who actively participate in their communities (“active youth”), as well as youth who are less involved in mainstream life and activities - either out of their own will and/or as a result of their social exclusion from mainstream society due to social status, gender, and/or that of having to face additional hardships (“hard to reach youth”). In addition to being considered excluded from their community, “hard to reach youth” are also harder to reach in terms of development programming targeting youth.

2.2 Country Background

The Central Sahel is increasingly affected by growing tensions, ranging from illicit trafficking to the sporadic attacks led by violent extremist groups (including but not limited to Boko Haram militants), community level conflict and massive population displacement.² Bordered by unstable countries sharing

¹ Source: Secretariat for the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security (2017).

² Source: International Crisis Group (2015), The Central Sahel: A Perfect Sandstorm. Retrieved from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/niger/central-sahel-perfect-sandstorm>

porous borders and weak institutional structures, Niger faces increasing social, economic and security challenges, which have cast a shadow over its capacity to tackle deeply rooted grievances, which have the potential to escalate in the upcoming months. Specifically, the security situation in two regions (Diffa and Tillabéri) continues to degrade as a result of repeated attacks by militant groups, the rise of community level conflict and the resulting social implications of fear, distrust and eroding social cohesion and resilience. Such a context continues to undermine the foundations for peace and stability in those regions but also at a national and sub-regional level.

Along the Lake Chad Basin, the Diffa region of Niger, which borders North Eastern Nigeria, is a crucial epicenter of the sub-region. Since 2015, recurrent attacks from Boko Haram militants, targeting both civilians as well as security forces continue to take place in both rural and urban Diffa. This violence, coupled with the military response, continues to result in further population displacements, stricter security measures and increased scrutiny of the population from the authorities and within the community. Diffa itself is isolated from the capital Niamey, and population centers within the region of Diffa are remote and difficult to access, which contribute to a climate of mistrust, fear and economic hardship. The climate of mistrust is primarily between community members (including but not limited to the youth and the rest of the community) and between the community and authorities (including security forces). Moreover, the region now faces the inherent risks associated with an ungoverned territory sharing a porous border with zones principally controlled by Boko Haram.

Over 1,400 km west of Diffa, the Tillabéri region has also emerged as a region displaying nascent signs of large-scale instability. The Tillabéri region, which houses the capital, Niamey, and borders North Eastern Burkina Faso and Central Mali, has become the home of thousands of Malian refugees. In addition, in recent months, the region has also experienced intensified attacks by unidentified militants who targeted the police and gendarmerie forces, refugees and civilians. Due to an increasingly deteriorating security situation the region was placed under state of emergency in March 2017. The region now has similar security measures as those applied in Diffa, which include the restriction of population movements and the closing down of public spaces to try and reduce the risk of mass attacks in urban and rural centers.

2.3 Research Context

Niger has one of the most dynamic demographics in the world, with more than 70% of the population under the age of 30. In 2015, the median age in Niger was at 14.9 years old. The insecurities and peace and stability challenges in the country have posed challenges to development and the inclusion of youth in society. Facing high unemployment rates and remaining excluded from main decision-making positions, youth are now also stigmatized due to the rise of violent extremism. There is a polarization between the youth and the rest of their communities. Even if Niger's Youth Development Index score has improved since 2010 (due to an increase in political and civic participation) the country still ranks as one of the lowest countries in 2016 and is 180th out of 183 countries. For employment and opportunity, Niger ranks 182nd, between Yemen (181st) and Iraq (183)³. All of this is creating frustrations and grievances among

³ Source: The Commonwealth (2016): Global Youth Development Index. Retrieved from: <http://cmydiprod.uksouth.cloudapp.azure.com/sites/default/files/2016-10/2016%20Global%20Youth%20Development%20Index%20and%20Report.pdf>

large segments of the population. Yet, youth's potential, if harnessed, represents a key - if not vital - opportunity for Niger to develop sustainable foundations for peace.

In its effort to include youth, the government developed the national youth policy in 2011. The objective of this policy is to “promote the insertion of youth in social and cultural life and in economic activities, by developing education programs and by supporting initiatives for socio-economic integration”.⁴ This includes the creation of the National Youth Council and its various divisions at the regional, departmental and communal levels. Similarly, one can speak of the framework of consultation of youth associations, an initiative of the Ministry of Youth and Sports in partnership with UNICEF, which also has representations in each region of the country. Furthermore, the peace committees have been set up in the regions by the Haute Autorité à la Consolidation de la Paix (HACP) with youth representatives within them.

However, the multiple fragilities affecting the country's social and economic structures have still enabled the rise of violent extremism, economic and social instability and the polarization of certain groups. This in turn has consequences on youth as they are the main group being stigmatized, especially vulnerable and marginalized youth. There seems to be no effective management of this issue affecting youth, which has led to severe unemployment and has increased their vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist groups.⁵ In order to avoid this, more must be done for meaningful youth engagement on these issues.

In September 2017, Search held consultations with youth in Diffa, Tillabéri and Niamey in order to inform the Secretary General's Progress Study. These consultations will feed into international policy-making discussions and push forward locally-rooted solutions to the multidimensional conflict dynamics affecting the country, and the wider Sahel. While a lot of research has been conducted on peace and security questions in the Sahel, they often lack the direct consultation of youth who, in Niger, represent 70% of the population, and are therefore essential to better understanding the challenges to peace and security. When youth are consulted, the ‘hard-to-reach’ and marginalized youth are almost always not part of this process. Understanding the entirety of youth's perspective is essential for the development of relevant and effective solutions. The consultations sought to achieve three key objectives:

1. Highlight global and regional trends affecting Niger's peace and security, as identified and experienced by young people;
2. Provide youth-oriented and locally-rooted solutions to these challenges; and
3. Understand Niger's experience of youth engagement in peace and security issues and share lessons internationally.

⁴ Information retrieved from [Youth Policy Factsheet](#) of Niger.

⁵ Source: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2017): Conflict in the Sahel region and the development consequences. Retrieved from: <http://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/23474/b11580410.pdf?sequence=3>

3. Methodology and Description of Research Activities

3.1 Objectives and Key Research Questions

The **overall goal** of this qualitative research is *to document young women and men's understanding and perspectives of the main drivers of violence in their respective communities; how issues of peace and security have affected them; opportunities they have for engagement in these issues; provide recommendations from youth to address key conflicts in Diffa and Tillabéri and share their vision of sustainable peace at the local and national level.* It also seeks to understand how favorable conditions targeting youth, can encourage their greater participation and leadership in peace and security, including decision-making and implementation processes. To ensure that this research was as participatory and inclusive as possible, the methodology had a strong youth-led approach to it. Youth were considered as partners at the different stages of the project and the research, data collection and analysis were youth-based.

In order to achieve the overall goal, four specific objectives and research questions were developed in order to take into account the various pillars of [Resolution 2250](#) (Prevention, Participation, Protection, Partnership, Disengagement and Reintegration) and to contribute to answering the main questions of the Progress Study.

SO1: Understand the main challenges of establishing sustainable peace and security in Diffa and Tillabéri, and how this affects the lives of young men and women in and beyond target regions (at the local, regional, national and global level);

SO2: Highlight the factors that prevent and promote young men and women from contributing to peace and security structures;

SO3: Understand what type of youth-led initiatives and projects exist to prevent violence and conflict and how they can be supported;

SO4: Draw recommendations from youth to strengthen the contribution of young men and women to building lasting peace and preventing violence, but also how their government, institutions, civil society organizations, media or the international community could help to support them in these efforts.

Four main research questions were the following:

- What are the main peace and security challenges that young women and men face, and how do these impact their lives (locally, nationally, regionally or globally)?
- What factors prevent or inhibit the involvement of young women and men in building peace and contributing to security? And what factors could promote and support young people's active involvement in building peace, preventing violence and contributing to positive social cohesion in their communities, societies and institutions?
- What are the peacebuilding and violence prevention activities, initiatives and projects being undertaken by young people, and what is their impact?
- What do young people recommend to enhance the contribution and leadership of young men and women to building sustainable peace and preventing violence? Do they have particular views on

how their government, State Institutions, civil society organizations, media or the international community, could help to support these contributions?

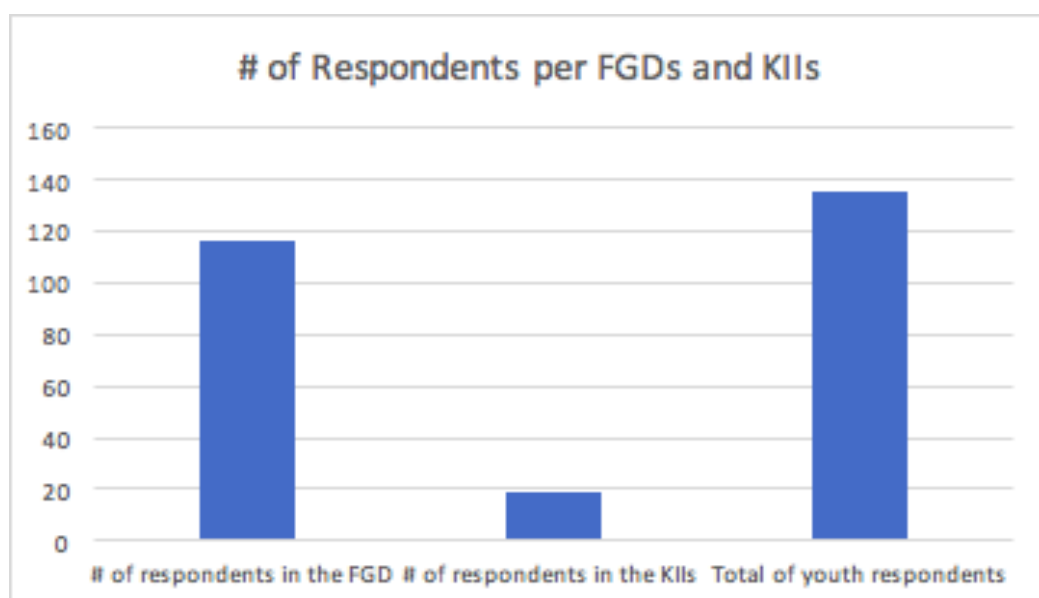
3.2 Data Collection Tools

Two different data collection tools (see annexes) were developed in accordance with the research questions and the content of SCR 2250. One tool was explicitly developed for the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and the other for the Key Informant Interviews (KII). Both tools were based on the same research questions, but with different objectives. The guide created for FGDs intended to find a common group response and to initiate a discussion between the different respondents active in their communities. The guide created for KIIs sought to initiate discussions with individuals hard to reach.⁶ These tools were examined and approved internally by Search's Institutional Learning Team (ILT) and the Children & Youth Division.

In order to ensure that there would be no translation nor comprehension problems during the data collection, the tools were translated into Hausa and Kanouri with the data collectors during the training of youth researchers.

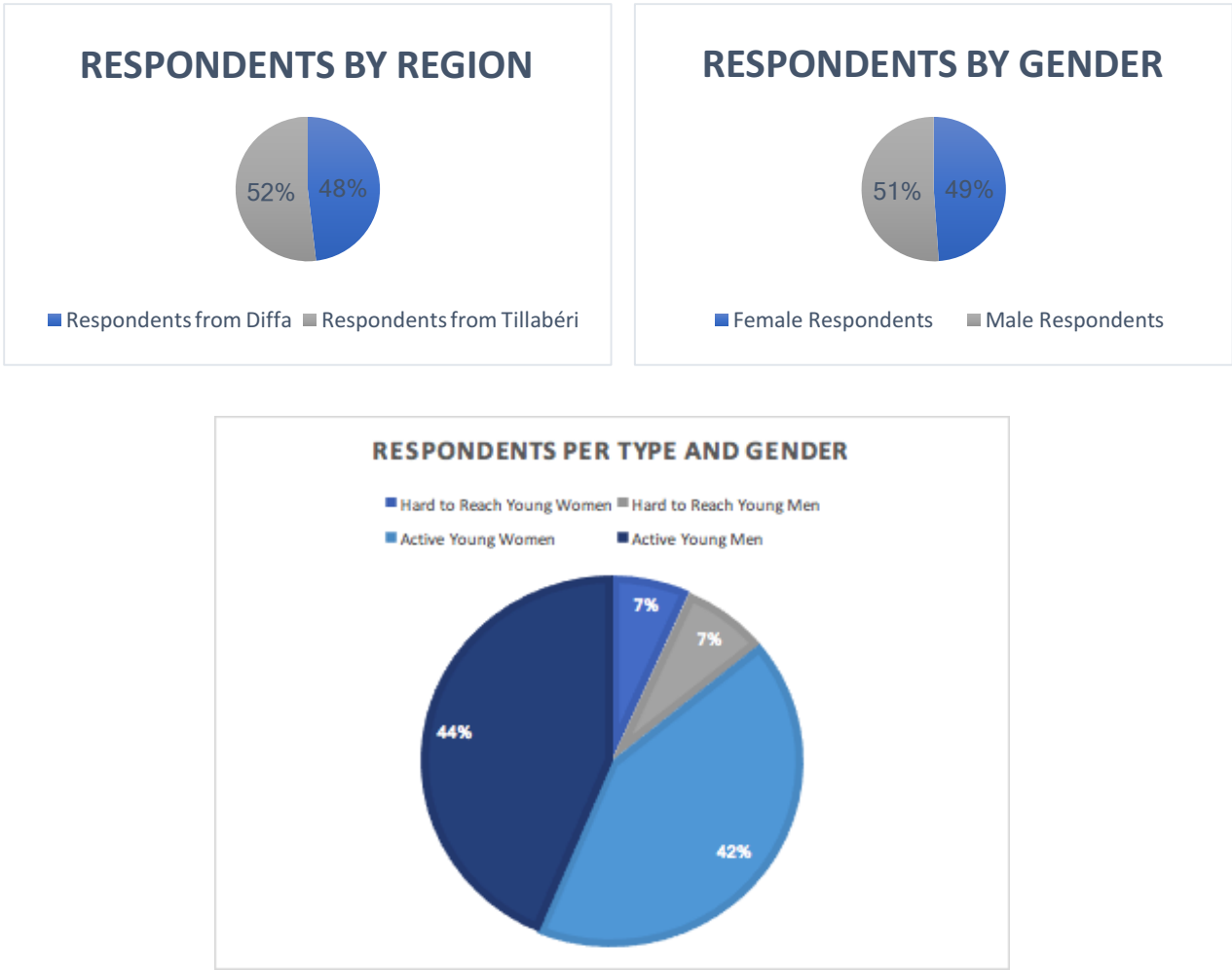
3.3 Data Collection Activities

A total of 18 FGDs and 19 KIIs were held in the nine different localities. These activities targeted 135 young people, including 116 active youth and 19 hard to reach youth. It is important to note that the active youth are also youth in hard to reach, remote and conflict-affected zones. FGDs and KIIs had the same weight during the analysis. While FGDs had more participants than KIIs, FGDs provided a group response and not six to eight individual responses.



⁶ This group of participants is explained more in detail further below in the 'Youth Targeted' section.

51% of the respondents were male (69 male respondents in total), and 49% of the respondents were female (66 female respondents in total). 52% of the respondents were from the Tillabéri region (70 respondents in total) and 48% of the respondents were from the Diffa region (65 respondents in total). Finally, 44% of the respondents were active young men (59 active young men respondents in total), 42% of the respondents were active young women (57 active young women respondents in total), 7% of the respondents were hard to reach young men (10 hard to reach young men respondents in total), and the final 7% of the respondents were hard to reach young women (9 hard to reach young women respondents in total). Each category of respondents and activity is further explained below.



A. Youth Researchers

Youth based research is a powerful tool for youth empowerment and engagement, and for inquiry contributing to improved understanding of community issues. Search's approach to youth based research is based on the Listening & Learning research and interview methodology. The methodology is specifically designed for research led by youth and relies on natural conversations as an exchange of information between both parties. This method also increases the access to communities and marginalized populations.

Youth researchers were identified through our contacts with local youth associations and selected on the basis of their involvement in their communities, education level and experience in data collection. The youth researchers then passed a small written assignment where they were tested on their knowledge concerning youth involvement in peace and security issues and their writing skills. In order to ensure the quality and the depth of the data collected, the youth researchers and their supervisors took part in a 3-day intensive training. During the training, the research, the research objectives and methodology were explained in depth to the youth researchers. The youth researchers also had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with and participate in the finalization of the data collection tools, and carried out test interviews and focus group discussions.



Photo 1: Two youth researchers from the Tillabéri region of Niger are shown taking notes from a focus group discussion with their peers.

B. Youth Targeted

During this research, we targeted two main groups of youths: (1) youth that actively participate in their communities (hereafter referred to as active youth) and (2) hard to reach youth: youth that are further marginalized by their communities or by social status, gender, or stigmatization and/or that have faced additional hardship. These youths are hence less involved in mainstream life and activities – either out of their own will and/or out of mainstream society’s exclusion of them. Out of the main networks, they are also harder to reach by development programming and international organizations that work with youth. This distinction was made, as active youth are more often consulted, yet it is important to include even the most marginalized and hard to reach youth who are often forgotten. The personal stories of some of the hard to reach youth we have had the opportunity to consult are briefly outlined hereafter.

Young Man #1	Has seen close family members and friends leave to join Boko Haram.
Young Man #2	Was beaten up by a group of people during the night, was not helped by the local authorities and has been stigmatized by it.
Young Man #3	Refugee from Nigeria, who is excluded by the community as he is perceived as a foreigner.
Young Man #4	Suffered from violence by security forces and was put in prison.
Young Man #5	Has seen close family members and friends leave to join Boko Haram, due to security measures he has no job or revenue anymore.
Young Man #6	Lives in constant fear of attacks or being brutalized by security forces and wants to leave.
Young Woman #1	Has directly suffered from physical violence.
Young Woman #2	Was victim of a forced marriage, decided to return to her family’s home after a week as she did not wish to stay with her ‘husband’. She was rejected by her own family and had to try to find refuge in surrounding localities.
Young Woman #3	Refugee from Nigeria, her brother was kidnapped.
Young Woman #4	Was forced to marry a Boko Haram member, yet she refused to leave with him. She and her family have been under constant threats from Boko Haram.
Young Woman #5	Has suffered from harassment from men.

C. Focus Group Discussions

FGDs comprise of a group of 6-8 carefully selected individuals with similar characteristics – in this case, active youth. The FGDs targeted groups of female and male youth between the ages of 18 and 30 from culturally diverse, educational, social, economic and linguistic backgrounds who are active youth leaders engaged in groups or local associations. 12 open-ended questions were predefined to highlight respondents' perception and experiences. This was key to meet the research objectives. In addition, the FGDs aimed to stimulate rich discussions. The FGDs were based on the desire to communicate on certain problems, perspectives and opinions.

In each locality, 2 FGDs were held, one with men and one with women. A total of 18 FGDs with 116 respondents took place throughout 8 zones in 2 regions (Diffa and Tillabéri). Discussions took between 90 and 120 minutes on average. The questionnaires were translated during training into local languages to ensure that wording of the questions would not lose any significance. Moreover, this ensured that there would not be any misunderstanding by respondents or youth researchers.



Photo 2: The photo above shows a focus group discussion with young women from the Tillabéri region. To respect privacy and security concerns, the photos were modified to ensure anonymity.

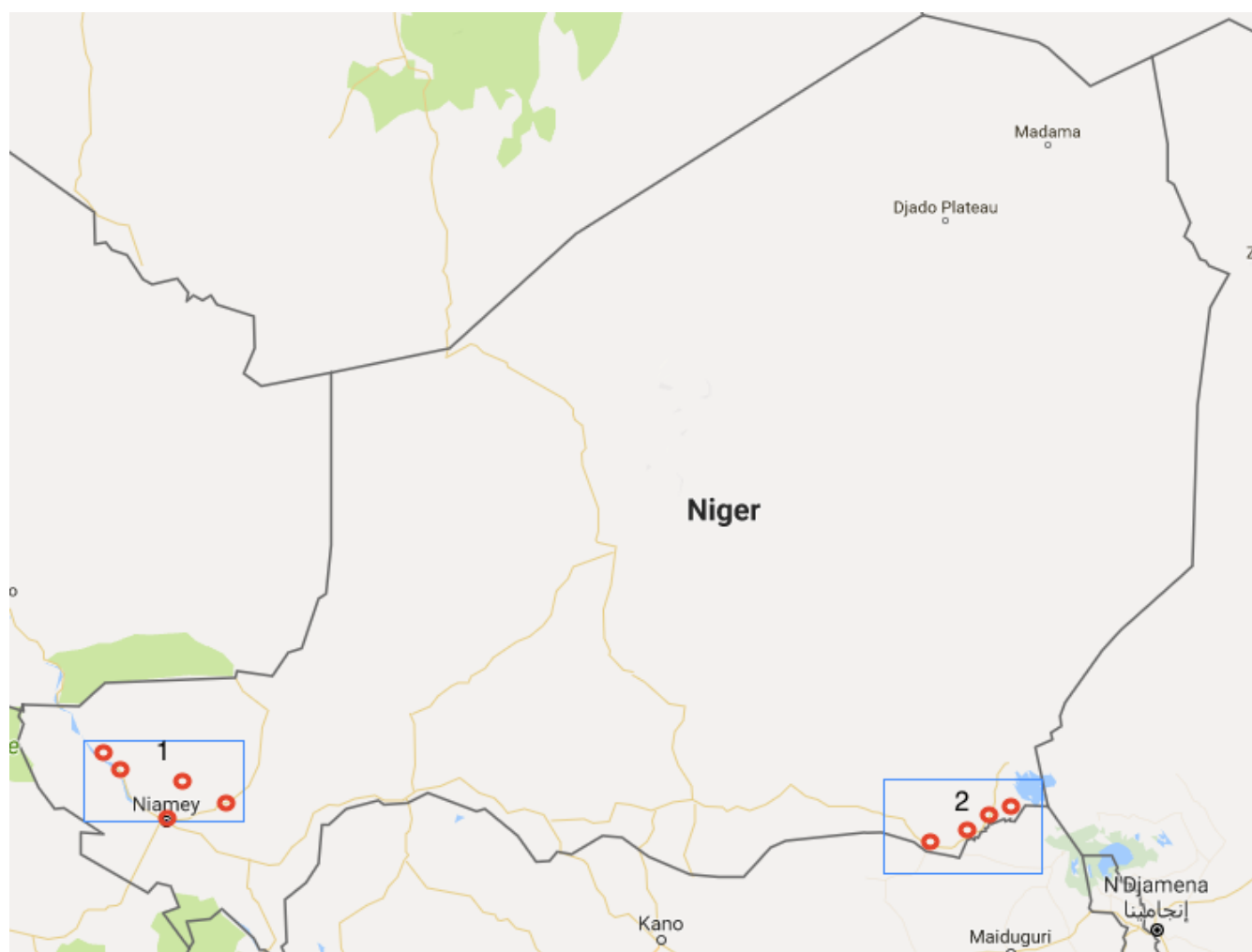
D. Key Informant Interviews

KIIs are essential in gathering in-depth information about a particular topic or context. They were deemed especially useful to understand motivation, behavior and perspectives of a specific group of youth. In this case, KIIs targeted hard to reach youth as they were directly affected by violence and conflict and / or excluded from the community. The reason why hard to reach youth participated in the KIIs and not the FGDs is that the nature of their situation was much more sensitive, and under group pressure it was unlikely that these youth would participate actively, openly and freely. The interviews were also conducted with youth researchers who were provided with 9 predefined questions. There were two KIIs per locality targeted – except for Maïné-Soroa, where there were three. In total the KIIs targeted 19 people. The questionnaires were translated during training into local languages to ensure that wording of the questions would not lose any significance. Moreover, this ensured that there would not be any misunderstanding by respondents or youth researchers.



Photo 3: The photo above shows a key informant interview with a young woman from Tillabéri region. To respect gender and cultural norms, these interviews with young women were carried out by young women researchers. This approach often results in respondents feeling more comfortable to express themselves.

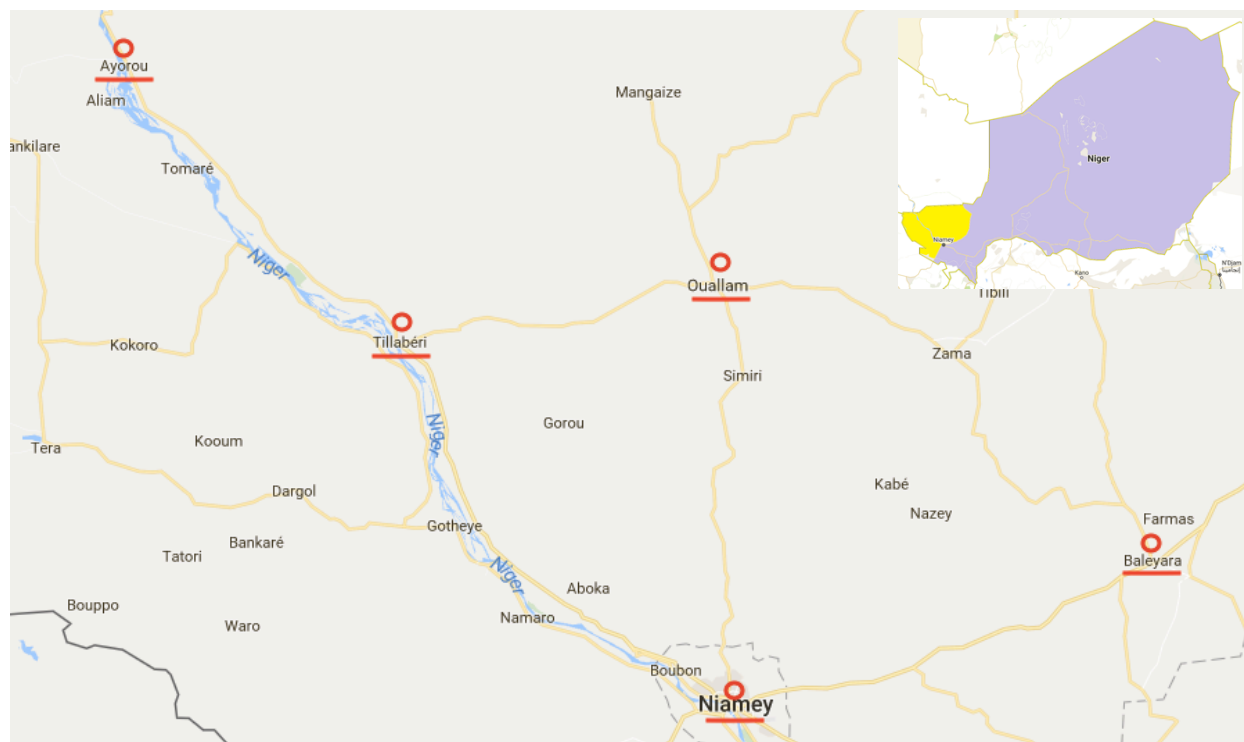
E. Geographic Scope



Map 1: The zones covered in the study are Tillabéri (box 1) and Diffa (box 2).

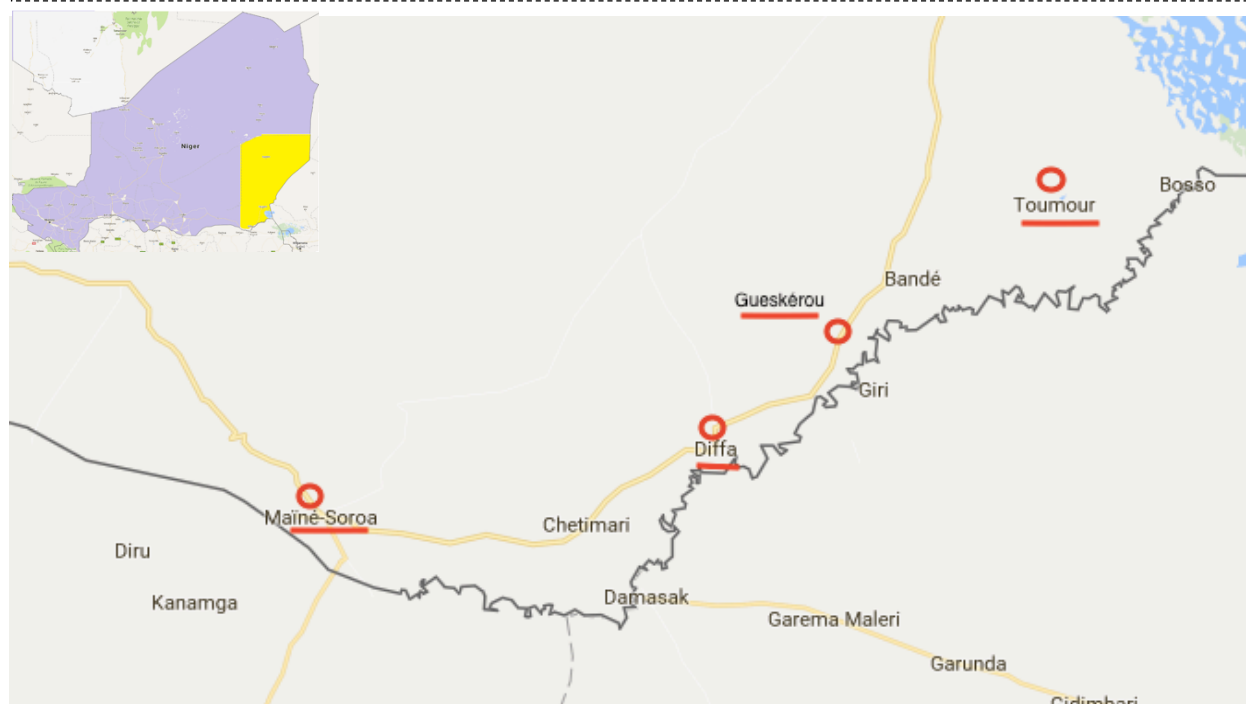
Box 1 - Tillabéri: 4 key localities across the Tillabéri region. We targeted youth from rural and peri urban zones affected by sporadic and ongoing instances of insecurity, but also those zones affected by the ensuing socio-economic effects of that instability. We targeted from West to East Ayorou, Tillabéri town, Ouallam, and Balleyara.

Box 2 - Diffa: 4 key localities across the Diffa region, targeting zones most affected by the social, economic, and security related effects of the ongoing Boko Haram Insurgency: Mainé-Soroa, Diffa ville Geskéro, and Toumour in Bosso. The relevance of these zones is rooted in the fact that many of the disenfranchised youth who become involved with Boko Haram have come from these zones. At the same time, these zones are also some of the hardest hit by violence resulting from the insurgency as well as the state military response. While already marginalized communities before, these dynamics add another layer of desperation in terms of insecurity and in the lack of service provision and opportunity.



Map 2 (above): shows the target zones in Tillabéri. The region faces significant challenges in security largely resulting from porous borders with its neighbors and the influx of armed criminal and extremist groups.

Map 3 (above): shows the target zones in the Diffa region. Over the past few years, the security landscape in Diffa degraded significantly as a result of Boko Haram insurgency and the subsequent military response and humanitarian emergency. This instability is accentuated in the zones along the border with Nigeria.



Niamey: Niamey is not a region targeted specifically, as it falls in the Tillabéri region, yet we targeted the capital in order to understand if there were any differences between youth groups in Niger's most conflict-affected areas and the capital. While the information coming from the Diffa and Tillabéri regions provide insight from youth living in very context-specific conflict environments, the youth from Niamey provide more inputs from the perspective of youth in an urban setting that allow to make comparisons on the different perspectives. This allowed us to determine if there are similarities and differences in the feedback so as to enable us to present a more rounded 'global perspective' as well as a context driven one.

The data was collected during a period of two days: 8 – 9 September 2017.

Region	Diffa				Tillabéri					
Location and timeframe	Geskérou	Diffa Town	Toumour	Mainé-Soroa	Ayorou	Ouallam	Tillabéri	Balléyara	Niamey	Total
Number of FGDs	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	18
# of Female respondents (18-30 years)	9	4	6	8	6	6	6	6	6	57
# of Male respondents (18-30 years)	8	6	7	8	6	6	6	6	6	59
Number of KIIs	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	19
Female respondents (18-30 years)	1 (19 years old)	1 (19 years old)	1 (25 years old)	1 (23 years old)	1 (22 years old)	1 (19 years old)	1 (20 years old)	1 (age unknown)	1 (21 years old)	9
Male respondents (18-30 years)	1 (28 years old)	1 (23 years old)	1 (27 years old)	2 (27 & 25 years old)	1 (18 years old)	1 (31 years old)	1 (18 years old)	1 (29 years old)	1 (28 years old)	10
Total of youth respondents	19	12	15	19	14	14	14	14	14	135

3.4 Approach

The research was designed by Search's team in Niger, reviewed by ILT and the Children & Youth Division within Search. Moreover, it was reviewed by the HACP in Niger.

As mentioned above this research had a strong youth-led component, which included designing the research around youth empowerment and engagement. For this research, the team used components of Search's Youth-Led Research (YLR), which is as a programmatic approach that can engage youth in peacebuilding, strengthen their leadership skills, and help them build stronger relationships with members of their community. Due to time limitations, the research could not encompass all of the elements of YLR, which include testing tools, extensive training of 4 to 5 days and feedback sessions with data collectors. These dimensions were implemented but not enough to have a complete YLR. However, the findings generated by this specific approach aimed to have a positive impact on youth and their relationships in their community. This was proven in Niamey as one of the youth researchers felt so inspired by the approach and the research that he said he felt compelled to set up an NGO or association to promote the role and responsibility of marginalized youth in promoting a culture of peace, security and conflict prevention.



Photo 4: The youth research team in Diffa, shown above consists of a group of youth partners and their trainer. The team includes young men and women who possess linguistic and cultural knowledge of the diverse groups living throughout the region. These include Hausa, Kanouri, and Fulfuldé languages.

There was a team of two youth researchers per targeted locality. This team was made of one male and one female researcher. Each team was supervised by a research professional. The youth researchers were selected based on their age (between 18 and 30 years old), their level of involvement (active within youth organizations/associations) and their level of experience in research. The youth researchers were identified and selected through local youth associations. The youth that were selected to participate in the research in the different localities were identified and selected through the Président Communal de la Jeunesse

(President of the Communal Youth Council) of each locality in the Diffa region. In Tillabéri, a key partner contacted people in each locality to help us identify and select the youth.

The team consisted of 18 youth researchers and five supervisors. Within the Search team, a Monitoring & Evaluation Coordinator was responsible for supervising the research and coordinating the data collection in Diffa and Tillabéri. She was supported by a research supervisor in Diffa and Tillabéri.



Photo 4: The photo above shows the youth research team at the SFCG offices in Niamey after the research training. The research team covered interviews in both Tillabéri and Niamey. The young men and women on the research team come from the larger Tillabéri region and speak both Zarma and Hausa languages.

3.5 Data Analysis

Throughout the data collection, and with the participation of the youth researchers, the data was analyzed. Debriefings were held after each day with the youth researchers, and the notes were consolidated per team with the constant supervision and technical guidance of the supervisors. In Diffa, a template was given to the youth researchers so that they could analyze the data while trying to answer the broader research questions and objectives. At the end of the data collection, each team gave a general overview of how the data collection went, who the respondents were and what their preliminary impressions and observations were. When they presented the data collected, this was then discussed with the group. Finally, the data was validated by all the teams. These discussions also sparked interesting and lively discussions between youth researchers on the issues at hand. The data was further analyzed by the Monitoring and Evaluation

Coordinator, through content analysis and comparison in order to produce the findings and the report while trying to answer the larger research questions. The findings were analyzed and compared, considering gender and location, while also being processed for themes, patterns and deviations between the different regions.

3.6 Limitations

Overall the data collection went well, all the FGDs and KIIs that were planned were held, and the minimum targeted youth were reached. A major limitation for the study is the lack of sufficient time. Having more time to build trusting relationship with the harder to reach groups of youth would have led to more fruitful and in depth conversations. The lack of time has influenced the study in a certain number of ways:

- Certain FGDs, especially those with women in Diffa, were not as dynamic as we had hoped. This could be due to the lack of trust of the respondents, in several cases they mentioned that they had seen many organizations come by but did not see any change. Many of the respondents were reluctant or too shy to answer a question, and often as one would answer all would immediately agree. The lack of discussion or participations of women made it difficult to go into the depth on some of the issues discussed;
- A similar observation was made during the KIIs with the women in the Tillabéri region where it became very difficult to engage with the respondents. In certain cases, the discussions were very difficult to have and the researchers could not build enough trust with the respondents. In extreme cases, the researchers decided to try to find another respondent. Moreover, certain respondents did not ‘know’ the answers to the questions, as they said that they had never thought about these issues. However, this was not the case with the KIIs with the young women in Diffa. The conversations held one on one with the youth researchers were more fruitful than those in Tillabéri.
- Certain questions in the data collection tools did not spark the level and depth of information we were looking for. Certain questions were ‘too closed’ for respondents to elaborate on. In certain cases, this influenced the type of answer received as the respondents did not feel comfortable sharing information that might spread a ‘negative light’ on them.
- The study was not able to disaggregate the analysis further by age as initially intended. This was due to the fact that during the FGDs the age of the 116 respondents was not noted. Only the age of the 19 KII respondents was noted.

As a result, we were not able to have data that would demonstrate the differences per gender and age in the different regions.

4. Findings

The findings analyzed are organized into the following sections: (1) Peace and Security Challenges Affecting the Youth Consulted; (2) Peacebuilding and Violence Prevention Activities by the Youth; (3) Factors Preventing and Encouraging Youth Involvement in Building Peace; (4) Enhancing Youth's Contribution and Leadership in Building Sustainable Peace; (5) Gender Analysis; and (6) Regional Analysis. These sections match the previously mentioned research questions and research objectives.

4.1 Peace and Security Challenges Affecting the Youth Consulted

A. Understanding of Peace, Security, Violence and Conflict

In order to introduce the topic of peace and security challenges that affected youth, we asked the respondents what the concepts peace, security, violence and conflict meant for them. This provided a basis to continue the different consultations but also allowed us to have an insight into how the youth across different areas understood these concepts.

Across the different regions, youth in FGDs and KIIs defined the concept of *peace* as: (1) peace as a life without violence, conflict and war; (2) peace as social cohesion and peaceful coexistence; and (3) peace as overall tranquility. In addition to these three definitions, the youth in Tillabéri also added that peace also means to have enough food and a job that would provide for their needs.

When asked what the youth of different regions understood as being *security*, on the one hand respondents in Diffa (FGDs and KIIs alike) highlighted elements of protection. On the other hand, respondents in Tillabéri, pointed out that security for them meant physical health, well-being and tranquility.

The majority of youth respondents in the FGDs and KIIs understood *violence* as the use of physical or verbal force onto someone without his or her consent. From their perspective, this also includes humiliation, insults, fights, abuse of power (including from security forces) and threats. As a young woman mentioned during a KII in Maïné-Soroa: “[Violence is] *to humiliate a person*.” During a FGD with young men in Gueskéroù: “[Violence is] *weakening the physical and psychological integrity of mankind*.” In some FGDs, respondents also indicated that poverty and hunger were forms of violence. As the women in the FGD from Ouallam added: “[Violence is] *hunger, unemployment and poverty*.”

Young Woman's KII in Maïné-Soroa:
“[Violence is] *to humiliate a person*”

Young Women's FGD in Ouallam:
“[Violence is] *hunger, unemployment and poverty*”

Young Men's FGD in Gueskéroù:
“[Violence is] *weakening the physical and psychological integrity of mankind*”

The majority of youth respondents in the FGDs and KIIs understood *conflict* as a divergence of opinions and a disagreement between people.

Peace	Security	Violence	Conflict
A life without violence; Social cohesion and peaceful coexistence; Tranquillity.	Protection; Wellbeing and Tranquillity.	Use of physical or verbal force; Poverty and Violence.	Divergence of opinions; A disagreement.

Even if the definitions of the concepts peace and conflict do not highlight any new dimensions and fall within the same understanding of the peacebuilding community, this is not the case when discussing and defining security and violence. The youth mentioned their physical health and well-being in relation to food, nutrition, hunger and poverty when talking about security and types of violence. These aspects, often forgotten by peacebuilding initiatives, recall that peace and security issues include working on addressing basic physical needs such as the necessity of food. In addition, these definitions imply that addressing poverty as systemic and structural violence is necessary. Discussing the meaning of these concepts with the youth is an important dimension for the rest of the conversations and the recommendations. It helps us understand what youth regard as important when discussing broad peace and security issues, which is a key objective of the consultations.

B. Main Peace and Security Challenges

The discussions further developed into a deeper understanding of what were the main peace and security challenges in Niger according to the youth consulted. From all the FGDs and KIIs the peace and security challenges identified can be grouped in three main themes: (1) economic insecurity, (2) the effect of inadequate security measures and (3) the marginalization of their voices.

Economic insecurity was mentioned several times throughout all the discussions as being the main peace and security challenge in the country. The youth are unemployed and poverty is rampant. This causes youth to join violent criminal and/or violent extremist groups. During a FGD with young women in Ouallam, a respondent stated that: *“the main challenges of peace and security in Niger are: poverty, lack of employment, hunger, and bandits that offer a lot of money to recruit young people.”* The youth mentioned that they are approached by ‘friends’, or people they know who joined such a group, who then ask them to join. They are offered money in return. They also see these people leave and come back ‘better off’ (with money and pride, or the ability to ‘show off’). They consider joining these groups as a way to have some economic security. Similarly, during a FGD with young men in Tillabéri, they stated that: *“poverty and the lack of employment, injustice, corruption and insecurity leads young people into rebellion.”* It wasn’t clear from conversations with youth whether those who had joined violent extremist groups had considered other options than rebellion, and why alternative options were not available, known or trusted at the time. During the 18 FGDs and 19 KIIs, the respondents used the terms ‘poverty’, ‘lack of work’ and ‘unemployment’ on

one specific question (“what are the main peace and security challenges”) 40 times. These terms and the vocabulary surrounding economic security are present in almost all questions and conversations. This suggests that, whether it is through the wish for economic gain or a certain rebellion, one cannot ignore economic security as in this context it was identified as what drives youth to violence. This implies that when discussing overall peace and security and the different conflicts, economic security should be an integral part. Youth clearly showed that they cannot be fully and successfully engaged in the peace and security framework if their economic security is not considered.



Number of times 'Poverty', 'Lack of Work', and 'Unemployment' were mentioned as the main peace and security challenges

During the FGDs and KIIs, respondents also believed that certain **security measures** put in place following the Boko Haram insurgency or other violent activities (e.g. state of emergency) were causing harm and even *insecurity*. Even if the respondents understood that security measures were needed, most of them did not view the extra security measures put in place as

providing more safety. A group of young women in Ayorou explains why: *“The lack of solidarity and support between ourselves and the community today is worse, with the state of emergency and patrolling where the security forces scam citizens.”* Accounts of abuses of power by security forces and the lack of cooperation between security forces and the local population are the causes of insecurity. This leaves the youth fearing of the security forces instead of feeling protected by them.

When we asked one respondent if he had experienced violence, he mentioned an altercation with security forces: *“Yes, I have faced violence. I was selling my fried chicken during the evening, and I missed the curfew by 10 minutes and the military patrol hit me and put me in prison for the entire night. I received a fine of 40,000 Francs. I can’t forget that day”* (KII with a young man in Maïné-Soroa in the Diffa region). Some men added during the FGD in Ayorou that: *“The state of emergency, the fear of the police and their injustice towards us, their use of force and aggression even against witnesses, their lack of trust in us, the authorities who do not inform or involve us in decision-making.”*

Young Men’s FGD in Ayorou:

“The state of emergency, the fear of the police and their injustice towards us, their use of force and aggression even against witnesses, their lack of trust in us, the authorities who do not inform or involve us in decision-making”

Young Women’s FGD in Ayorou:

“The lack of solidarity and support between ourselves and the community today is worse, with the state of emergency and patrolling where the security forces scam citizens”

Respondents also reported that security measures had a negative impact on the different economic opportunities youth have at their disposition to try to make a living. For example, motorcycles were a

very used means of transportation influencing several businesses in the Diffa region. Due to security measures, driving motorcycles is no longer allowed. This decreased economic opportunity and the revenue of youth, creating in turn more insecurity. This is just one example of the many policies preventing youth of ensuring their livelihood.

The increased security measures have had two effects. First, they impacted the lives of youth drastically as they sense a lack of freedom and a lack of economic opportunity/well-being. Security measures increased their economic insecurity (as certain jobs/economic activities were stopped). The overall feeling of the youth in the different regions is that they are restrained by security measures that are not helping their economic, social and political integration. Second, it has negatively impacted the cohesion between security forces and youth: For example, there are reports of abuse. What makes it worse is that youth were not considered nor consulted while putting these security measures were being put in place, and the measure ended up affecting them negatively. This in turn creates a divergence between youth and the security forces. Consulting with young people would allow them to feel respected, propose ideas on advantages and disadvantages of different security measures and to have a say in decisions that directly affect them.

Besides economic security and the effect of inadequate security measures, the youth also mentioned that their **marginalization** was also a major peace and security challenge in Niger. The overall feeling was that there was not only a lack of social cohesion within communities faced with ethnocentrism, but that there is no synergy between the government, the authorities and the local population. This in turn results in the youth's frustration and deception. Corruption was often mentioned, as well as the fact that the political and administrative system does not take into account youth's needs and opinions. Young men from Ayorou noted that: *"No because we are not listened to, they [the rest of the community] do not give us time [understand space] to expose our needs. The community and the authorities do not collaborate with us, they do not integrate us unless it is in their selfish interest, but between us [youth] we understand each other."* The measures and policies that might be taken by the government are often seen as 'de facto' not in the interest of the youth and/or their communities. Meaning that, from the perception of the youth, the real peace and security issues are not being resolved. This implies that even if the governmental authorities do try to take steps to include youth the divergence between the two groups is so large that it is not considered and/or recognized. Extra steps encouraging a greater confidence and trust building between the two groups are thus needed.

C. Why Do Some Youth Choose Violence?

Even if the respondents shared their frustrations, it is important to note that none of them saw violence as an acceptable option. Yet, they did give explanations of why some youth take part in violence. This included acting on self-defense; responding to injustice; the use of

Young Man's KII in Diffa:

"Young people chose violence due to lack of employment, lack of patience, poverty, ignorance especially when you do not feel supported by society"

drugs which pushes them to a violent behavior; uneducated youth that lack critical thinking; the built-up frustration; ignorance; and manipulation. One participant interviewed during the KIIs in Diffa, who was considered “hard to reach”, explained that *“young people chose violence due to the lack of employment, lack of patience, poverty, ignorance especially when you do not feel supported by society.”* As many youth mentioned several factors which may drive them to violence, it is often a combination of factors and built-up frustration that seems to explain the choice of violence. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, youth take part and join violent groups because of an economic and financial need. During a KII with a young man in Ouallam in the Tillabéri region he said: *“the need for easy gains. There’s a clear difference.”* This meant that joining violent activity provided much greater economic gains than what youth would get from other non-violent activities. From these consultations, it seems that the easiest solution for youth to have a better economic situation would be to join violent activities. This seems to touch on a systemic issue, that needs to be addressed, concerning youth in Niger as their perceived opportunities for success outside violent activity is small. It is important to note that one should not generalise this information: even if in this research youth explain that one could take part in violent activities because of economic reasons this is not the only reason. Conflict sensitivity and context should always be understood.

D. Personal Experiences with Violence

We asked the youth if they had been affected by violence and all the respondents, even the active youth, said yes. Some respondents, especially those in remote areas, experience violence first hand. In addition to the physical abuse from security forces that was already mentioned it is important to note that women faced another type of violence: forced marriages. A young woman hard to reach in the Diffa region mentioned that she had been married by force to a Boko Haram member: *“one of my uncles who is in Boko Haram had even married me to someone from Boko Haram. I refused, but he still managed.”* As she refused to follow her ‘husband’ (that is to leave her parental home and live with him), she and her entire family received threats forcing her to flee and go into hiding. Another young woman in the Diffa region, was also married by force this time not to a Boko Haram member but to a man in her community. After refusing to stay with her husband she was rejected by her family. Women from Tillabéri did not mention forced marriage but rather noted that they lacked protection, sharing that they could not do anything if bandit members approached them.

Many respondents added they suffered from stigmatization from society because they are considered as the cause of the overall violence and conflicts in the regions. Youth mentioned that they suffer from violence based on negative stereotypes of youth. In Ayorou, the group of young men added during the FGD that *“violence always affects us, we are always victims of injustice, when there is a crime, we are constantly tortured, imprisoned and fined instead of or with the real criminals”*. This testimonial illustrates the situation that affects youth: Because some of the youth do take part in violent activities, when there is a crime, any and all of the youth present at that moment are often regarded as guilty. This implies that youth are not only vulnerable to violence due to the insecurity (ex. Boko Haram, physical abuse) but they are further subjected to an overall broader violence and stigmatization because of the simple fact that they are youth. This creates a lot of frustration because as the next section will show, not all youth are part of violent activities and all of the ones we consulted had resisted adopting violent alternatives.

4.2 Peacebuilding and Violence Prevention Activities by Young People

A. Awareness Raising Actors

All respondents thought that their role in their community and as actors in peacebuilding was important. In the Diffa region, they explained their role was to represent and defend the interest of youth, highlighting issues that they face. Most of the FGD respondents in Diffa are members of youth associations and saw their role within their communities as awareness raising actors. The youth all saw their role as awareness raising actors very seriously, and observed that their initiatives and their positive roles help the community's resilience and cohesion. Even if no specific impact could be reported, the youth consider and perceive their cultural and sport initiatives as important. It is a way for them to prove to their communities that they can and want to participate through initiatives that spread an important message of social cohesion. It is a way for them to create stronger communal links and integrate everyone.

The respondents in Tillabéri answered similarly to this question, they did see themselves as awareness raising actors and mediators in their communities, yet without being part of formal youth associations. In one FGD they explained how they contributed to making the market place a safer place while supporting the security forces – showing that cooperation between security forces and youth is possible. In the FGDs in Tillabéri and Diffa, youth also acknowledged how they could contribute to social cohesion through social activities.

The answers and opinions from the KII respondents were more varied on this subject. Most of the participants thought they had a good relationship with their communities but defined it as a dependent one where they required help from other community members. One-third of the participants said that they had never even tried to participate in any peacebuilding initiative (whether officially or unofficially). This was to be expected as the KII respondents were hard to reach youth, marginalized and excluded from their communities.

B. Peacebuilding Initiatives

Youth in both regions, Diffa and Tillabéri, further identified various peacebuilding and violence prevention initiatives or activities in their communities that were youth-led. Many of these initiatives were initiated by youth associations or organizations such as Ka Koulou, Kintcha Yindi Namlewa, or Diffa Shawa in Diffa. In Tillabéri there were also other specific initiatives such as UAM (where students organise activities to create awareness on peace and security and of socio-political issues in the country), RESCUAO (which is the West African Network on UNESCO – this regional network regroups students that want to integrate state institutions), and MOJEDEC (the 'Mouvement des Jeunes pour le Développement de l'Education Citoyenne' has initiatives such as capacity building of youth in maintaining peace, and conflict management).

Aside from official associations, many of the youth-led activities are unofficial and involve youth regrouping in Fada's or informal groups. As mentioned earlier, these groups of youth individuals stated that they acted as awareness raising actors with their peers and organized cultural or sports events. There are no specific trends between the official and unofficial, however the youth do not limit themselves to one or another. Young men can be members of Fada's – as Fada's are for men – whilst also being part of associations.

Next to the official associations and different youth groups, the consultations showed that the youth believe that the spiritual dimension is important. Several consultations revealed that the youth give financial contributions to marabouts.⁷ For example, in a FGD of young women in Gueskéro, the women stated that: *“We make small contributions to give to the Marabouts, for them to implore Allah to have peace and stability in their community.”* Religion and spirituality are thus also ways through which the youth want to engage when it comes to consolidating peace. This factor should be considered in programming.

4.3 Factors Preventing and Encouraging Youth Involvement in Building Peace

A. The Lack of Recognition of Youth’s Role

Even if the youth perceive their role in their community as something that is important and mention examples of what they do, this importance is overall not recognized by the rest of the community or the authorities. They state in the FGDs and KIIs that the lack of support they received from the leaders and authorities is the main element stopping them from achieving their dreams and aspirations. The overall feeling of the respondents was one of abandonment from the government. A young man mentioned during the KII in Ayorou *“we are not considered nor informed in any decision-making process.”*

Young Man’s KII in Ayorou:

“We are not considered nor informed in any decision-making process”

Young Woman’s KII in Ayorou:

“There is no communication between us, even less support so that even if you have a problem thinking about the fact that they can help you would be dreaming. Everybody only about him/herself”

We asked the youth respondents whether they were satisfied with the level of interaction or exchange between themselves (youth) and the rest of the community. Youth respondents in Diffa (except for two groups of young women) highlighted that the overall feeling was that the level of interaction was sufficient and positive, a good interaction. Some respondents mentioned that because they were parents themselves the interaction with the community was good and reciprocal. Parenthood seems to provide a certain status to the youth as members of their community that youth without children do not seem to have. However, not all respondents shared this feeling, as some youth say that they interact with the rest of the community but it does not seem to be a reciprocal process as they do not receive any consideration for their activities.

Young women feel abandoned and neglected from their communities. During a FGD in Diffa a young woman mentioned *“no, sincerely we are abandoned and left aside, we are put in the second margin of the population.”* The respondents from Tillabéri also mentioned that they were unsatisfied with the level of interaction with the communities. They even mentioned that when there was interaction they felt as if they could not speak the truth. *“They consider us as vagabonds”* said young men from a FGD in Balleyara. In Niamey, the feeling of dissatisfaction was even larger as the group of young men said: *“Those who lead us want to keep us in poverty and unemployable, the old ones take our girlfriends in marriage, we are not*

⁷ A Marabout is a Muslim religious leader and teacher. The marabout is often a scholar of the Qur'an, or religious teacher.

satisfied with the interaction, the oldest ones swindle us (morally and financially). These old men constitute an obstacle, they have had their time and refuse to leave.”

Some youth do not let the exclusion stop them, but others experience it as a strong deterrent. Especially in Tillabéri the youth respondents saw their initiatives in vain as the community or the authorities do not consider them. A group of young women in Tillabéri stated: *“No, we have not attempted to participate as women in one way or another in building and maintaining peace and security in our community. We do not have time to get together, and wealthy people probably will not have time for these things. In short, we never thought of that.”* A young woman hard to reach in Gueskéro (Diffa region) mentioned that: *“I wanted to try one way or another (to participate) but unfortunately, I am not considered because I am nothing in their eyes, in a word I am poor.”* Youth try to participate, but the lack of support and structures to include them negatively affects their initiatives and their potential impact. Frustrated, youth may feel pushed to abandon their efforts to contribute positively to peace and security.

B. Formal Associations/Organizations Are Struggling

As seen in the previous section, research participants’ engagement in peacebuilding and violence prevention activities mostly takes place in informal ways. Formal associations or initiatives in their regions are not necessarily more successful nor are they recognized or supported more by the respective communities. During the FGD in Ayorou, the men added *“yes, we are very committed even, since we volunteer community actions in the greater interest without remuneration; but since we have no voice it is difficult, we are not considered.”*

“Yes, we are very committed even, since we volunteer community actions in the greater interest without remuneration; but since we have no voice it is difficult, we are not considered” - Young Men’s FGD in Ayorou

The lack of recognition and effective functioning of formal associations is what pushes youth to stay in informal roles, and mostly be awareness-raising actors. This in itself is not something negative, but it does limit their ability to also be formally part of civil society, join broader networks, or be integrated in other official settings, such as eventual formal consultations or decision-making processes. It could also make their contribution less visible beyond immediate circles of action. Yet the formal associations are not functioning as well as wanted. It was mentioned that a lot of official youth associations are created, and in the first weeks they flourish and have a lot of members, however the momentum is not sufficient to keep the associations functioning. Within weeks, members lose interest as they see no ‘return’ on their own investment and leave. They do not seem able to sustain themselves fully. This in turn has two effects. First, the youth-led initiatives are not functioning as well therefore do not attain their own objectives in terms of peacebuilding. Secondly, this could potentially have additional negative effects on the perception of youth-

led activities by other community/governmental entities. Other stakeholders may be less inclined to consult with youth-led organizations if they perceive them to be struggling and short-lived.

C. Cohesion between Youth

Youth perceive themselves as marginalized from the rest of the community as well as in opposition to certain authorities. They are faced with very difficult life situations and often with violence. Yet, an important matter stood out from the different consultations that should not be forgotten and that also encourages youth to participate in peacebuilding activities: there is solidarity between youth. While there can be tensions between youth, the overall sensation is one of solidarity. Especially because they know that they are all in the same ‘situation’. Peacebuilding actors and other entities should build upon this to create greater cohesion between all groups in communities.

4.4 Enhancing Young People’s Contribution and Leadership in Building Sustainable Peace

A. The Need for Inclusion

Youth want to be taken into consideration. This is one of the main elements that the FGDs put forward in regards to what the youth would need to help them enhance their contribution and leadership in building sustainable peace and preventing violence. The youth say they want to be listened to, and supported by local and national authorities. More precisely, the youth, whether in Diffa or Tillabéri, hard to reach or active, are asking authorities and international organizations to support the creation of jobs, or other income-generating activity. A group of young women also stressed that their role in the workforce needed to be considered. They shared that as women, they are often not considered when organizations or authorities set up initiatives to increase work opportunities or professional trainings. If they are considered in certain initiatives, they are trained in one specific area (e.g. sewing or another area perceived as a woman's profession), and do not get as much liberty or choice in choosing the professional career they would want to pursue (compared to the men).

Furthermore, as noted previously the security measures put in place and the relationship between security forces and the communities are having negative effects on social cohesion and the security situation itself. The youth recommended a better cooperation between youth and the security sector, and to involve youth in the different decision-making processes around security.

B. Support to youth-led initiatives

To help enhance their contribution and leadership in building sustainable peace, youth ask that their organizations receive greater support, in different forms. Men during the FGD in Diffa said: *“We mainly seek their financial and material support, listen to our proposals and take them into account.”*

“We mainly seek their financial and material support, listen to our proposals and take them into account” - Young Men’s FGD Diffa

Youth also request that the government or international organizations support and train them in conflict prevention and management in order for them to be able to successfully contribute to sustainable peace in the different regions. Furthermore, they believe that capacity building in awareness-raising would be key as they would be able to spread non-violent messages through their localities. The ultimate goal would be to create a space of discussion between youth and authorities, where their opinions are taken into account.

C. The Importance of Working with All Types of Youth (Risk of Deficit-Based Approach Programs)

This research also showed further potential risks. It was noted that youth might at some point lose patience and be driven to be at odds with the rest of their community and authorities. This frustration in turn is also fueled by the fact that the government and international community is perceived as helping people who had committed crimes, or had joined Boko Haram, more than the youth who had done nothing wrong. They see this as a serious injustice. A young man from Diffa added during the KII that *“we continue to see ex-inmates with job created by the government while we are struggling, there will be some consequence”*. There was a very strong ‘us’ [those who have done nothing wrong] and ‘them’ [the government/authorities neglecting us] narrative during the consultations. This is also evidence that current programming and communications around this programming are facing some backlash. The deficit-based approach programs by governments, NGOs, or the international community (working with convicts, former combatants, etc.) is no doubt important but leaving other youth who are in the middle of the spectrum makes them feel left behind. Despite living in very difficult situations, the young people consulted have not turned to violence, even if so many in their community have. This resistance to violence is strength in which to invest.

“We continue to see ex-inmates with job created by the government while we are struggling, there will be some consequences” - Young Man’s KII Diffa

Moreover, during the validation of the data collected, further discussions were held with the youth researchers in Diffa on this exact topic. The youth researchers felt very strongly about this matter. They also mentioned a certain frustration towards the international community in Diffa not recruiting enough locals from the region and supporting the regional economy. There was a strong sense of frustration that NGOs made people come from the capital to do a job (driver, guard, or other similar position) that a person from Diffa could just as well be doing. Careful consideration should be given to this type of dynamics that erode trust between young people and different organizations. Contribution of young people to peacebuilding requires collaboration between all actors. Such collaboration cannot be developed or strengthened in the context of a trust deficit.

4.5 Gender Analysis

In order to fully understand the potential differences between young men and young women during the consultations, a gender analysis was effectuated during the analysis of the data. There are three main trends that were noticed in regards to the women consulted. (1) Young women are faced with different types of violence than men are – cases of being forced to marry a Boko Haram members are recurrent; (2) Young women participate differently than men in their communities – women tend to have more informal roles; and (3) Young women seem to be more resilient to recruitment by violent and/or violent extremist groups.



Photo 5: The photo above shows a youth led focus group in Tillabéri with young women. Due to cultural and contextual circumstances, all of the focus group discussions with women participants were led by young women to ensure that participants felt comfortable speaking about hard hitting issues.

In the case of the young women being married by force to a Boko Haram member, she said that she lived in fear of being harmed or taken at any moment. Only the women talked about violence that women and girls suffered because of their gender.

“Yes, we are affected differently. Everyone suffers personally from violence, such as rape, torture etc.” - Young Women’s FGD in Toumour

The FGDs in Diffa also stressed this point as they stated: *“Yes, we are faced with violence because men beat their wives, and girls are raped by civilians and security forces. It makes us sad and frightens us. It is even the reason why we can’t fully participate in some situations.”* The women further explained that they considered any and all gender based violence towards any individual as violence against all women. There is a lot of solidarity between young women, which should not be overlooked. The young women are faced not only with the same insecurity and violence as young men, but they also have to face gender-based violence (an analysis made from the FGD in Niamey). This implies that the insecurity in conflict-affected and fragile areas is worse for women as they have to face other forms of violence and risks to their own security, and is linked to their ability to participate in peace and security activities.

Young women, especially in Diffa, tend to have a **different role** regarding peace and security issues in their communities than young men. Young women tend to stay within the realm of informal awareness raising actors. Young men tended to mention other roles and activities (e.g. cultural and sport events they organized). Young women mentioned as an example that they would regroup between themselves and support each other. The exact implications and reasons why women might not have the same role as men were not specified during the different consultations, but seem clearly linked to the persistence of gendered roles in Niger, and the fact that women were given less access to decision-making and influence in their community.

The FGD in Gueskérou in the Diffa region was specifically dissatisfied with the level of interaction with their community as they said: *“There is no good interaction between young women and the rest of the community as they are not considered.”* The group also stated that their voice as young women is not taken into consideration, and their contribution to peace and security is not taken into account. Within this setting, a little less than half of the women we consulted mentioned that they were unhappy with the level of interaction or communication with the rest of their communities. This shows that women want to have more and better interaction with their communities.

Finally, it was noted that in the Tillabéri region, there was an overall sensation that young women - compared to young men - would be less ‘influenceable’ by other youth or groups to take part in violent activities. However, some respondents from Diffa did mention that women would follow their husbands and join Boko Haram because of love. The overall perception is that young women seem to be more **resilient** to voluntary recruitment of violent or violent extremist groups. A young woman from Balléyara stated during a FGD: *“there is a difference [between men and women to why they take part in violent activities] as men are more tempted than women.”* While findings cannot be generalized beyond the populations interviewed, further in depth research and analysis of why women would be less tempted to join violent activities should be considered and analyzed as it could be an important factor of community resilience.

4.6 Regional Analysis

Even if throughout the report, differences between the different regions were mentioned, the following summary will provide a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of what the regional differences between Diffa and Tillabéri are. The main differences identified are: (1) Hunger and the lack of proper nutrition plays a more important role in Tillabéri; (2) There is a greater feeling of frustration towards the

authorities with the youth in Diffa than in Tillabéri; (3) The relations and the level of interaction with the community is better in Diffa than in Tillabéri; and (4) The group of Niamey showed a greater dissatisfaction with the government.

During the different consultations, **hunger and the lack of proper nutrition** for one's physical well-being was extensively mentioned in Tillabéri, including it as a form of violence toward people. This is not at all what is observed in Diffa. It could be that the actual level of 'hunger' or lack of proper nutrition is the same in Diffa, however it was not discussed as being a major problem. This is a difference that should be further explored with research participants to understand the exact role hunger and the lack of proper nutrition play in peacebuilding for them.

In Diffa, there was a **greater frustration** (and potential risk) of youth feeling set aside. The Diffa region has seen the presence of international organizations increase. Yet, the youth have not seen their situation improve. They noticed that prisoners and ex-Boko Haram members were receiving a lot of attention and help whereas they are not. Moreover, the international community is perceived as recruiting people from other regions instead of supporting the local economy and hiring youth from the region. This is an important finding that has implications for current and future programming and trust building between youth and international organizations.

This frustration in Diffa however has not negatively affected the relations and level of interaction between youth and the community. During the consultations, **the relationship** between the youth and their communities is perceived/explained as better in Diffa than in Tillabéri. The youth also stated clearly that they were part of the community, the dissatisfaction lies with other organizations and not necessarily with the community. There seems to be a bond and a sense of social cohesion between the youth and the community as the youth felt that even if they are marginalized the community does understand them. These dynamics could be explored further to better understand how to leverage them and also to understand how to strengthen social cohesion in other regions.

In Niamey, the respondents, mainly those from the FGD seemed to be more vocal about specific **dissatisfaction with the government**. The youth in Niamey are closer in proximity to the different national governmental institutions and seem to have a more precise understanding of the system and the responsibilities of the government. In a comment on what the major challenges were in Niger a list of challenges directly linked to the government were given. During a FGD with young men in Niamey, a respondent stated that: *"conflict of interest at political level; ethnocentrism; clanism; regionalism; injustice; despotism; business; poor governance; unemployment (being a time bomb); natural resources are managed in obscure ways; inability of the state to end terrorism."*

Different regional dimensions should not be underestimated as they affect the outcome of programs and policies, especially in the case of peacebuilding initiatives.

4.7 Further Research

Due to time constraints, there were several limitations to the current study. The research could not include further consultations of other community members' perception of youth as actors in peace and security and as leaders in the community. These perceptions could have an exponential value to enrich the data collected here and further understand how the community feels about youth and their roles in peace and

security. This additional exploration could help identify opportunities to work on greater acceptance and recognition of youth by the community and promote collaboration. Such acceptance and recognition emerged as a critical element for the young people consulted.

Further in depth research is also advised with hard to reach youth. Taking more time to personally identify hard to reach youth will ensure that we speak and consult those who have never been considered. Building up a trusting relationship, especially in these cases, between the interviewer and interviewee with each respondent is key in understanding their opinions and perceptions, and making the interviewee feel comfortable to truly open up. It would also be important to identify the main challenges that hard to reach youth of different age groups face, how they respond and resist to violence, and what their preferred ways of interaction are. This could contribute to better inform age- and context-specific programming.

Women's activities to build peace were largely informal, and are therefore less visible. Additional research with young women could identify the benefits and disadvantages of this informal status, and reflect on how to better highlight their contribution and support their work without negatively affecting their security.

The research findings have different potential implications. These can be shared and validated with the young people consulted, as well as other people, in order to further understand motivations and develop more detailed solutions.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Increase Youth Representatives in Decision-Making Positions

National and local authorities should increase youth representatives in decision-making positions at all levels. Systems of consultations and follow-ups between authorities and youth representatives should be set up. Reporting of such processes should be made regularly by an independent organization. These reports should detail the different consultations and the follow-ups that have taken place to measure the level of inclusion of the youth and the effect this has. The consulted youth mentioned the need for true policies that would include and take into consideration youth in the decision-making structures.

Cooperation and trust building activities between the authorities and youth should be organized so that there is a greater sense of cohesion and trust between the two groups. The authorities have previously set up mechanisms for better inclusion, yet as the research shows there is a lack of trust between the youth and the authorities.

5.2 Revise Security Measures in Cooperation with Youth

Security forces and authorities need to revise security measures, as they are currently contributing to a greater dissatisfaction, insecurity, and marginalization of youth. This concerns current security measures as well as all future security-related decisions (this is also linked with the previous recommendation) that have an impact on the lives of the community. Special consideration should be given to how these measures affect economic activity and community relations, especially with youth.

Regional authorities can set up a mechanism of input and feedback, where youth are integral partners, on the different policies implemented. This will develop a culture of dialogue where youth are directly implicated and have a channel to influence decisions that directly affect their lives. In order to promote a climate of collaboration and further improve the relationship and the cohesion between youth and security forces, activities - whether cultural or sport activities - should be organized.

Being seen as active contributors to improve security efforts can also help to reverse negative stereotypes (youth as threats to security) that affect them. For this reason, it is important that other community members be informed of this type of partnership.

While implementing quick response new security measures, authorities and security forces should involve and consult the ‘Président Communal Regional de la Jeunesse’.

Youth should actively take part in council meetings. Providing a platform for youth to share their concerns is key as youth are some of the most exposed groups to violent extremism and gang related activities.

5.3 Support Youth Initiatives

Governmental authorities and international organizations or NGO's alike, should support local youth-led initiatives, whether formal or informal associations. All stakeholders should be more open to recognizing youth-led activities and exploring potential partnership. This will show the support of youth activities to the wider population and to the youth from the different entities. For official/formal associations, there should be administrative, financial and organizational support on running successful associations so that they can function better, increasing the efficiency of youth engagement in peacebuilding and combatting violent conflicts.

While it may be challenging for different actors (government, international organizations) to provide financial or administrative support to informal associations, support is also understood as ‘advisory’ and/or ‘recognition’ of their actions. Informal associations of youth can be invited to share their voice on different platforms or take part in other initiatives.

A common strategy should be adapted on how to create a strong supportive and enabling environment for initiatives to flourish and affect systemic change. This includes understanding the environment in which different initiatives are built up and their challenges. Furthermore, it also includes providing guidance on how to overcome these challenges. Within this strategy, support to women-led associations should not be omitted. This will help make their role more visible, and increase recognition of their role as official actors in peace and security.

A structure should be set up to for the continuous monitoring and support of the different youth initiatives and associations, this would also include performing an overall overview and mapping of the different youth initiatives and associations in each region to raise their visibility to different actors and increase chances of collaboration.

5.4 Increase Economic Security

Economic insecurity is the major cause identified by youth as leading to peace and security challenges in the country and in each region. Health and food were also considered as important, and connected to this dimension.

Governmental authorities, international organizations and NGO's present in the different regions need to better integrate economic security in their peacebuilding and violence prevention efforts. This means supporting initiatives that promote greater economic security as well as implementing peacebuilding and conflict transformation programs that carefully combine or work with dimensions of employability, job creation, entrepreneurship, and food security.

A critical assessment of the different initiatives already put in place should be made by an independent organization in order to assess with young people what works and what does not in terms of providing economic security. From this a list of more precise lessons learned should be detailed and further recommendations for each actor and their responsibility can be developed.

5.5 Increase Capacity Development Initiatives for Youth

International organizations and NGO's should increase capacity development initiatives for youth leaders in each locality and in the different regions. Young Positive Peace Actors should be identified and supported in each region. Within this framework, young women should also be encouraged and empowered to become official Young Positive Peace Actors, contributing to enhance the public recognition of their role.

Civil society actors/organizations capacities should be strengthened. Trainings in awareness raising, conflict management and peacebuilding should be given. Youth have already taken up a peace promoter role in their communities and are active and willing to positively contribute. These are initiatives that the youth have already undertaken, this should be utilized to maximize their efficiency.

Joint capacity building trainings should be organized between youth, community leaders and authorities on a sub-regional level, on issues concerning community development and conflict management. This will encourage youth and other actors to work together in finding sustainable and efficient solutions to issues concerning peace and security.

6. Conclusions

These consultations have been rich in information in understanding the opinions and perceptions of youth in Tillabéri and Diffa on issues concerning peace and security challenges they face in their everyday lives. They have identified some of the strengths of youth in these regions, activities they undertake to build peace, and have also been key in exposing why certain youth decide to take another path, that of violence and conflict. It is important that this information is spread and incorporated in all entities working in these regions in order to enrich programmatic approaches and to implement the recommendations formulated to increase and support youth contribution and engagement in building sustainable peace. The

recommendations should not be limited to Tillabéri and Diffa but implemented throughout the country, while remaining sensitive to their environment.

The key takeaways are:

- **Youth in Diffa and Tillabéri suffer the violence of exclusion.** Despite progress in youth representation and engagement in decision-making in Niger, this is not felt nor perceived in the different localities. Government has taken active and positive steps in this regard, however moving from policy into perceived and recognized implementation is important. Youth need to *be* involved and *feel* involved in peace and security measures. Currently, they have a deep sense of being abandoned by the government and authorities. They also face a lack of recognition from their community.
- **Economic security** is the most recurrent element in every consultation held. For the youth consulted, the lack of economic security is what brings larger insecurity and challenges social cohesion. Furthermore, lack of investment in youth who are marginalized but have not yet adopted violence is seen as an injustice.
- **Youth from Diffa and Tillabéri are willing and able to be key actors in peace and security** at a national or a local level in Niger, but their action remains largely informal. This is particularly the case for young women. They require community acceptance and recognition, as well as additional support (financial, capacity building, ensuring security of young women peacebuilders) in order to grow their impact. Continuous lack of interest for their work and ideas by community members and authorities deters many from participating or pursuing their efforts.

It is important to not undermine the drivers of youth action especially in a country where 70% of the population is below 30 years old. It was observed that youth consulted showed signs of solidarity among them rather than reporting divisions, as may be observed in other countries. This is something to leverage and build on. Harnessing youth collaboration can help youth initiatives grow exponentially and have more impact, as well as foster a crucial climate of social cohesion.

Understanding the positive potential of engaging with youth could change the direction from violent conflict and insecurity to sustainable peace and social cohesion. Youth in Niger have the will and potential to be active actors within the peace and security framework of Niger. They reject violence and have led various activities to respond to the increasing insecurity. Yet, as the case of Niger strongly shows, their maintained marginalization is deepening their frustrations and creating deeper grievances. Investing in their strengths and positive action will create a greater social cohesion and therefore resilience.

7. Annexes

Annex I: Inception Report (in French)

Annex II: Transcribed interviews (available upon request in French)