REPORT

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

Informing the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security and the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2250.

SEPTEMBER 30, 2017

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# Table of Contents

Table of Contents...........................................................................................................................................1  
Acknowledgements.............................................................................................................................................3  
Acronyms............................................................................................................................................................4  

1. Context..........................................................................................................................................................5  

2. Methodology and Description of Research Activities.......................................................................................7  
   2.1 Objectives and Key Research Questions ..................................................................................................7  
   2.2 Data Collection Tools ..................................................................................................................................8  
   2.3 Data Collection Activities ..........................................................................................................................8  
   2.4 Approach .................................................................................................................................................11  
   2.5 Data Analysis .............................................................................................................................................12  
   2.6 Limitations ................................................................................................................................................12  

3. Findings .........................................................................................................................................................13  
   3.1 Youth Perceptions of Violence, Peace, Security and Peacebuilding ...........................................................13  
   3.2 Main Peace and Security Challenges Affecting Youth Consulted ...............................................................14  
       3.2.1 Disrupted Lives and Coping Mechanisms ......................................................................................14  
       3.2.2 A Sense of Loss .................................................................................................................................16  
       3.2.3 How and Why Young People Engage in Violence ........................................................................16  
       3.2.4 Youth Develop Resilience and Resist Violence ............................................................................17  
       3.2.5 The Complicated Role and Vulnerabilities of Vigilantes and Civilian Joint Task Force Members ........................................................................................................................................18  
   3.3 Peacebuilding and Violence Prevention Activities by Young People .......................................................19  
       3.3.1 Who Are the Peace and Security Actors? Youth Perspectives .......................................................19  
       3.3.2 Activities and Impact of Young People Promoting Peace and Security ........................................20  

3.4 Factors Preventing and Encouraging Youth Involvement in Building Peace .............................................22  
   3.4.1 The Value of Recognizing and Supporting Youth-Led Initiatives ......................................................22  
   3.4.2 “Peace and Security Work is Men’s Work”: Gender-Specific Barriers ..............................................22  
   3.4.3 Need for Capacity-Building ................................................................................................................22  
   3.4.4 Working in Adverse Conditions, Lack of Protection and Partnership .............................................23  
   3.4.5 Barriers for Internally Displaced Young Men and Women ..................................................................23  
   3.4.6 Challenges of Young Vigilantes and Members of CJTF .................................................................24
3.5 Enhancing Young People’s Contribution and Leadership in Building Sustainable Peace ..........25

4. Recommendations........................................................................................................................................26

4.1 Partnership: Commitment to Work with Youth and Greater Linkages between Community-Led and Government-Led Efforts........................................................................................................26

4.2 Ensure Participation through Recognition, Support, and Gender Sensitivity .............................27

4.3 Prevention ..............................................................................................................................................28

4.4 Protection and Reintegration ..............................................................................................................28

5. Conclusions.............................................................................................................................................29

6. Annexes ..................................................................................................................................................31

6.1 FGD and KII Guides.................................................................................................................................31
Acknowledgements

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**Financial and Technical Support:**
This report was commissioned by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) with funds from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The report was developed as a contribution to the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security mandated by Security Council Resolution 2250, and co-led by UNFPA and PBSO. The research and consultations for this report followed the key research questions and methodology developed for the Progress Study.

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

CJTF: Civilian Joint Task Force
CVE: Countering Violent Extremism
FGD: Focus Group Discussion
IDP: Internally Displaced Person
KII: Key Informant Interview
LGA: Local Government Area
MMC: Maiduguri Metropolitan Council
PBSO: United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office
P/CVE: Preventing and/or Countering Violent Extremism
Search: Search for Common Ground
UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund
YPs: Youth Peace & Security
1. 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. It 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 young people in all regions of the world were commissioned in order to document young 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 Burundi, Nepal, Nigeria and Tunisia was made possible through funding from UNFPA. The research in Niger was made possible through a grant from PeaceNexus.

The current report presents results from research conducted in North-East Nigeria, in two of the states most affected by violence and the consequences of the Boko Haram insurgency: Borno and Adamawa. Search mobilized young people involved in peacebuilding, security activities, as well as internally displaced and other at-risk and hard to reach youth in order to bring to the fore the experiences and perspectives of young women and men whose voice is seldom included in global policy consultations.

Since 2009, the radical insurgent group Boko Haram has devastated communities across Northeast Nigeria. As of April 16, 2017, Borno State continued to host the majority of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) (1,428,947 people), followed by Adamawa State (146,605). In August 2017, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) estimated that the number of IDPs currently stands at 1.7 million in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states, in addition to over 200,000 Nigerian refugees present in neighboring countries. Almost 7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, more than 50 percent of whom are children. After three years of being unable to farm due to the high levels of violence and

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1 Nigeria Crisis, ETS Situation Report #5, 16 April 2017.
spread of improvised explosive devices, the UN now reports that 5.2 million people are in need of life-saving food assistance. A cholera outbreak in Borno is now bringing additional threats to people’s lives, with 44 deaths and 2,300 cases recorded since August 2017.

This situation has left millions, especially youth, increasingly vulnerable to recruitment and targeting by Boko Haram. In the past two years, Boko Haram’s tactics have shifted to rely on suicide attacks carried out by youth and children. The January 2017 suicide bombing at the University of Maiduguri (UNIMAID), which killed four and wounded 15, is even believed to have been carried out by a teenage girl. Despite the Nigerian government’s declared victory over Boko Haram, suicide attacks have continued. Al Jazeera’s Ahmed Idris reports that Abubakar Shekau, leader of the largest Boko Haram faction, called on all his supporters to “hit the Nigerian population as hard as possible through bombs, guns, and even slash-and-burn,” seemingly promising that the violence will continue.

In this context, Nigeria’s widening youth bulge represents both a key opportunity and a risk for the country to develop sustainable foundations for peace. In 2013, about half of the population was made up of youth, defined as individuals between 15 and 34 years of age and as of 2016, over half of the population is under 30. Youth’s potential, if harnessed, represents a key resource for Nigeria to transition from a state of deepening crisis towards more stability, enabling reconciliation and durable peace. However, the multiple fragilities affecting Northeast Nigeria’s social and economic structures have enabled the rise of violent extremism, as well as economic and social instability. Amongst the most affected are young men and women, coming from urban, peri-urban and rural zones. Extensive research has highlighted the role of ‘push’ factors such as poverty, lack of opportunities for economic and social development, corruption, frustrations with government policies, and poor governance that render individuals vulnerable to social marginalization, exclusion and radicalization. In Adamawa and Borno, extremist violence has created second-order vulnerabilities that can become future drivers of grievances or economic-based recruitment. Key ‘pull’ factors also increasingly serve as a growing reason for recruitment among youth. These include radicalization through economic incentives, misinformation, and the proliferation of extremist narratives often based on false religious interpretation. Additional pressure stemming from friends and social media may also develop affinity with or ‘pull’ individuals towards violent extremist groups. With a growing youth population and the limited ability of communities to effectively engage them, coupled with a

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lack of both information and positive ‘alternative narratives’, vulnerability of youth towards violent extremist groups remains a serious and growing problem in Nigeria.

Despite the growing threat of violent extremism and its attraction to young people across the country and the wider Lake Chad Basin, the vast majority of young men and women reject violent extremism. In fact, young people in Nigeria are at the forefront of movements to counter and prevent violent extremism from taking hold in their communities. However, when strategies for countering violent extremism (CVE) engage youth, they often do so either without real consultation with young people or with pre-designed strategies and objectives rather than empowering youth to take the driver’s seat. Too often, the most marginalized and conflict-affected youth are also not consulted. To effectively counter violent extremism, youth must be supported in designing and implementing their own solutions that speak to their experiences, goals, and vulnerabilities.

This research therefore seeks to positively engage young women and young men from Borno and Adamawa states in the reflection on peace and security, and in the formulation of concerns and ideas that reflect their realities and needs. It also seeks to document their involvement in peace and security issues in Borno and Adamawa. The objective is to support well informed, locally-driven and led solutions that have greater potential to be effective, as well as to provide a platform for youth to share recommendations with key stakeholders and actors. The youth consulted are among those directly affected by the insurgency, and are considered hard to reach. For the purposes of this research, hard to reach youth are understood as those whose voices are not typically heard and whom government and mainstream development programs – whether national or international – have challenges in reaching and meaningfully including.

2. Methodology and Description of Research Activities

2.1 Objectives and Key Research Questions

Search conducted qualitative research to explore young people’s perspectives and experiences related to violence, peace and security. The main objective of these consultations was to raise positive contributions of young men and women to preventing conflict in Northeast Nigeria, and sharing their innovative thoughts about the installation of a sustainable peace through a process where young people are partners at all stages.

More specifically, the research sought to involve young women and men directly affected by the insurgency, whose voices are seldom heard, as well as young people engaged in peace and security. Four main groups of youth were targeted: Young women affected by the insurgency (young women held under Boko Haram captivity, child mothers, IDPs); young men affected by the insurgency (IDPs, street children, victims of the insurgency); young leaders engaged in projects related to peacebuilding and P/CVE; and young women and men members of non-state security forces (vigilante groups and Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)).

The key research questions were in line with those of the Progress Study:
• What are the main peace and security challenges that young women and men face, and how do these impact their lives?
• 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 governments, State institutions, civil society organizations, media, or the international community, could help to support these contributions?

2.2 Data Collection Tools

The research was based on a qualitative approach that used focus groups discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) to collect data. The research tool was designed as a questionnaire, with questions targeted at the objectives of this research; this was done through consultations with staff at Search Nigeria, especially the Design Monitoring Evaluation and Learning team. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews and interactive focus group discussions, taking the opportunity to adapt questions and conversations according to various group discussions and topics emerging while making sure that the interaction remained within the scope of the study.

2.3 Data Collection Activities

The fieldwork was conducted in Borno and Adamawa states, located in Northeast Nigeria. In recent years, these two states have suffered massive destruction and instability as a result of the Boko Haram insurgency. Borno, where Boko Haram was first established, is the epicenter of the insurgency.9

Within these two states, Search targeted five Local Government Areas (LGA). In Borno: Jere, Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC) and Mafa. In Adamawa: Yola North and Numan. These LGAs have directly witnessed and experienced the rule of the insurgent group, and the consequences of the group’s actions. MMC, Mafa and Jere are regularly affected by attacks in public spaces. All have received and continue to host thousands of IDPs seeking safety away from Boko Haram. Across all these LGAs, young people still lack platforms to raise their perspectives on the crisis, and opportunities to play their part in the prevention of violent extremism and resilience building of their communities. Since 2013, an increasing number of young people have also joined groups of non-state actors who enforce law and order: Vigilante groups and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), a local group formed to support the Nigerian

security forces in the fight against Boko Haram in the region. CJTF engages in different activities, including protecting communities from attacks, and providing security to IDP camps.10

A total of eleven individual interviews and nine focus group discussions were held. In Borno, Search conducted five interviews and six FGDs in the LGAs of Jere, MMC and Mafa. This included FGDs and interviews in two IDP camps in Jere and MMC. In Adamawa, Search conducted six individual interviews and three FGDs in the LGAs of Yola North and Numan.

A total of 91 youth between 15-34 years of age were consulted, including 48 young men (53%) and 43 young women (47%). More specifically, the research participants included:

- 35 internally displaced persons (39%);
- 19 youth active in peacebuilding and P/CVE initiatives (21%);
- 13 members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and vigilantes (14%);
- 24 other hard-to-reach youth, including street youth (26%).

Search leveraged existing relationships, personal contacts and its youth networks in project areas to reach out to the targeted youth. Search has over time established a network with youth through its Youth in P/CVE project in the Northeast and specifically in Borno and Adamawa. Youth from marginalized and vulnerable communities were part of the network established in Nigeria and the Lake-Chad region. Furthermore, Search has built a strong relationship with communities through peacebuilding dialogues. These dialogues, though not targeting youth directly, engage them as key stakeholders participating in the activities. Search is also working with national organizations as partners in these states. Through these different networks, Search was able to reach out to the targeted youth.

The following table presents detailed information on the research activities:

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#### 2.4 Approach

The research was designed by the Country Director of Search Nigeria as the technical lead, with support from the Design, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Manager and the Youth Programs Coordinator. Research and fieldwork were conducted by the Youth Programs Coordinator, whose age, prior experience in working with youth in the selected locations, and ability to communicate in local languages allowed to apply principles of culturally- and age- responsive research: all these were considered to give opportunities and space for youth to interact freely without fear.
Special consideration was given to working with indigenous staff to contribute to the quality of the research, as the people in the selected locations over time prove to be more comfortable with local staff and interventions. Search engaged young people with knowledge of the context and peacebuilding, who are capable of taking notes and support in facilitating discussions, especially in translating some of the questions in local languages to best suit the target in each LGA of research, since most of the target groups were not English speaking and the tools had first been developed in English.

Considering the context of the study locations, research participants had the opportunity to participate in same-sex focus group discussions, to give opportunities for women to speak of their challenges freely and not feel intimidated by their male counterparts. This was the case for example in IDP camps. Also, since we were targeting hard to reach and marginalized youths, we contacted individuals to get their consent on how and where would be ideal to interact with them, offering them the opportunity to participate in individual interviews rather than FGDs if they felt more comfortable doing so.

Research participants were mobilized through phone calls and visits to introduce Search, its mission, and objectives of the research, and establish the best space for conducting interviews and FGDs. This included conversations on security, ethics, and do no harm considerations. Search produced a consent form that was shared with research participants, explaining how it intended to use the information and maintain their confidentiality. Authorization to use photographs of research activities and participants was also obtained from those participants who felt comfortable with this.

The research team ensured to abide by the advice from Search security updates, and operated within safe areas. Locations for interviews and focus group discussions were negotiated with informants to ensure safety and security of both team and informants.

**2.5 Data Analysis**

Given the qualitative nature of the data, content analysis was the primary technique for analyzing the information collected. After reading the participants’ interventions, the data were divided into themes and concepts, and classified and compared between the different age and gender groups, when possible. The verbatim quotes were grouped according to identified ideas and themes.

**2.6 Limitations**

The research has some limitations, as follows:

1- The study’s qualitative approach and research sample was not intended to be representative of all Nigerian youth, or all youth from the states of Borno and Adamawa. Findings cannot be generalized beyond the populations interviewed.

2- Field research was completed in adverse conditions (conflict-affected areas with security challenges), within a very limited time frame. This affected the number of research participants that could be identified and mobilized. The research team had also originally intended to interview former fighters or repentants of violent extremist groups, however it was not possible to identify and mobilize any that would be willing to come forward and share.
3- Most of the FGDs included youth from multiple age groups within the age range of 15-34. It was therefore challenging to record trends and differences across age groups. While a few trends were noted and are listed in the findings, it was difficult to provide a more comprehensive set of age-specific understandings and recommendations. Additional research, including individual interviews targeting specific age groups, would be necessary to provide more age-specific information.

3. Findings

3.1 Youth Perceptions of Violence, Peace, Security and Peacebuilding

Conversations around violence, peace, security and peacebuilding started with an exploration of what these specific terms meant to the research participants, and how they experienced those in their everyday life.

Themes such as destruction, displacement, fear and killing were used by youth to describe what violence meant to them and how it had affected their lives. Young women were found to be more explicit in speaking of violence as directly connected to their lives, and affecting them directly, as opposed to young men, who would speak of violence affecting others and community member. Young women, mostly IDPs, also linked their experience of violence to remembering past incidences of conflict: “Thinking of hardship, thinking about my past, thinking if insurgency will ever end, and thinking of my stay in captivity under Boko Haram,” recalled a young woman who had been abducted, aged 20-24 years, in MMC Teachers Village IDP camp, Borno State. Another one, aged 15-19 years, added: “Confusion, fear, running for safety, thinking of protecting my children, killing, destruction of lives and properties.”

Young men’s responses referenced more the general context of violence, its effect on families and people around them, and anxiety about the future: “...you are not aware or certain of future and its happenings, thinking of the situation that the children and old could find themselves in,” said a male vigilante aged 20-29 years in Yola North, Adamawa State. They generally spoke from the position of having escaped violence, rather than having been directly affected by violent acts. The responses may have been different had we been able to speak directly with abducted or forcibly recruited young men. While the study sample is not representative of the whole population, these observations raise interesting questions around young people’s experiences of violence. They remind us that young women are most often victims of violence, but also call for further reflection on what social expectations are when we ask young women and young men to share around these experiences. Young men may have felt less comfortable in sharing experiences of vulnerability.

The most commonly used themes to describe peace were the absence of violence, living with peace of mind, justice, peaceful marriages, and IDPs returning to their communities. There were no key differences in the perception of peace between male and female respondents, however IDPs mostly expressed peace as returning to their home communities. “[Peace is] returning to our homes, returning to school, having peace of mind away from violent thoughts and fears, re-uniting with our families,” shared a young woman who had been abducted, aged 20-24 years, MMC Teachers Village IDP camp, Borno State. “[Peace is] absolute rest of mind, healthy
living, resettlement, return to our home, the way we were living before the insurgency, peace of mind,” added a male IDP aged 15-29 years, NYSC IDP camp, Borno State). “Returning” became a recurrent theme across all questions during the research, highlighting its importance for the young people affected by the violence, and emerging as a key condition to prevent further violence and live in peace.

As for security, most young people described it as the protection of people and their property, with frequent mentions of the different security actors. “Protection of civilians, lives, properties, military personnel are responsible for such,” thought a female community member aged 15-19 years in Yola North. With lives that have been marked by insecurity, militarization and a strong presence of state and civilian security forces, it appeared difficult for young people to describe security otherwise than being linked to or provided by security agents. Some respondents, however, highlighted that a sense of security would occur as the result of a shift, from violence to safety, back to normalcy and living in peaceful conditions: “Army, police, CJTF, a shift from violence to safety, feeling of peace and engaging in our normal lives,” said a male IDP aged 15-29 years in NYSC IDP camp, Borno State).

Peacebuilding was commonly understood as the process of ending violence and insurgency, and people living in peace. The way to do this often included a combination of approaches and strategies that would not necessarily officially ‘fit’ in the accepted definition of peacebuilding. Security and protection work, humanitarian work, fighting the insurgency were all examples that young people mentioned as ways to achieve “living in peace”. The process of helping IDPs return to their home was also frequently mentioned as part of peacebuilding. Others mentioned going back to how life was before the insurgency.

A general understanding by the research team at the end of the study is that peacebuilding appears to be a new concept and new area for the young people consulted. They have generally been more exposed to efforts undertaken to restore security from the perspective of the protection of lives and properties, military and vigilante intervention, and mostly as a result of their experience of the crisis resulting from the Boko Haram insurgency. Many highlighted that they did not know of “peacebuilding” organizations but knew of organizations working to help improve the situation. Others shared that before the insurgency, peacebuilding had not come up in their lives, which were characterized by relative peace. They felt this was the first major conflict and crisis they were experiencing in their region. The main take away from these conversations was to focus on young people’s aspirations, ideas and solutions for living in peace and resisting violence.

3.2 Main Peace and Security Challenges Affecting Youth Consulted

3.2.1 Disrupted Lives and Coping Mechanisms

“I was abducted by insurgents and forced to live with them for over two years under their custody. I lived there as a slave in the first three months because I refused to marry them but I had to succumb to their will and settle with one of the fighters. I was treated well after then.

I decided to escape after two years because I didn't believe in what they do and
also I have been separated from my family. I thought about my family everyday and prayed and hoped that I would live to see them again. When I returned here in the camp for the first few days, many tagged me as a Boko Haram member, which made me uncomfortable. At some point, I was even thinking about why I escaped. I was lucky to meet with some of my family members in a village in Chad close to Nigeria. I lived there for over a year, and then we were brought back last week to the IDP camp here.

During my stay in the Boko Haram camps, there were many young girls and women who were also abducted and forced to live there like me. I feel safe staying here, because I know I am protected by soldiers and CJTF. And I believe all this happened as a result of violence, and I am able to return and unite with my family as a result of security and a little peace.”

Young woman aged 20-24 years
MMC Teachers Village IDP camp, Borno State

Young people’s lives have been completely disrupted. They have experienced and/or witnessed destruction of lives, properties, livelihoods, and displacement from their homes.

Young IDPs are particularly affected. Camps in Borno are congested, which increases challenges to health and for feeding people adequately. As mentioned by a young man who works in IDP camps in Borno, “health issues, and communicable diseases are on the rise because people [in the camp] are living in congestion.” A male IDP in Teachers Village camp, Borno State, aged 15-24 years, adds: “We have difficulty in accessing school, many of our businesses have collapsed.” Many IDP youth left and loss businesses back home; others explain that they find themselves unable to study, with most education interventions targeting children.

Outside the camps, basic needs are also hardly met, and normal activities – going to school, running businesses or finding employment – cannot be conducted without major challenges. The threat of suicide bombs and increasingly restricted movement negatively affect many young people’s ability to access education and run businesses. “Bombings are current threats to my school, and the security checks we undergo before accessing school is a challenge to me,” shares a young woman aged 20-24 years in Mafa. “Many young people are displaced and hardly eat once in a day. Life is very difficult now, especially seeing many youth roaming the streets unemployed,” explains a young man aged 20-24 years in Yola North. A young woman aged 20-24 years in Jere adds: “Many businesses are ruined because the insurgency has destabilized markets. Restriction of movement by security personnel, and blockage of access roads affect us”.

In response to this situation, young people look for alternatives to cope with the situation, as well as to support themselves and their families. With little recourse and options, often times they are constrained to choose options that harm them and others. Many engage in drug abuse, theft or prostitution to survive. Drug sellers are said to be mostly young males living in IDP camps and host communities, prostitution is mainly carried out by young females as a source of income to support themselves and their families while living in IDP camps and host communities.
3.2.2 A Sense of Loss

“What should have been used to develop youth is now being diverted to feeding and rebuilding structures.” (A 24-year-old young man active in peacebuilding in Borno State)

Other peace and security challenges involve the reality of living in fear, experiencing anxiety for the future and a great sense of lost opportunities. These peace and security challenges have had mostly negative impacts on youth, inclusive of fear, loss of family members, loss of education and employment opportunities, migration of young people out of their states, and an inflated cost of living. These are apparent in the following perspectives: “I restricted myself from going to places, and [was] sitting down doing nothing, this is all as a result of fear of attacks,” shares a young woman aged 20-24 years in Jere. A 24-year-old man active in peacebuilding in Borno State adds: “It has affected me through deaths, I lost relatives and friends to the insurgency, and we have lost our means of livelihood subjecting us to a very difficult context of living. It has affected my education and I lost many opportunities to enroll back in school. What should have been used to develop youth is now being diverted to feeding and rebuilding structures.”

3.2.3 How and Why Young People Engage in Violence

None of the young people we spoke to agreed with engaging in violent activities, but most of them could offer responses as to why other youth engaged in such activities. In Borno, many young people had been touched more personally by the issue. Some of their friends and relatives had joined violent extremist groups and had not returned. Respondents explained that exclusion and marginalization, lack of self-identity, a sense of alienation, lack of education and employment opportunities and lack of trust between youth and the government are deeply affecting them and their peers. Often times, young people in rural communities are not reached by interventions from government or other actors, and have unequal access to the most basic services. They remain unaware of many issues, are robbed of opportunities to realize their full potential and lack the chance to even engage in the important process of thinking and preparing for their future, based on their aspirations. According to them, all of these factors could push young people to use violence, be recruited by violent extremists or coerced by politicians. Violent extremist groups were said to be very skilled at capitalizing on these grievances to turn young people against their communities and authorities, cultivating in them the sense that they are fighting for what is right.

“Young people seeing the elders/leaders living in luxury and them living in a poor state has often triggered violence and making youth feel like they are doing the right thing,” shares a male vigilante aged 20-29 years in Yola North. Another vigilante adds: “I will say as a young person, I am scared of leaving school; some can be lured to be part of the violence, but forgetting that the violence can affect their immediate families and relatives. From youth perspectives, lack of engagement and focus, or opinion to think of their future, or what to do often results in our involvement in violence. For instance, when politicians approach and give us money to be political thugs.”
3.2.4 Youth Develop Resilience and Resist Violence

Conversations with young people revealed that their experience of violence and how they have processed it, has led to greater self-awareness, growth, and resilience. The examples below show that, despite going through trying and traumatizing events, youth find the resources within themselves and their circles to resist violence and to look for positive perspectives, alternatives and activities.

Some youth reported taking up roles in IDP camps and in the community in order to be too busy for violent activities: “When we earlier came to the camp we used to go out to do some manual labor and get token to support ourselves, but now the work is not available, those available are not paying well, and some of the jobs are not even available. We engage ourselves in activities like cap sewing to support ourselves and not sit idle,” explained a male IDP aged 15-24 years in Teachers Village camp, Borno State).

Others, following an initial phase of retreat from the violent conflict, returned with the resolve to contribute to peace, like this young man from Borno State: “As a result of the insurgency, my first choice was to run away. I ran and went to Kaga LGA where I met youth fighting against Boko Haram, and I asked myself why am I running when my colleagues are standing to defend their homes? I was a victim at gunpoint, I narrowly escaped and he was my friend whom I didn’t know was a Boko Haram sect member. I chose to be a peace advocate through enlightenment and steering up conversations with peers.”

As a result of their experience of violent conflict, some youth chose to contribute to protect their communities, counter violent extremism and build peace. “I was affected by violence in October 2015, [...] affected by bomb blasts as a result of violence. I am still suffering from hearing problems. After that incident, I was able to lead a vanguard of youth to protect the community,” shares a 28-year-old man active in P/CVE in Yola North.

Other youth reported increased self-awareness, and deepened commitments to their families and communities, like this young man in Borno State who maintains a positive outlook: “I am an indigene of Bama town displaced from my community and my family is now in IDP camps, it has slowed down my education because I wasted two years without school. I was able to understand something about myself and it changed my mindset. It provided me with opportunity to study outside Borno. And that was a learning avenue to me. I think the challenges made me better than I was [for example] I wouldn’t have taken up my peace advocacy. This has a very negative effect on us, but it has equipped us with knowledge to prevent it from reoccurring”.

Finally, many have felt compelled to engage directly in the protection of their communities, by joining vigilante groups or the Civilian Joint Task Force. “Some of us feel stronger and put our best to work because we are protecting our families, parents, friends and neighborhood. We made ourselves and wanted to do this, so we feel it is a responsibility obliged upon us to protect our environment,” says this 20-24 year old male vigilante member in Yola North. The complicated role and the vulnerabilities of vigilantes and CJTF members are explored in the following section.
3.2.5 The Complicated Role and Vulnerabilities of Vigilantes and Civilian Joint Task Force Members

Increasing numbers of young people have joined vigilante groups and the Civilian Joint Task Force to contribute to ensure security in their communities and counter violent extremists. Research and inquiry on this topic has identified vigilantism as an effective tool to counter insurgency, as well as a controversial, and even harmful practice to its members and the community: While it fills the gap that state security and military cannot fill, and provides local knowledge to increase effectiveness of interventions, it also raises concerns. Risks to the safety of its members, use of violence and arms by civilians, including youth, and potential sense of impunity are among the concerns raised.\(^{11}\) It has also been identified as recruiting children.\(^{12}\)

The young vigilantes and CJTF members we consulted shared the challenges and risks young people face when joining such efforts. These included threats to their lives, suspicion and lack of trust by other community members, and lack of support for and recognition of their work by other security actors. They also lament the fact that families of deceased vigilantes now have challenges in supporting themselves. Many vigilantes and CJTF members have formulated grievances. They perceive their own work as dangerous, complex and much needed in a context in which communities are disrupted and live in fear. However, they feel they operate without adequate support and transparency.

In addition to the immediate risks inherent to fighting violent extremists, a prominent threat for CJTF members was the fear of reprisal attacks by suspected Boko Haram members whom they reported to the police, once those suspects are released. Families of arrested suspects were also said to harass them. Vigilantes from Yola North also faced this type of problem when dealing with cases of theft and community conflicts. “We find that when we send cases to the police they don’t take us seriously and they dismiss the cases without proper sentence of justice. This has often led to conflicts and attacks between the perpetrators, victims and us,” shared a male vigilante member aged 20-29 years in Yola North.

The lack of recognition and support by other security agents and actors was identified as the main peace and security challenge affecting them. A male CJTF member from Borno State shared: “We have a lot of challenges with the police arresting our youth. We have found a case of someone who hid a Boko Haram member and we caught and handed him over to police. Later we learnt he was released and the police framed our boys and arrested them. We currently have a lot of cases in the courts.” According to them, this is because despite working in collaboration with the police and security forces when violence was at its peak, CJTF members are now being reported to security agencies by community members who hold grudges against them either for capturing or chasing members of their family connected to Boko Haram.

Members of CJTF also reported lack of community support for their contribution to security and CVE work in communities where they reside. This is a recent development following the restoration of some level of security and stability in these communities, with community


members now of the opinion that the services of CJTF are no longer needed since Boko Haram members do not live in the communities anymore. “People in the community are not cooperating and are seeing us as threats [...] forgetting about our contribution in the days of epic insurgency,” says a male vigilante aged 20-24 years in Yola North.

As for young women, they face specific gender-based challenges as a result of their involvement in maintenance of security. A male CJTF member in Borno State explained “women CJTF are being harassed by the community for collaborating with CJTF, with insults and accusations of prostitution to us as CJTF.” A female CJTF member shared that after helping the family of a victim of sexual violence, they denounced her to the police. “The parents took the case to the police and mentioned I am a prostitute, and they suspect I know who is responsible for their daughter’s pregnancy.” They explained that because the community has difficulty accepting and believing that women can perform security work, most of the CJTF women were seen as prostitutes.

### 3.3 Peacebuilding and Violence Prevention Activities by Young People

#### 3.3.1 Who Are the Peace and Security Actors? Youth Perspectives

Our conversations with young people explored their understanding of who are the peace and security actors in their area and how young people and their initiatives fit into this context. Key actors mentioned included state institutions, local and national non-governmental organizations and international NGOs, traditional and religious leaders, youth-led organizations as well as frequent mentions of the CJTF.

In terms of civil society organizations and youth-led organizations working for peacebuilding, consulted youth mentioned the Damilu Youth Association in Yola North and the Jambutu Trustee Youth Association in Adamawa State, and a number of youth-led organizations and initiatives in Borno State that prioritize peace sensitization (including on social media) and reintegration of young women survivors of the insurgency in Borno State.

Most of the consulted youth did see themselves as actors of peace and security, either currently or in the future. This was especially the case for young people already engaged in some activity. They were also motivated to do more, if supported adequately. However, some youth – more often the most marginalized ones – felt more limited in their ability to take on this role. They regarded peacebuilding as an activity for educated youth, and reported not really having opportunities to participate in such activities. Apart from a few exceptions, the young women mostly did not regard themselves as actors or feel the community would take them seriously in this role.

Involvement in peacebuilding varied according to age groups. Adolescents and early youth (15-19 and 20-24 years) have less experience participating in or leading peacebuilding activities.

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13 Examples included the Red Cross providing all round support, the military providing security, Search for Common Ground providing education on early warning and human rights, Northeast Regional Initiative (NERI) through photo community and support to different peace and security initiatives, and Federation of Muslim Women’s Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) specifically targeting young women. Mention was also made of Government Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Youth Empowerment, and Ministry of Information Home Affairs and Culture were also mentioned. However, their roles were not specified.
They have had fewer opportunities and less time to engage, may feel less experienced to do so, but may also be less consulted or even less targeted by programs. Younger women (adolescents and early youth, 15-24 years) were actually found to be more interested than young women in middle or late youth (25-34 years).

3.3.2 Activities and Impact of Young People Promoting Peace and Security

Some actions and initiatives currently being undertaken by some of the youth consulted include activities in peacebuilding, P/CVE, maintenance of security, and emergency/humanitarian relief.

a. Peacebuilding

- Community sensitization that encourages community members and youth to not engage in violence. This includes peace campaigns (face to face and online), marches for peace, and sporting activities. Young women and men implement these initiatives through community and social media interactions (especially social media, where a majority of young women participate).
- IDPs reported performing sensitization and conflict resolution in the camps.
- Female IDPs reported organizing themselves to provide some psychosocial sessions to support each other, and especially newcomers into the camp.
- In Borno, dissemination of photographs and video clips on social media to promote peace, using short interviews conducted with people on the streets and in affected communities. A young male peacebuilder reported the video initiative. A young woman started the photography initiative, which has mobilized groups of youth for peacebuilding and P/CVE.
- Providing school materials to children at community level to support their education.
- A youth network was established to connect young people through photography and peer-to-peer sensitization on peaceful coexistence.

According to the youth consulted, such initiatives make a difference in communities and have advantages that distinguish them from initiatives led by non-youth. Some thought young people would be more likely to participate because they are more receptive to initiatives led by youth. Providing opportunities to engage meaningfully with other youth was also seen as an asset in areas where most young people do not have access to such programs. “We have recorded positive impact and shifts in perception especially on youth perspective. Before we have a lot of youth clashes within same communities, but now through such initiatives, voluntary community cleaning with youth, which brings together young people from different areas to connect through working together in different areas and talking about peace, youth are not easily seen fighting themselves. Through community sanitation, youth have been connected to each other and this is great,” shares a 27-year-old male peacebuilder, in Adamawa State.

Others are said to have contributed to increased tolerance and acceptance of IDPs in camps, as well as reduced conflicts in the camps. “Yes, previously we have been isolating and being hard on rescued or escaped victims of Boko Haram captivity, but with the sensitization and the awareness, we now accept them in the communities and treat them as sisters. Even support them with our clothes and share our food,” said a female IDP, aged 15-29 years old, in NYSC IDP camp in Borno State. A male IDP from the same camp, aged 15-29 years, added that “people
have reduced the level of conflicts within the camp and most people have learned to tolerate each other.”

“As a result of the insurgency that has been affecting young people like me, my first choice was to run away. I ran and went to Kaga LGA where I met youth fighting against Boko Haram, and I asked myself why am I running when my colleagues are standing to defend their homes? I was a victim at gunpoint, I narrowly escaped and he was my friend whom I didn’t know was a Boko Haram sect member. I chose to be a peace advocate through enlightenment and steering up conversations with peers. I made choices to reach out to the disconnected youth through messaging in communities after the insurgency especially through sensitizing about gender equality. I volunteered to support the people in need and looking through the future. I have chosen to be an advocate for peace and good governance.” (Male peacebuilder, Borno State)

b. Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

- Establishment of peace clubs to teach peace education in primary and secondary schools in communities to reduce the appeal of violent extremism in children and adolescents. This is an initiative by a mixed group of youth that received support from Search through seed grants and coaching. The peace clubs were established in many schools across Borno, and are sustained by a network of youth who met during the Regional Youth Summit on Countering Violent Extremism organized by Search in Maiduguri in November 2016.
- Members of vigilante groups reported conducting one-on-one interactions with fighters to drop their weapons, surrender, and undertake reconciliation between former combatants and community members.
- Creation of a youth network for real time incident reporting, to enable quick response by vigilante groups.

c. Emergency/Humanitarian Relief

- Through social media campaigns, a 26-year-old female peacebuilder mobilizes immediate basic resources like food, clothes, soaps and detergents for IDPs.
- Vigilante group members reported collecting and distributing blood donations within the members of CJTF, as the need arises, due to blood loss from injuries gotten through combat.

d. Security

- Acting as security guards in IDP camps to secure the camps and ensure people are protected and safe.
- CJTF members protect lives and properties of people in the community, especially to attend places of worship, as these are primary targets for violent extremists.

Young people consulted appreciated the efforts of the CJTF in protection of lives and properties, especially when the insurgency was at its peak: “CJTF, they have been searching and protecting
people at night, especially during Ramadan when going to the mosque,” said a young woman aged 20-24 years in Mafa. Another young woman aged 20-24 years from Jere added: “CJTF, they protect people and escort them to hard to reach areas.”

However, in certain circumstances some young people saw them as a threat after the insurgency if they are not engaged or sent back to schools. Others, like this 20-24 year old man from Yola North, also knew of some cases that had been reported, denouncing violations of the rights of community members: “Vigilante groups are only disturbing us in our areas because they are violating human rights on the process of their work.”

### 3.4 Factors Preventing and Encouraging Youth Involvement in Building Peace

#### 3.4.1 The Value of Recognizing and Supporting Youth-Led Initiatives

Recognition and respect for their efforts was a key factor that encouraged youth involvement in building peace. “We have never been discouraged doing these small things because we believe we are doing it for ourselves, especially after the crisis which left us homeless and we have to manage here in the camp. Also we have been applauded by the camp securities and management, this has been encouraging,” shares a male IDP from NYSC camp in Borno State. A male peacebuilder in Borno, aged 20-24 years, agreed: “Factors that promote my engagement was when I went into a particular community I met a random youth who approached me to applaud my commitment on peacebuilding campaign. How we get our videos viewed on social media and how is shared publicly, I feel there is need to be more.”

#### 3.4.2 “Peace and Security Work is Men’s Work”: Gender-Specific Barriers

However, recognition is not always consistent – especially when it comes to women’s role and potential. Conversations with young women confirmed they faced additional barriers to their participation in building peace. They shared that cultural and religious factors drive the perception that security and peace work is “men’s work”. A 15-19 year old woman in Yola North explains her experience: “As Muslim women, we face marginalization and are expected to stay at home. The thought of peace and security work being for men not for women is also an issue. [...] The overall understanding of women as actors not beneficiaries should be prioritized and women must be put at the center of peacebuilding.” Some young men also recognized this challenge, that has resulted in women feeling left out of peacebuilding in their communities, despite having interest in contributing to these efforts: “There is a lot of contribution from women in peacebuilding. But with a lot of challenges, religious and cultural beliefs often restrict interested women from participating in peacebuilding work,” expressed a male peacebuilder, aged 20-29 years, in Yola North. The experience of female CJTF members being accused of prostitution also falls within these challenges.

#### 3.4.3 Need for Capacity-Building

Recognition is also not enough, as many young people felt they would need training and capacity building, especially in the areas of mediation and reconciliation, before considering participating and in order to ensure their participation would be effective. “I will want to be part of the movements so that I can give my support and help in peacebuilding. I will want my capacity to be built on what peacebuilding is. I need to be educated on the entire process. I need more
knowledge about the field,” says a young man, aged 20-24 years, in Jere. A female IDP in Borno was also of this opinion: “We would need training on reconciliation and mediation to be able to interfere in many issues, we need to learn approaches to how we can properly engage in peacebuilding before we can act.”

3.4.4 Working in Adverse Conditions, Lack of Protection and Partnership

More importantly, protection and partnership is needed. In addition to lack of support and recognition for their work, during the consultation, youth reported fear of death or attack, negative perception from community members, and working in adverse conditions as part of the major factors that prevent or hinder their involvement in peace and security. These factors were especially mentioned by youth currently involved in peacebuilding and P/CVE, as well as by members of CJTF and vigilante groups. This male peacebuilder from Borno State listed several challenges in this regard: “[We face] attack from colleagues, especially social media. Perceptions of people in the community […] I am a student and a lot of family pressure from parents thinking peacebuilding is risky; different threats coming from unknown persons; not getting support from the people you count on. Trying to feature people on our videos was very difficult because many are scared.”

Other challenges include the difficulty of mobilizing community participation, especially in voluntary projects, and obtaining support or collaboration from government authorities, international and donor organizations. Community members ask for incentives for participating in activities, and operating without political affiliation is difficult, as shared by this 20-24 year old male peacebuilder in Yola North: “[There is a] lack of cooperation from government to support our initiatives and projects if it is not political.” A 26-year-old man from Adamawa added: “Youth organizations and movements are usually hijacked by politicians. This often happens when youth seek support from their political representatives or government.” As for collaboration with international and donor organizations, young people report that, most of the time, their initiatives are unable to meet the funding criteria and partnership requirements of those organizations. Youth organizations and initiatives rarely access large funding and mostly operate on a voluntary basis, and therefore have limited capacity in the areas of financial and human resource management. They also often do not meet the minimum requirements in terms of years of existence, registration with their government, or other criteria.

3.4.5 Barriers for Internally Displaced Young Men and Women

As for young people in IDP camps in general, and young displaced women in particular, they faced the most barriers to their participation. While youth were to some extent involved in peacebuilding efforts in their communities, within the IDP camps, youth are reportedly not very involved in peacebuilding activities. It was mentioned that most initiatives within the camps are not targeted at youth, and that youth are not consulted regarding issues on the camps. “Most times we young people are not targeted during interventions because we are found not to fit in most categories of target beneficiaries,” said a male IDP aged 15-19 years at NYSC IDP camp in Borno State.

Young women in IDP camps believed that they could not be involved in peace initiatives, even if they wanted to. They expressed that they cannot be peace actors because they are not educated and have never been to school. They were of the belief that peace work is for educated persons. Furthermore, the perception that they are girls and have to stay at home or get married at an early
age was also a factor that influenced their belief that they could not be peacebuilders. “We have never interacted with peacebuilders and we think we can never be one even if we want,” said a female IDP aged 15-24 years at MMC Teachers Village IDP camp in Borno State. In addition, the poor continuity or sustainability of programs initiated by external organizations for women in IDP camps was reported as a hindrance to their participation. “The organization that started to train us left before we finished learning and that discouraged us a lot, and we had to stop,” shares a displaced young woman at NYSC IDP camp in Borno State.

3.4.6 Challenges of Young Vigilantes and Members of CJTF

Vigilante members listed a variety of reasons that discouraged them from continuing to engage in issues of peace and security. These included a lack of equipment that made their work more difficult and even more dangerous; a lack of remuneration and incentives, making it challenging to volunteer their time when already facing economic instability and lack of income generating activities; and a need for concrete skills in addressing violent conflict, not just reacting to it. Overall, young vigilantes suffered from the informal character of their participation and felt their work was not recognized. They shared that many of them were frustrated, and were losing patience. Some volunteers had given up their livelihoods to join vigilante groups and were not receiving enough in return for the huge risk they were taking. “Youth feel downgraded because they are not respected as vigilantes. We don’t have adequate materials and equipment, we don’t have office spaces that will support our work, we would need support for capacity building, reconciliation, mediation,” said a male vigilante aged 20-29 years in Yola North.

It was also reported that the CJTF has a platform on which it registers its members who are recognized by government and are given incentives. However, the system is unable to accommodate the large number of volunteers who join them on a daily basis. This challenge is faced both in IDP camps and in communities, spaces that are in dire need of protection and security. “We are not being paid and some of the CJTF are being paid so we stopped participating. We started the movement as volunteers because we know the importance of protecting our family, [but as a result] we often do not have time to do the small jobs that will support ourselves in the camp, so we have to make a decision to stop,” expresses a male IDP, aged 15-24 years, at Teachers Village camp in Borno State. Some had strong grievances: “We want the full participation/recognition by the Federal Government. We want the FG to protect and give welfare to the families of the deceased. We want the FG to mandate all security agencies to be integrated into the system.”

Young vigilantes’ accounts highlight the challenges that Nigeria faces in fighting the insurgency: Need for greater coordination and management of civilian-led efforts and how these link with government efforts; need for improved communication and transparency around how these efforts are managed and at what level cooperation exists. The need for capacity building in conflict transformation and mediation also highlights a critical issue: the population’s response to the insurgency is to protect itself, and groups of civilians have come in to fill a gap that the State cannot fill. They want to protect their community, and possess local knowledge that is crucial to identify and stop violent extremists, and secure key spaces for day-to-day activities. However, they are also able to recognize that this alone is not sustainable and will not solve the wider issue. Mediation and conflict resolution skills are needed to sustain peace beyond the end of the insurgency. Finally, for better or for worse, vigilantes have taken a role in peace and security
issues. Their realities, vulnerabilities and grievances must be considered in the consolidation of peace.

Overall, responses indicate that youth want to be involved in peace and security if given the opportunity. They are mostly interested in joining security forces to protect themselves and their community, and volunteering for initiatives that organize community-led peace campaigns. However, young people also expressed concern for their financial stability, and the need to have time to engage in income-generating activities, and education. It is observed during the research that youth cannot continue to be engaged without addressing their financial needs through providing them with employment opportunities and skills development.

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

As seen in the earlier section, a major finding of this study is that young people – especially those from rural, marginalized and violence affected settings – cannot be engaged in peacebuilding without carefully addressing their economic situation and financial needs, as well as their need for capacity building and education.

They recommend that their skills be built on best practices and approaches to peacebuilding, mediation, reconciliation and leadership. In particular, members of CJTF and vigilante groups recommend that they be provided with security training and capacity building on how to manage cases reported to them, or conflict situations in which they find themselves. Girl and young women’s education and the involvement of women in peacebuilding was also a recurrent topic. “Girl-child education should be prioritized, young women should be involved. Young women should be trained in security sector and peacebuilding,” says a woman aged 15-19 in Yola North.

For IDPs, return to their communities is seen as the greatest indicator of success, an essential component for being able to promote, live in, and sustain peace. As expressed by a male IDP aged 15-29 years in NYSC IDP camp, Borno State: “The government and all partners should put in more efforts to relocate or return us back to our home, this will be the greatest success in the fight against violent extremists, this way we are sure of future and we can start again somewhere.”

Several other elements also emerged in conversations as possible strategies to enhance young people’s potential, contribution, and leadership in building sustainable peace. These point to the need for partnership and collaboration across ages and sectors, including major shifts in the way young people are perceived, and in the way systems function. All of these strategies must entail consultation with and inclusion of young people from rural areas, with a particular focus on adolescent youth (15-19 years) and early youth (20-24 years), as well as young women. Without this type of commitment by government and community leaders, as well as national and international organizations, the contribution of young people will be limited, and so will the chances of finding solutions.

For example, young people see their involvement in planning of security activities as essential. Since they know the insurgents and violent perpetrators in their communities, they will be better able to proffer strategies to reduce conflicts. Young people also need support from traditional
and religious leaders and opportunities to partner on joint initiatives with them. Without this critical support, their work cannot be expanded and reach certain segments of the population. “If the leaders (traditional and religious) can support and encourage youth to participate in such initiatives, many youth would be willing to contribute to peace and security,” says a 20-24 year old man in Yola North. More media initiatives (social, print and electronic) emphasizing dialogue and creating awareness on peacebuilding efforts – safety and security allowing – would also complement their work, and help expand it.

“...Youth-specific interventions should target youth and youth leaders themselves and not through representatives. Youth must be empowered directly to support peace and security related issues.” (Male vigilante, aged 20-29 years, Yola North, Adamawa State)

In terms of leadership development, the inclusion of youth in key areas of decision-making, especially on issues that affect their lives, is recommended, as well as partnership with government, local and international NGOs. Young people warn of implementing youth-specific interventions through youth representatives, who do not always represent the interests of all young people. It came up in different conversations in this study that young people’s representatives are not young people themselves, and thus do not represent the interest of the youth properly. An example was provided of a youth leader in Adamawa who was in his late 40s, and when asked to mobilize young people in his community, he mobilized mostly people above 40 years of age. Some interventions targeted at youth are being channeled through their community leaders and often get diverted to only specific people that are close to the leadership not reaching deserved youths. “Youth-specific interventions should target youth and youth leaders themselves and not through representatives. Youth must be empowered directly to support peace and security related issues,” said a male vigilante aged 20-29 years in Yola North.

Ultimately, success for young people means their direct involvement in the design and implementation of peacebuilding projects that target youth, and total absence of violence or threats in communities where they reside: “…when we are able to reach out to more youth to engage in peacebuilding, and when young people are involved in designing and implementing projects that targets them directly…” wished a young peacebuilder aged 20-34 years in Borno State.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Partnership: Commitment to Work with Youth and Greater Linkages between Community-Led and Government-Led Efforts

A more responsive and responsible approach is needed from government, security agencies, and community leaders to start identifying and addressing the real needs of the community, rather than the perceived needs. Failing to do so results in greater community vulnerability that leads members of the community to take matters into their own hands.
• Government and community leaders should develop confidence building and trust building activities with various youth groups, in order to be able to address conflict in collaboration with young people rather than unilaterally.

• A collaborative network should be built between community based youth-led organizations, Borno and Adamawa local and state governments, security agencies, media, as well as with local and international organizations implementing peacebuilding programs. This network will provide an opportunity for young people to share and receive information, including information on early warning of threats, build their skills in peacebuilding initiatives and provide linkages between community-led efforts and government-led efforts in peacebuilding.

4.2 Ensure Participation through Recognition, Support, and Gender Sensitivity
Youth are more likely to be and stay involved in peacebuilding if their efforts are recognized and supported. Special attention should be given to engage and support younger youth, young women, and IDPs, who are less involved in this type of initiatives, as well as widening our understanding of what roles young women and men can play.

• Community and religious leaders, government authorities as well as non-governmental organizations should increase the ways in which they support youth-led initiatives and organizations, including community-based and online. This includes financial support, official partnerships as well as other forms of collaboration and recognition to amplify young people’s work.

• Support young women, with a particular focus on younger women, with the encouragement, skills and platform to contribute to peacebuilding, media engagements, peace messaging and awareness creation, mediation, reconciliation and livelihood initiatives.

• Widen communities’ and stakeholders’ understanding of the potential and actual roles that young women and men can and do play in peace and security, beyond the gendered stereotypes of women as victims or prostitutes and men as protectors or perpetrators. International and national organizations can play a greater role in recognizing the various roles young women have played in protecting their communities, including in security efforts. They can also work to address with the State and communities some persisting and harmful stereotypes (“peace and security work is men’s work”, “men are protectors”, “women who join security efforts are prostitutes”). Such efforts can help recognize young women as real actors in peace and security, and support more young men in adopting roles that may be better suited for them (beyond the binary option of fighting with or against violent extremists).

• Prioritize education, inclusive of female education and peace education, at all levels of schooling – primary, secondary and tertiary, with stronger emphasis on ensuring IDPs can continue their education.
• Increase the inclusion of young people in key areas of decision-making, especially on issues that affect their lives.

• Multilateral institutions should adapt criteria and requirements for funding and partnership that are more sensitive to the reality and context in which youth-led initiatives and organizations operate, in order to allow for greater support of smaller youth initiatives at community and grassroots level.

• Multilateral institutions need to increase their attention on youth activities at the local level. Young people are involved in mediation and peacebuilding at the local level and in local capacities but their contribution is not recognized. Institutions such as the African Union, the United Nations and government agencies could collaborate to strengthen their capacities and amplify their contributions.

• Train and engage more young people in mediation and conflict resolution processes in order to gain the trust of younger parties involved in the conflict, and increase the chances of successful outcomes.

4.2 Protection and Reintegration

• Focus efforts on creating the conditions for IDPs to return home.

• State governments, local and international organizations should fund peacebuilding and livelihoods programs in IDP camps, designed and implemented by or in collaboration with youth. These programs will not only give youth a sense of purpose in the camps, but will contribute to preparing them for reintegration and economic independence when they return to their own communities.

• Recommended livelihood programs include skills building in house and road construction, such as masonry, tiling, plumbing, painting, electrical work and carpentry, based on interest and previous experience of youth. In addition to these, knowledge and skills in climate resilient and sustainable agriculture, as well as handcraft is also recommended.

• Offer psychosocial support as part of efforts to reintegrate returnees (IDPs and former combatants) in their own or host communities, for both returnees and host community members. Counseling and support groups, community dialogues and sensitization are an important component to raise awareness on the importance of supporting each other to aid peaceful reintegration and resettlement. This, in addition to the livelihood skills returnees would have developed, will support their reintegration into the communities and subsequent rebuilding of their lives.

• Members of vigilante and civilian task force groups ask the government to provide alternative sources of livelihood, as well as provide, through its security forces, protection for vigilante members from reprisal attacks from former combatants. This is in addition to dialogues, mediation and reconciliation programs also recommended for this group, and their host communities.
• Back to school initiatives should be launched to support amnesty and accommodate members of the CJTF; this will support their demobilization and equip them to be integrated into security agencies, assisting greatly in the prevention of violence or conflict post-insurgency.

4.3 Prevention

• Strengthen access to justice and mediation for youth to be able to resolve disputes without resorting to violence. In partnership with the media, government and youth-led organizations, ensure young people are aware of the availability of such services and know how to use them. Facilitate youth-led / peer workshops on peace, reconciliation and access to justice to support these efforts.

• Provide meaningful avenues for young men and women to process their experience and express what they are living and feeling. Make sure young men are also supported in expressing pain and vulnerability. Establish spaces that foster and celebrate young men’s creative expressions, where creativity and personal expression are cultivated as a stepping-stone for masculinity, beyond the pressure to be strong and protective.

5. Conclusions

This study highlights the contributions of young men and women to preventing conflict in Northeast Nigeria. It explores their understanding and lived experiences of peace, conflict, security and peacebuilding, and highlights the peace and security challenges faced by youth in the focus states. It further explores factors that contribute to or hinder youth involvement in peacebuilding, and proposes recommendations to enhance youth participation in peacebuilding initiatives and promote locally-led and locally-rooted, more effective solutions to conflict.

While young people’s lives have been disrupted and they face peace and security challenges on a daily basis, including interrupted education, bombings, displacement, unemployment and challenges in running businesses, conversations with young people revealed that their experience of violence and how they have processed it, has also led to greater self-awareness, growth, and resilience. Despite going through trying and traumatizing events, the consulted youth have managed to find the resources within themselves and their circles to resist violence and to look for positive perspectives, alternatives and activities.

Some actions and initiatives currently being undertaken by youth include activities in peacebuilding, P/CVE, maintenance of security, and emergency/humanitarian relief. Such initiatives are said to make a difference in communities. Others are said to have contributed to increased tolerance and acceptance of IDPs in camps, as well as reduced conflicts in the camps. Positive dimensions of these youth-led initiatives include the following: they provide hard to reach youth with opportunities to engage meaningfully with other young people on issues that directly affect them; they are more likely to engage young people as youth are more likely to be receptive to initiatives led by youth; and because they are locally based, they operate with a more intimate and personal understanding of the context, and aim for continuity (as opposed to external organizations leaving the area).
The findings also highlight the complex and difficult position and role of vigilante groups and Civilian Joint Task Force members. These emerge as committed actors in the field of peace and security in Nigeria, whose desire to protect their communities, vulnerabilities and grievances must be recognized and addressed with care. Many spoke of the need to ensure their demobilization and reintegration after the conflict, but also of their potential for wider contribution to peacebuilding by engaging them positively in conflict resolution and mediation activities, through training.

Recognition of and support for youth-led peacebuilding efforts was found to be a major driver in sustaining youth involvement in peacebuilding. However, partnership, with no political strings, is needed to amplify and sustain these efforts and ensure they do not operate in isolation. To that effect, a more responsive and responsible approach is needed from government, security agencies, and community leaders to start identifying and addressing the real needs of young people and their community, rather than the perceived needs. Failing to do so results in greater community vulnerability that leads members of the community to take matters into their own hands. Ultimately, success for young people means their direct involvement in the design and implementation of peacebuilding projects that target youth.

This research shows that young people can contribute to building peace in various ways, but more needs to be done to open up the spaces and ways for their involvement. Persisting gendered representations of young men and women are limiting young people’s potential and causing them more harm. Young men are seen as protectors, doing the hard work, fighting with or against Boko Haram, while women are seen as victims, see themselves as needing education before being able to contribute, and if they get engaged in security work, they are seen as prostitutes.

Recommendations include the need for a collaborative network of youth, government agencies, security agencies, media, and local and international organizations focused on peacebuilding for information sharing and skills development, as well as support and recognition of efforts of youth. Religious leaders were also identified as key partners to engage, in order to support youth in reaching broad segments of the population. The need to involve young women in peacebuilding was also highlighted, in addition to emphasis on youth-led initiatives in communities and youth-focused programs in IDP camps. The protection and reintegration of returnees, IDPs and former combatants, in their communities or in host communities, was also highlighted. Young people recommend the provision of psychosocial support, through counseling and support groups, for both returnees and host community members. Community dialogues and sensitization are also an important component to raise awareness on the importance of supporting each other to aid peaceful reintegration and resettlement.

Finally, widening communities’ and stakeholders’ understanding of the potential and actual roles that young women and men can and do play in peace and security, is a crucial attitude shift needed to move forward and build sustainable peace. Such efforts can help recognize young women as real actors in peace and security and finally allow the full potential of this group to flourish. They can also support more young men in adopting roles that may be better suited for them (beyond the binary option of fighting with or against violent extremists).
6. Annexes

6.1 FGD and KII Guides

Section 1: Demographics

Date

Location (Community, LGA and State)

Sex of Respondents (Please tick)

Female o
Male o

Age group of respondents (Please tick)

15-19 Adolescence o
20-24 Early youth o
25-29 Middle youth o
30-34 Late youth o

Target group (Please tick)

Young women affected by the insurgency
Girls and young women held under Boko Haram captivity o
Child mothers o

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) o

Former fighters o
Street children o

Young men affected by the insurgency
Former combatants o
Survivors o
Street children o
IDPs o

Young leaders actively engaged in projects related to peacebuilding, P/CVE o

Members of vigilante groups or CJTF o

Section 2: Knowledge and perception of peacebuilding

1. What can you tell me about these words: Violence, peace, security, and peacebuilding? What do these mean for you, in your everyday life and experience?
2. Can you tell me about some of the main peace and security challenges that affect you (or have affected you) and how do these impact your life? (Probe for local impacts, national impacts, regional impacts or global impacts)

3. What choices have you made around these issues and how did you come to this decision?

4. Can you tell me more about the different actors in these issues of peace and security? Who are they, what role have they played, and how does this impact or connect to you? Do you think it could be different? (Probe for different actors such as government, NGOs, international community, local leaders, extremist groups, other young people)

Section 3: Prevention

5. What peace building and violence prevention activities, initiatives and projects being undertaken within your community? How much of these violence prevention activities, initiatives and projects are being undertaken in your community?

6. Do these activities make any difference in the issues we are talking about? (For example, do you notice any change – good or bad?)?

7. Have you noticed individuals or groups who are taking an interesting or useful approach to solving these issues? If yes, can you share an example? If no, can you think of what would be useful for different groups to do? What would success look like?

Section 4: Participation

8. How much are you involved in building peace and contributing to security in your community?

9. Can you tell me of any experience that has discouraged or prevented you from taking part (or wanting to take part) in building peace and contributing to security in your community?

10. What factors do you think promote or could promote and support your active involvement in building peace, preventing violence and contributing to positive social cohesion in your community, society and/or institutions?

11. What are some of the most important things you would need to be part of these efforts? What would help you contribute and be a leader?

12. Do you have particular views on how your government, State Institution, civil society organizations, media or the international community, could help to support you?

13. Do you have any other suggestions or comments?