MAKING NOISE AND GETTING THINGS DONE:
YOUTH INCLUSION AND ADVOCACY FOR PEACE
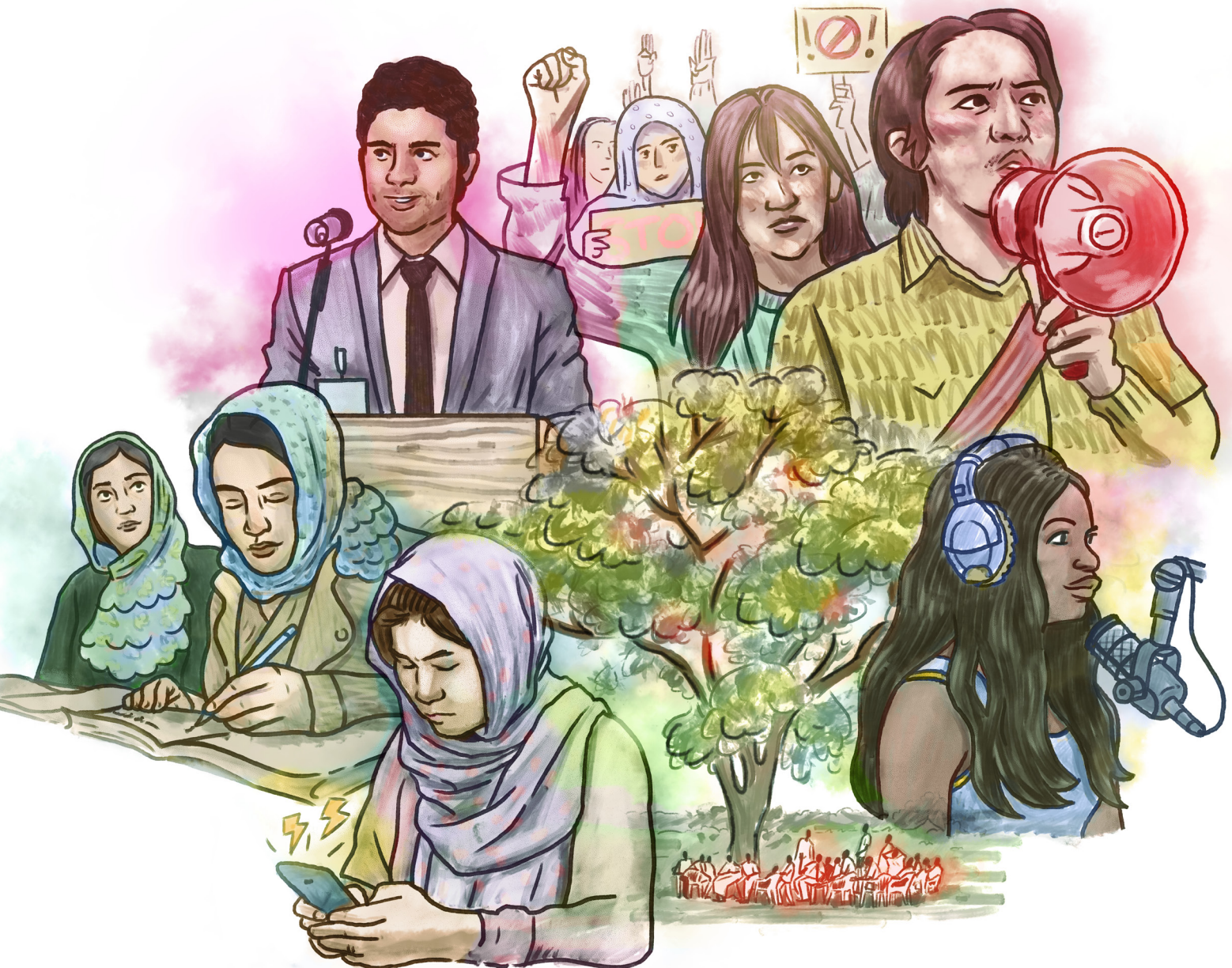
LESSONS FROM AFGHANISTAN, SOUTH SUDAN, AND MYANMAR

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Thanks to contributors

Acknowledgements

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth must be valued for their integral contributions to addressing conflict and not just seen as merely beneficiaries of formal peace processes, as they have a unique stake in the outcome of efforts to build peace. With one in four young people globally affected by conflict their experiences are invaluable for creating more peaceful societies.

Since the establishment of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda in 2015 with UN Security Council Resolution 2250, and further specific frameworks for youth inclusion in formal peace processes with UN Security Council Resolution 2419 (2018), there has been growing attention on the relationship between youth peacebuilders and the institutions tasked with building peace. While the priority for the international community has been on transforming the formal space to facilitate a more inclusive landscape, young people have been doing the work to build the foundations for peace within their communities, despite limited access to resources and heightened security threats. To date, progress toward implementing inclusive strategies remains largely conceptual within the formal peace architecture. There are calls for accelerated action from youth and their allies in areas including capacity strengthening, knowledge solutions, community of practice and partnership, and institutionalization and policy.[1] This report contributes to this strategic approach by offering practical recommendations for how the international community can support and amplify the fundamental and vital peace work already being done by youth.

Drawing on interviews with youth peacebuilders in Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar, this report examines the activities, leadership, and inclusion of youth in the formal peace processes and peacebuilding work beyond institutional processes. Research for this report was facilitated by Search for Common Ground and undertaken by youth researchers with support from adult researchers with the aim of strengthening the evidence base on youth inclusive peace processes and demonstrating the value of youth-led research. Research for this report was undertaken as the February 1 coup occurred in Myanmar, and before the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August. The insights offered by the youth peacebuilders, however, remains even more relevant and urgent, as the events of 2021 demonstrate how fragile peace can be.

Continued efforts towards substantive youth-inclusive peace practices requires a commitment to greater coordination between youth and other peacebuilding stakeholders. Cooperation must occur both within formal systems and between formal systems and the informal spaces where youth leadership is most often found. Youth peacebuilders in South Sudan, Afghanistan and Myanmar are united in their advocacy for peace architecture that recognises and supports the work they are doing to create enabling environments for sustainable peace. Strong consensus also exists amongst youth peacebuilders around the need for equitable and substantive access to peace negotiations and other formal processes

Currently, frustrations are heightened amongst youth activists. Despite international frameworks that obligate member states to empower youth and take their needs seriously, implementation of this mandate remains constrained by politics, power, economics and exclusionary social discourses. Youth also face threats and significant risks in undertaking their peacebuilding work and participating in formal political processes. Despite these barriers, youth peacebuilders interviewed shared a transformative and foundational vision for peace.

KEY MESSAGES

The findings of this research evidence the urgent need for international stakeholders to meaningfully include, support, and fund youth peacebuilders. Formal peace processes must be youth-inclusive at all stages, and concurrently, meaningful support must be given to youth-led organisations and initiatives committed to building the foundational conditions for peace and security at local, regional and national levels. Coordination between formal and informal spaces where youth advocacy traditionally takes place, is necessary to enable and embed youth voices within peace processes.

This report offers five Key Messages that consolidate the youth peacebuilders' own recommendations for the international community and other stakeholders:

1. Enable and foster networks for youth peacebuilders connecting formal and informal processes and initiatives.

2. Support and facilitate substantive youth inclusion in formal peace processes.

3. Commit to long-term funding, training, and resourcing of youth initiatives to create the conditions for peace agreements to be reached, and to ensure they endure.

4. Ensure protection for young people involved in peace processes and peace advocacy.

5. Prioritise practices that ensure substantive attention to the inclusion of a diverse range of youth in formal and informal peace processes

These Key Messages are supported by 15 actionable recommendations forwarded by youth themselves (see pg 36).

"This lack of inclusion today, unfortunately, causes youth to think twice about their inclusion in the peace process....[Youth] are forced to create their own room and develop their own strategies and go their own way. And that's not very effective, overall, because youth have the energy, the optimism and the capacity to engage. If the government can understand this and the international community can support this, they can be a catalyst of change, they can be change makers, that's important"

> *- 27, young man, Afghanistan*

INTRODUCTION

Globally young people are actively contributing to building more peaceful, secure, and just societies. Yet they are often overlooked or left out of formal processes of building peace which are frequently exclusionary and elite in nature.

Youth are not only beneficiaries of peace processes but must be seen as integral contributors to efforts that address conflict and build peace. Their unique expertise and experiences enable a more nuanced understanding of peace, where it is both a product of and condition for communities that enable all individuals to enjoy dignified lives.
In conflict-affected contexts, young people often make up a majority of the population, and globally 407 million young people live in conflict affected contexts.[2] Yet, the case for youth inclusive formal processes goes beyond 'demographic necessity,' as it is also a 'democratic imperative.'[3]

Youth participation in peace is a central tenet of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda and a strong normative framework has been established since 2015. The first UN Security Council resolution, Resolution 2250[4], calls for establishing 'integrated mechanisms for meaningful participation of youth in peace processes and dispute-resolution. In 2018, the second UN Security Council resolution of the agenda, Resolution 2419[5] specifically focuses on youth inclusion in peace processes. Resolution 2419 identifies the need for 'inclusive representation of youth for the prevention and resolution of conflict, including when negotiating and implementing peace agreements.' The third UN Security Council resolution, Resolution 2535 (2020) reinforces Member States commitments to youth inclusive peacebuilding, including formal peace processes.

In 2019 the *We Are Here: An integrated approach to youth-inclusive peace processes* report, in a global-first study, established a framework for understanding what a youth inclusive peace process could look like. Supported by extensive documentation of when and how young people engage with peace processes the report offered crucial insights into why that engagement is imperative for ensuring sustainable peace agreements. The authors, Altiok and Grizelj, argue for understanding youth engagement through a youth-focused, non-hierarchical framework of layers in terms of proximity to the formal peace negotiations: in the room, around the room, outside the room.

The *We Are Here* report contributes to a body of evidence that shows that inclusion of a broader range of peace actors, including women, indigenous communities and youth, contributes to the success of peace agreements.[6] In response to this growing body of empirical evidence practical plans have been developed for the implementation of this normative agenda.[7]

This report contributes to the development of knowledge solutions by examining the roles of youth in formal peace processes and informal peacebuilding in Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar. It centres their voices and expertise in peacebuilding in the context of the negotiation, and implementation of peace processes. It also highlights young people's work 'outside the room', and in contexts of fragile and threatened peace and security.

Interviews with youth in Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar reveal the ways in which *foundational peacebuilding* work is being undertaken by youth. Work that is occurring to create conditions in which formal political agreements may have the best chance of succeeding. Vital advocacy work by youth has created space and opportunities for youth to be heard in formal political spaces. However, young people have also been engaged in peacebuilding that occurs in the context of the implementation of or negotiation of peace agreements but without direct reference to the formal process.

This report is divided into four key sections. After a discussion of the research process, it first examines the importance of inclusion for youth peacebuilders. It then outlines strategies employed by youth to advocate for inclusion and undertake peacebuilding activities. Thirdly, it details the challenges, risks and obstacles youth face in undertaking their work. Finally, it synthesises young people's own key messages to the international community and lists actionable recommendations to support youth inclusion in peace processes.

Foundational peacebuilding work is often undertaken by youth. This holistic approach to peace, includes expansive notions of the conditions necessary for peace and stability. Yet, efforts occurring within communities, at local levels, and in rural areas are often overlooked. Such work is purposive and strategic, addressing crucial issues identified by youth with the aim of pursuing and building conditions where peace can thrive. This report reinforces and complements a growing evidence base on the importance of youth-inclusive peace processes.

1.   METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCESS

A commitment to recognising youth as knowledge bearers and knowledge creators is reflected in the approach to this research. This report is the product of a youth-led, adult- supported research project where youth researchers based in Australia undertook training before conducting interviews with youth peacebuilders in Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar.[8] This approach had two key goals: skills-building for youth in undertaking peace research, and partnership with youth in design and implementation of the research.

Three youth researchers, Spalding (21), Odgers- Jewell (25), and Payne (26), were supported by two adult researchers, Mollica and Berents, (35 and 36 years old) who provided skills training, support, and guidance on the research process.

Decisions on the research process from the questions for the semi-structured interviews, to data analysis and synthesis were undertaken collectively, with the youth researchers' views being prioritised in guiding the shape of the research.

This approach had methodological implications and is grounded in an ethical commitment to recognising youth as knowledge creators, and the importance of building research models that recognise and centre this commitment. Attention to youth-led research as a foundational necessity for youth, peace and security has been growing.

The launch in early 2021 of the Youth, Peace and Security Research Network, constituted of youth generating knowledge to guide the YPS agenda, is one example of truly youth-led knowledge creation.[9] Approaches such as Search for Common Ground's guidance on youth-led research practice[10] provide frameworks that enable youth to lead on research. This increasing attention is promising in shifting narratives of youth capacity and expertise and embodying ethical commitments to youth inclusion throughout the research process.

	National Definition of Youth	Youth as % of population
Afghanistan	18-35	66%
South Sudan	15-35	73%
Myanmar	15-24	28%

Two significant events impacted the context in which this report was written. The first is the military coup which occurred on the 1 February 2021 in Myanmar just as interviews commenced. The second is that interviews in Afghanistan were undertaken before the Taliban takeover in August 2021.

In both contexts youth peacebuilders now face extremely heightened risks and insecurity and are unable to carry out their work in the same way they had been doing previously. Despite this, indeed because of, the situations in Myanmar and Afghanistan, the accounts of youth peacebuilders and their insights into how peace processes can be more youth-inclusive are more relevant than ever.

The team conducted thirty-five interviews (thirteen in Afghanistan, eighteen in South Sudan, and four in Myanmar) between January and April 2021.[11] Initial contacts in each country were facilitated by Search for Common Ground, subsequent interviews were solicited by 'snowball' referrals by participants to move beyond the initial network.

The average age of the youth peacebuilders across all three countries was 25.6 years old. There were nineteen young women and fifteen young men. Interviews were conducted mostly via Zoom, with two focus group interviews conducted via Whatsapp call in South Sudan.

Context of Formal Peace Processes

Afghanistan: The US and allies have been involved in a conflict in Afghanistan, since 2001 when they invaded and overthrew the Taliban. The most recent efforts to negotiate peace in Afghanistan commenced in September 2020 in Doha, after the US and Taliban signed an agreement in early 2020 ahead of a proposed withdrawal of US troops. There was minimal representation of women on the government's side and no women in the Taliban team. Victims of the conflict were not been included in the process. These formal negotiations were precarious and in August 2021 with the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan there has been no further progress.

South Sudan: After many failed attempts at peace negotiations following the outbreak of conflict in December 2013, The Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan was signed September 2018. Brokered by the InterGovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) listed parties included the Transitional Government of National Unity of the Republic of South Sudan, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army- In Opposition, the South Sudan Opposition Alliance, Former Detainees, and Other Political Parties.

Myanmar: The National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) between Myanmar's (military) Government and eight rebel organisations was signed in 2015. In 2016 when Aung San Suu Kyi's civil government established leadership they continued peace negotiations and two more rebel organisations formally signed the agreement. Since then, attempts to create a more comprehensive and inclusive peace process have been constrained by escalating violence. On February 1st 2021, a coup d'etat began, stalling the peace process indefinitely.

Text Box 1

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH-INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Key Ideas

- Stereotypes and "policy panic" limit opportunities for substantive inclusion of youth.
- Inclusion requires recognition of youth leadership and capacity for today and for the future.
- Inclusive practices that recognise the political capacity of youth peacebuilders will value their participation in the decision-making and implementation of formal peace practices.
- Inclusive practice must acknowledge youth voices that agree *and* those conveying dissent.

The inclusiveness of peace processes is increasingly used as a marker for success as it promotes ownership amongst diverse stakeholders. Despite evidence that broader inclusion yields positive impacts on the transformative capacity and sustainability of peace agreements, youth continue to be left out of the room and on the margins of formal decision- making.[12]

Amongst youth peacebuilders interviewed it was evident that they "have been forced to create their own room and develop their own strategies and go their own way" as formal negotiation processes remain out of reach for the majority (27, young man, Afghanistan). In Myanmar those interviewed highlighted that "young people were not allowed to participate in formal peace processes" and in the "peace agreement itself, there's no word that mentioned youth" (30, young woman, Myanmar).

Youth are "demanding for spaces" but are "often told by the older generation that this is not the time" (27, young man, South Sudan). In Myanmar "when [youth activists] do [their] work, when [they try] to advocate, the one thing [they] keep hearing is you're still very young, you still have time" (30, young woman, Myanmar). Similar trends are evident in Afghanistan where "authorities, the government, elders... do not recognise that anything without youth is not for youth" (26, young woman, Afghanistan).

This generational disconnect goes some way towards explaining the continued exclusion of youth from formal peace practices. Attention to transforming how youth capacity is recognised and valued is of critical importance. Further commitment to building intergenerational trust and collaboration are also urgently needed.

During the first International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes (2019) delegates noted that the existence of frameworks, such as UN Resolution 2249 and 2250 obligates Member States to implement youth inclusive practices. While institutional discourses have normalised the inclusion of young people in formal peace practices, implementing meaningful engagement strategies that take youth seriously remains a challenge at the local level.

Stereotypes and the 'Demographic Imperative' of Inclusion

Simplistic binaries of youth as the victims or as spoilers create a lack of urgency with respect to youth's inclusion in formal peacebuilding spaces.[13] This narrow perception limits youth's capacity to exercise agency and ownership as it "erases and denies the multiple experiences of youth as peacebuilders who negotiate complex systems of risk and oppression to act for peace at local, national, and international levels"[14]

As interviewees highlighted, youth constitute a significant proportion of the population and thus have a stake in the decisions that are made. In Afghanistan participants emphasized that because youth make up 60 percent of the population (median age of 18) without their voices, strategies for peace remain incomplete. Similar motivations for youth inclusive discourses were outlined in South Sudan where youth constitute 70 percent (median age of 19) of the population. "In societ[ies] where the majority of the population is youth" therefore their voices are necessary as they "contribute to inclusivity, and when the process is inclusive… it will result in the "success of the process" (27, young women, Afghanistan).

Youth explained that "if we don't include… young people in the peace process in mediating or in putting down a foundation of a peaceful society… then we are losing out" on their perspectives and on their buy-in of the peace process (28, young man, South Sudan). In Myanmar youth noted that the broadening peace dividend throughout the nation is driven predominantly by the continued prioritising of a siloed approach to peace, where 28 percent of the population are excluded from the decision making. As one participant explained "the reason why we have very long conflicts and very short peacebuilding is because these processes have "less youth voices… and they don't have youth leadership" (22, young man, Myanmar).

Large youth populations represent untapped potential for peace within communities emerging from violence and instability. Realising youth inclusive discourses reflects a critical imperative as they "are the ones who are going to be there in the next twenty years." (28, young man, Afghanistan). In South Sudan youth explained, "if I'm not going to participate in drafting the policies that govern me, and are going to govern my children, that are going to govern my grandkids, then there is a problem there. So… this process [is] very important because… they bring young people's perspectives to the table, where they are looked at as stakeholders" (28, young man, South Sudan).

Youth peacebuilders in all countries emphasized the important relationship between the future sustainability of peace, youth inclusion and their political buy-in.

Valuing Youth-Inclusive Peace Practices

Inclusivity matters as it "helps shape the understanding of what the future holds for [youth]" whilst also legitimising the process through their political investment (30, young man, South Sudan). Similar links, were drawn by Afghan youth peacebuilders who explained that "involve[ment] in every aspect, especially in peace processes" is important "for our future" (22, young woman, Afghanistan).

"Youth [are] spearheading the wars and fighting, why not also let them spearhead the peace process!"
- young woman, South Sudan

Advocacy by youth for inclusive formal peace processes is driven by recognition that "the decisions made at the negotiating table… directly affect their future and… how they would be living in the aftermath of signing a peace deal" (26, young woman, Afghanistan). Youth inclusion is integral to ensuring youth trust in the process and for ensuring that they participate in creating the outcomes which will enable a positive future.

Put simply, "youth [are] spearheading the wars and fighting, why not also let them spearhead the peace process!" (young woman, South Sudan). Also in South Sudan youth explained that regardless of the where and when peacebuilding takes place "whether at the grassroots, whether from the beginning until the end, the youth voices have to be included, and the youth have to be at the table every time there is a peace processes happening" (30, young man, South Sudan).

While conceptually the value of youth to formal peace processes is increasingly recognised as a critical imperative, in practice their leadership remains ignored.

There is an assumption that "we are the young leaders of tomorrow... I think that has to stop because... young people are the leaders of today"
- 30, young man, South Sudan

The ceding of space and power by older generations and those in key decision-making structures remains a key advocacy concern for youth peacebuilders. As many explained, "most of the time, this happens you find, young people's opinions forgotten" as there is an assumption that "we are the young leaders of tomorrow, [but] I think that has to stop because I believe, and everyone [should] believe that young people are the leaders of today"
(30, young man, South Sudan).

Notions that youth are the "leaders of tomorrow" and that they possess leadership capacity today are not mutually exclusive ideas. Yet often inclusive peacebuilding discourses emphasize the future to the detriment of youth's meaningful inclusion in the present.

Central to discussions of inclusion were ideas about the nature of inclusivity. Amongst the youth interviewed there was a consensus that "their role should not be symbolic" (28, young man, Afghanistan). Efforts towards youth inclusion therefore, must normalise the embeddedness of youth's experiences and leadership in the design and implementation of peace practices.

Youth in each country challenged historical understandings of inclusivity that trend towards piecemeal or tokenistic participation. Instead, interviewees revealed the significance of talking about responsive practices that centre and take seriously the voices of youth. As one Afghan peacebuilder suggested, "[youth's] voice should be heard and their voice should be valued, and also acted upon not just to show it to the international community, but for the Afghan people that we have youth representative" (31, male, Afghanistan).

The importance of a responsive and normalised approach to youth inclusion was also underscored by the UN Secretary General in his 2020 review of the YPS agenda. He concluded that "while the inclusion of young people as signatories inside the negotiation room is key, their presence alone does not always guarantee that youth specific needs will be addressed."[15]

Youth Leadership and Political Will

Youth leadership in decision-making and implementation of peace creates space for often underutilized strategies and innovative approaches capable of transforming communities.

In Afghanistan peacebuilders explained that when youth are included "from the very beginning" they offer "different perspectives... give different initiatives" and provide "different opinions" that can "bring changes in their communities" (22, young woman, Afghanistan). In addition, "their voices really matter, because they are a part of this country, and they are passionate about the country, they are passionate about changing the society into and directing the society... in a positive direction and making Afghanistan a better place for all"
(26, young woman, Afghanistan)

Creating youth-inclusive peacebuilding strategies which enable leadership and allow for expressions of citizenship and agency were revealed as key priorities amongst interviewees. This reinforces findings from the *We Are Here Report*, which suggests that "youth agency and leadership... has a powerful impact on stabilizing and strengthening formal peace negotiations and agreements."[16] Contributions that arise from youth leadership are increasingly acknowledged, particularly in research that aims to centre youth's voices and experiences.[17]

Inclusion that produces sustainable peace must acknowledge how youth leadership creates more expansive participatory parameters. When youth are empowered to lead within formal processes they bring increased attention to the importance of intersectionality for responsive peace. As one Afghan youth peacebuilder explained, a key focus of youth advocacy involves creating space for diverse voices.

"[Youth] voices really matter, because they are a part of this country, and they are passionate about the country... and making Afghanistan a better place for all"
- 26, young woman, Afghanistan

The importance of these diverse voices cannot be understated. As one youth peacebuilder from South Sudan explained engaging with youth "...will bring different voices to the table, on what kind of country they want...it's also helped them to build their desired South Sudan, because youth have gone through a lot and they are continuing to suffer the consequences of something that they did not bargain for"
(27, young woman, South Sudan).

The African Youth Action Network, for example, aims "to make sure that the youth and refugees... have a voice in the decision-making process, at the policy level, on issues that are meant for them, because anything for the youth should include youth"
(27, young man, South Sudan).

The relationship between youth leadership in peace processes and sustainable peace was also evident in Myanmar. As one youth advocate explained:

> When you talk about sustainable futures, it is important for youth to participate... When you don't include youth...in the peace process, then the country can fall back into the conflict. So, when you create peace agreements, when you create future plans, it is very important to include youth... So that they have a sense of ownership to all of these things
> (30, young man, Myanmar).

As many of the young peacebuilders highlighted, "involving young people in the peace process... give[s] them the ownership of the peace process itself. And they will feel that we are part of this...And we try to also work together with all stakeholders to the peace process" (30, young man, South Sudan).

In all these accounts, the potential for intergenerational co-creation of peace is evident, if adults are willing to work with youth. Youth leadership enables expressions of political will which empowers diverse young people to invest in the outcomes of peace.

The Importance of Representation for Inclusive Peace

Youth advocates demonstrated that they have the capacity to participate in formal institutions and are broadly supported by discourses and institutional frameworks. However, they also suggested that continued emphasis on the politics of who participates creates environments where the pursuit of inclusive peace remains elusive for most young people. Central to the production of an enabling environment are relationships between youth and the community.

This is particularly noticeable in Afghanistan where questions of who participates in formal peace are often determined by pre-existing power structures dominated by the elite. As one young peacebuilder explained, inclusivity is largely symbolic "...because the Afghan government are saying they have a number of youth on the negotiating team, but those youths are not speaking on behalf of youth, they are just talking on behalf of a group of people" (28, young man, Afghanistan). Long-standing and deeply embedded structural conditions, social relations, and existing power structures prevents meaningful representation of diverse youth voices (text box 2).

Similar challenges for representation exist in South Sudan, driven by intergenerational tensions. South Sudan peacebuilders highlighted gaps in the relationship between youth and community leaders, noting that "the older generations are not being free or rather not so welcoming to train the youth to take up leadership" (27, young man, South Sudan).

For many young people inclusion, therefore, remains highly politicised. Youth peacebuilders in Myanmar, Afghanistan and South Sudan acknowledged the importance of notions of inclusion, which emphasize practices that empower all youth to participate.

Advocates interviewed identified factors such as "different cultures", "sexism", "age segregation", "socio-economic opportunities", "racism" and "political relationships" as embedded barriers to participation in formal peace processes for young people (23, young woman, Afghanistan; 34, male, South Sudan; 30, young man, Myanmar).

> *"I want a representative who really represents me. I do not want the son of a traditional leader, or Son of God of War. I call them God of War, whose fathers have been in war for many years. I really want someone who has been migrants, who has been injured from the war, who has lost his family, I want someone to understand what I'm saying, what I want as a youth, in peace negotiations"*
> *- (22, young man, Afghanistan).*

Text Box 2

In Afghanistan it was suggested that "...more attention is given to the major province, to elites" than to youth in rural and isolated areas (28, young woman, Afghanistan). Similar exclusion patterns were revealed in South Sudan, as youth advocates explained that "... when we put all our dialogues within Juba, within urban centers, sometimes I think it does not really make a lot of sense" as it excludes where the fighting is happening (30, young man, South Sudan).

Consensus amongst youth peacebuilders was that inclusion involves "...bring[ing] different people like from the rural communities, from the states, from the counties, from the borders, to come and have the dialogue.' (30, young man, South Sudan; 27, young women, Afghanistan).

In Myanmar, the need for capacity building was similarly tied to the demographics of youth currently experiencing exclusion from peace processes. Those interviewed highlighted the intersecting challenges of class, socio-economic status and location. As one youth activist explained, outside Yangon "they don't have such access themselves to attend workshops and training. In the rural area, they are more poor than the Yangon area and they have to focus on their survival, their wellbeing that's why they have very little chance" to participate "and why we need more capacity building" for these young people if we are serious about inclusion (22, young man, Myanmar).

The expansion of youth centered research has revealed similar trends towards the underrepresentation of particular youth demographics in peace processes.[18] Broadly, what interviews with youth peacebuilders demonstrate is that inclusion requires meaningful consideration of the intersecting factors that inform how youth participate in social and political systems.

While underrepresentation remains a challenge for all youth, particularly within formal peacebuilding structures, some youth experience heightened exclusion. This exclusion is amplified by intersecting factors such as class, economic status and gender.
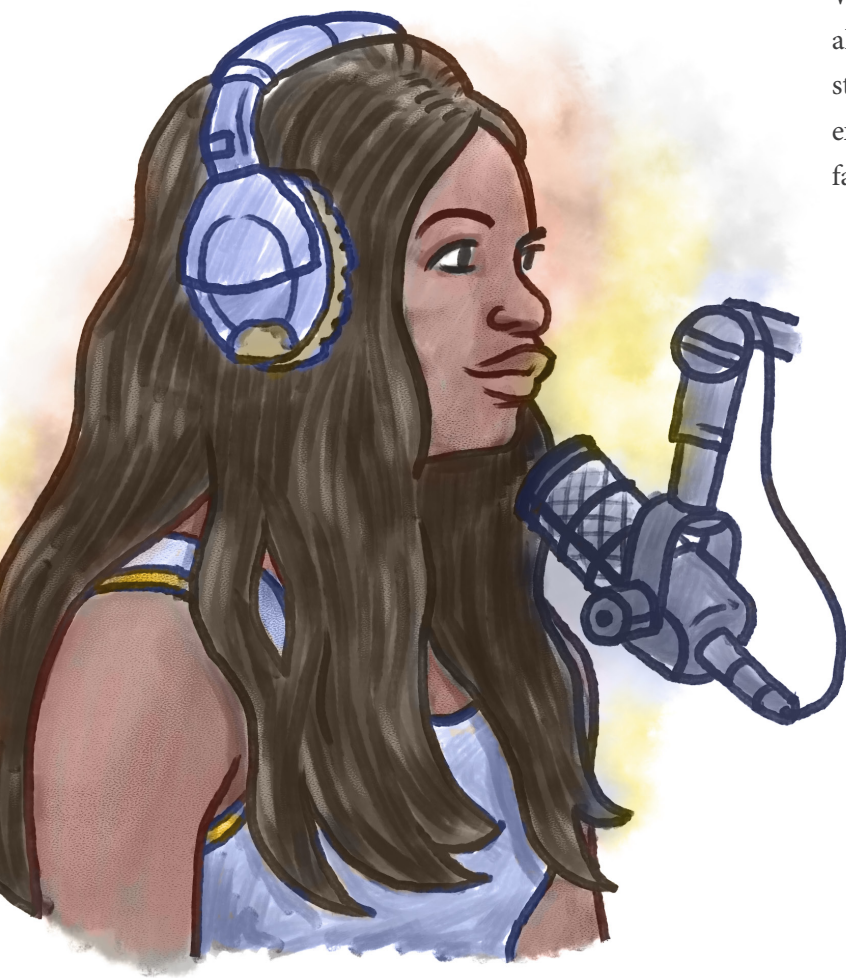
Acknowledging Informal Spaces as Sites of Inclusion

Notions of inclusion are focused predominantly on formal institutions. Where youth are concerned however, the value of informal spaces cannot be underestimated. Informal spaces provide youth with opportunities to participate in peace on their own terms and to define the parameters for peacebuilding in ways that reflect their diverse experiences. These spaces are legitimate, yet consistently undervalued sites of engagement.

Recognition of the value of informal spaces has been previously noted in research on YPS. As Simpson concluded, they are crucial for the realisation of inclusive peace as "these are not spaces where young people are being "included" or "invited in" – they are spaces that young people have invented or made their own."[19]

In Afghanistan the creation of the 2019 National Youth Delegate forum provides an example of the value and legitimacy of informal spaces. This forum provided an opportunity for youth in each of the 34 provinces to come together to discuss "issues related to the peace processes... after [the] peace agreement [and] to make a resolution" to be "shared with the government and to our partners, national and international here in Kabul" (28, young woman, Afghanistan).

Informal spaces are often free from technocratic rules and notions of the "correct" way to achieve peace. They offer opportunities for more voices and for youth to display leadership and agency.

Amongst youth peacebuilders the importance of interactions between the formal and the informal were also evident. For example, South Sudan advocates explained that "outside of the room, youth are really doing a lot, they go to the peace negotiation venues, they wait for people outside of the negotiation rooms, they meet them with letters, they do one on one meetings, and then they do a lot on social media to campaign, create activism, and push things to go" (34, male, South Sudan).

Peacebuilding practices, which are substantially inclusive, must better recognise the links between formal and informal spaces and the strategies youth employ to navigate these.

3. STRATEGIES FOR PEACE: CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Key ideas

- Advocacy and lobbying present opportunities for youth participation in peacebuilding across both formal and informal space.
- Technology is rapidly becoming an important tool for the implementation of responsive peacebuilding strategies so training in the ensuring safe and effective use of technology is key.
- Networks are critical for knowledge sharing. They offer forums for youth to learn from each other and assist with building positive interpersonal relationships for sustainable peace.
- Training conducted by youth peacebuilders emphasizes building capacity including youth inclusive conflict resolution and analysis, mediation and leadership skills.
- Mentorship empowers youth to develop knowledge about peace and provides greater opportunities for intergenerational trust and co-leadership.

Youth in Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar use a diverse range of strategies for peace. They employ new and traditional mechanisms to engage in peace practices in formal and informal spaces. Advocacy and lobbying, in particular, provide scope for engagement with other stakeholders, and remain central to the agendas of youth peacebuilders.

Advocacy and Opportunities Lobbying as Opportunities

The power dynamics and cultural traditions that underpin formal institutions produce conditions that limit the efficacy of strategies pursued to increase participation. Through engagement young people can lobby and advocate to transform institutions and to explain their needs. Visibility is an important first step towards a responsive and representative youth agenda

Advocates continue to propose potential forums for engagement as it is a noted "priority for civil society organisations and the government" (28, young man, Afghanistan). In Afghanistan those interviewed agreed that "establishing national youth councils" (31, male, Afghanistan) has the capacity to "bring youth from corners of the country with different backgrounds and ethnicities, from all walks of li[f]e."

However, "unfortunately, the young people who make the highest population of Afghan society feel marginalised and ke[pt] away from the peace process (28, young man, Afghanistan). This continued marginalisation, leads some Afghan youth to question who formal strategies that engage youth are for given highly visible external dynamics.

As one Afghan youth peacebuilder explained it is important that they "introduc[ed] a youth representative who goes to the United Nations Security Council and raises the voice of youth on different issues, not on the peace, on different issues that the youth want the international communities to have the attention to have the support" 28, young woman, Afghanistan).

When given the opportunity to speak and most importantly to be heard, advocacy and lobbying yield important results and build responsive networks for youth peacebuilding efforts.

In South Sudan "Emmily Koiti... signed [the peace agreement] on behalf of [youth and women] after women lobbied for a representative to be in the room." Youth activists such as Rhea Williams, are also increasingly engaging with formal institutions and "these young women have fought very hard for women to be in such spaces"
(26, young woman, South Sudan).

"... so the young woman that I was mentoring had a complaint and they said, we have all these women in the government; we have Angelina Tang we have Agnes Kwaje Lasuba--she's the Minister for Gender, Youth and Social Welfare—but we have never met them. How can we meet them and share with them our grievances? Like okay... when you're going to meet them you don't just want to meet them barehanded. We have to go with something they like. Okay, what should we do? I'm like, before we go, we have to know how to write a policy brief. How are you going to write a policy brief? How are we going to share our grievances to them? So we had a meeting where we gathered 15 of the young women... So, we had a meeting, we drafted our policy brief, we shared it with our donors, and they also gave us their input"
- (26, young woman, South Sudan).

Text Box 3

For youth, advocacy and lobbying build networks of trust and forums to challenge long-held stereotypes about their interests and capacities. Advocacy and lobbying by youth also gives other stakeholders opportunities to learn and establish relationships with a demographic long ignored within these formal structures.

Youth-led organisations have also pursued institutional and policy training for youth inclusion. The intended aim is to build capacity amongst youth, which ensures productive and positive advocacy within formal institutions. As a youth peacebuilder from South Sudan explained, when meeting with government representatives it is important to engage using approaches that speak the language of institutions (text box 3). Technical training in writing and policy are therefore central to capacity building.

Also evident in this approach is the importance of collaboration between partners. While not ideal, it is important that once youth are in the room that they have the tools to ensure that their ideas are presented in a way that will be heard.

Links between youth dialogues and formal structures are crucial for the sustainability of peace efforts. As a result, youth activists find ways to embed this interaction into their peacebuilding strategies.

Navigating Exclusion from the Room

While strategies that provide opportunities for participation within and between formal processes continue to be used, efforts to engage meaningfully through these practices often discount young people's leadership capacity. Youth, therefore, have found new opportunities to demonstrate leadership and create foundational peace that transforms their communities.

In Afghanistan, "youth come together to form a network of groups by themselves" as "beyond that [there is not] any kind of meaningful engagement of youth" in the room (31, male, Afghanistan). Likewise in Myanmar activists suggest that the peace process "do[es] not represent [youth]" due to a lack of "opportunity to discuss the peace process" (28, young woman, Myanmar).

Similar trends of exclusion from formal processes exist in South Sudan, as despite stipulations in the Peace Agreement that youth should be given a seat at the table, "the government has not bought a lot of young people in" which has "made it fairly hard...to get involved in peace and the affairs of the state" (30, young man, South Sudan).

The frustration evident in this quote reflects the piecemeal nature of inclusion in South Sudan, as the invitation of one youth representative assumes that they have the capacity to speak authoritatively on the experience of all youth. To overcome these obstacles, youth advocates pursue many strategies. In South Sudan this includes "guerilla advocacy". Youth "write position letters, and they also do radio talk shows... they lobby for representation... organ[ising] marches through State Houses" (22, young woman, South Sudan)

In Afghanistan, youth activists highlighted their potential to act as "a bridge between" the government, the Taliban and other civil society organisations, as "they can lobby, they can advocate, they can convince and they can mobilize people... and provide opportunities" through "support[ing] their peers to reintegrate" (27, young man, Afghanistan).

The strategies employed by youth activists are underpinned by expansive, and constantly evolving notions of peace. There was consensus that "the way peace means to everyone is different. Because we identify peace in different ways" (26, young woman, South Sudan).

Strategies for peace therefore must be diverse and acknowledge these differences.

While notions of peace may differ, there was agreement about the approaches needed to pursue sustainable peace. Youth peacebuilders interviewed agreed that strategies which "empower people to build positive peace in their community", "that create more room for participation, more room for development, more room for resilience and sustainability" (30, young man, Myanmar) are likely to produce stability and opportunity.

Common amongst all the strategies was the pursuit of unity. As one South Sudanese peacebuilder explained "before we started reaching out to youth, we're looking, what are the unifying factors? What are the things that can unite young people that can bring youth people together" (30, young man, South Sudan).

Similar strategies are evident in Afghanistan as youth activists built a network to "connect with other local youth peacebuilders and to help each other" to speak to the government and the community in a collective voice (22, young woman, Afghanistan).

Exclusion from formal processes has necessitated the pursuit of other avenues for meaningful engagement by young peacebuilders. These alternative approaches envisage peace as a foundational rather than institutional idea.

Activism through virtual and collective unity

Outside and around the room youth advocates have more opportunities to implement and design strategies their way. They are empowered to develop peacebuilding practices that reflect their needs and their voices. Building networks and creative practices are prominent features of the work of youth peacebuilders.

In South Sudan, youth peacebuilders have built unity and pursued reconciliation using music, establishing the "Power of Unity" initiative. Youth created a song... called 'Power of Unity' where artists from different tribes sang in their local languages. Eight languages in total ensured "they pass the message of peace, reconciliation, unity among, the youth and among the citizens themselves" (30, young man, South Sudan). Music is often a shared language allowing people to communicate across time and cultures. Using music from multiple communities of youth makes visible the diverse yet common experiences of youth in a public space.

Youth peacebuilders indicated that "in person meetings are more effective" in building a collective voice (31, male, Afghanistan). Yet they also all acknowledged the value of technology for creating virtual, collective spaces for activism. Youth "leverage the use of technology to raise their voices, to increase women [and] youth participation in peacebuilding" by sharing knowledge (30, young man, Myanmar).

Public radio is widely considered to be a useful technological tool due to its accessibility and wide reach amongst rural and urban communities, as well as youth and government officials. Youth peacebuilders in South Sudan use public radio to talk with decision makers about the needs of youth and the gaps in the peace process felt by young people (22, young woman, South Sudan).'

"We have radio talk shows every Sunday, on Eye Radio. And that has helped people to realize that you don't have to be just … in the peace process to speak about peace. No, you can use your sports to speak about peace. You can use your eyes to speak about peace, you can use different platforms to speak about peace. Because peace is not only about the agreement, but it's about you at home. How are you feeling? Are you secure? Can you talk? Others' peace is having food in their house, others' going to school. That means that I have peace, and we have been using [the radio show] to share that".
- (26, young woman, South Sudan)

Text Box 4

The proliferation of radio programs in South Sudan (text box 4), and the increasing use of social media to launch activists' campaigns further demonstrate the importance of the virtual space for youth activism.

Social media has also been used successfully by the youth activists interviewed to facilitate conversation. As one youth activist explained "we use social media to try to highlight the concerns and voice of those Afghan youth by recording and making short videos and then putting it on social media and asking our influencer friends and our network to please share those videos so that these videos have as much reach as they can" (27, young man, Afghanistan).

Creating strategies for social media proved important for Myanmar's youth activists, as "now in 2021, most of the information and news about the protests and information are rooted in social media...if you want to get information [you] go and check social media" (22, young man, Myanmar).

In Afghanistan "online conferences" provided opportunities to "share their thoughts and experiences of facing COVD and dealing with that." (26, young woman, Afghanistan). Technology has proven to be particularly crucial in 2020 and 2021 during the global pandemic and as increased security challenges have made in- person gatherings unsafe and unfeasible.

In Myanmar, "young people developed a campaign called flower speech" to combat increased hate speech online and counter government attacks on social media platforms (22, young man, Myanmar).

The wide reach of social media allows activists to provide knowledge to a wide range of youth and thus empower them through information. Youth peacebuilders and their adult allies in all three countries acknowledge that "social media has its positive and negative aspects, because it can limit communication sharing to the elites and communities with internet and electricity" (51,male, South Sudan).

As such, while social media provides opportunities to democratise knowledge, in other instances it can further restrict access to peace practices.

To maximise the positive potential of technology and social media platforms, youth activists have focused some energy towards teaching young people effective and safe strategies for building peace in the virtual space (text box 5).

In Myanmar, youth peacebuilders "train youth on how to make short videos, very brief one day or two day training, and then we let them interview their peers to make some one minute, two minute videos about what they want to see in the future" (30, young man, Myanmar).

Pragmatic skill development in technology is also prominent in the peacebuilding work of mentors in South Sudan (text box 6).

"Social media can be a way to spread the message of peace and the message of love in Afghanistan, because like I said, we know our target audience, we know that a lot of youth are using Facebook and Twitter. So when we train [youth], we train them on different platforms. So for example on Facebook, what we know so far is that a lot of our local government, politicians use Facebook rather than Twitter. So when we talk to Afghan peacebuilders, we say okay, Twitter is for these specific activities... [But] if anything is happening in your community, if there is any problem, you need to create a Facebook group, we will help you from here."
- (22, young woman, Afghanistan)

Text Box 5

These discussions of developing technological skills emphasize the importance of applying an expansive lens to notions of what constitutes peacebuilding work. Foundational ideas of peace reiterate the importance of understanding youth inclusive peace in holistic and transformative ways.

Dialogue and Awareness Raising: Creating networks

Peacebuilding mechanisms that strengthened youth's networks were evident in each case country. Networks are central to effective inclusive peacebuilding as they facilitate relationships of trust and the development of strategies for recognising shared goals. Dialogue was used by youth peacebuilders to develop interpersonal connections with other youth and with adult allies to achieve effective conflict resolution, and mediation.

In South Sudan, networks such as "Sisters Keepers" and "Seed" use WhatsApp to connect women from across South Sudan.

The aim is to create an accessible and common space "to check on each other... share materials and build a network that even though you're not close to me, but you say you're my sister, it doesn't matter how far you are...we are sharing the same goals. We are sharing the same ideologies and we want to make sure that the country is better for us" (26, young woman, South Sudan).

> *"Our peacebuilding work involves extensive work on media, training young people on media skills and to be able to produce programs that are heard on radio stations in different languages, including the engineers, local languages, and with the young people that we draw from different backgrounds, we give them access to our production studios and train them giving them the skills and after that, they begin to have the confidence and skills to go and for use and to them programs on radio stations. And when they discuss important issues over the radio, the adult people, the older people are actually listening to this discussion from the young people".*
> *- (34, young man, South Sudan)*

Text Box 6

Youth recognise that relationship building is crucial for transformative peace. Providing opportunities for open conversations about peace is central to the activities of youth peacebuilders across all three countries.

In Afghanistan building community between youth is important for common understanding as when "they are connecting between each other... they're sharing opportunities with each other, so they see how one youth faces the challenges and how he or she would overcome in society. So, they are using each other's experiences to help each other" (28, young man, Afghanistan).

These programs, which prioritise communication are essential for the development of an inclusive peace that responds to the needs of youth. Their visibility, openness and transparency, provide youth who participate opportunities to challenge misconceptions and to advocate for different ways to resolve conflicts.

In South Sudan, the Anataban Campaign illustrates the value of peace dialogues led by youth. Anataban has wide reach amongst South Sudanese youth activists, demonstrating its effectiveness in facilitating a public discussion on peacebuilding issues impacting youth.

In 2018 Anataban also launched a social media campaign #SouthSudanIsWatching "through WhatsApp and Facebook" the aim of which was to express youth's views on the implementation of the Peace Agreement and to pressure the government to take young people seriously (27, young man, South Sudan).

The campaign also continues to assemble a community of artists to hold concerts, organise street theatre, and conduct poetry readings in a public forum (30, young man, South Sudan). These art projects are designed to make create visible networks of youth, which collectively amplify their experiences of conflict and highlight their vision for peace.

Youth utilise creative mechanisms for dialogue (text box 7). In Afghanistan "art can prove to be significantly effective and important in social change. Because you can use the soft power of art for the sorts of change that you want to bring in, in your community" (27, young man, Afghanistan).

In South Sudan initiatives such as the "Power of Unity" discussed previously, and other "music for peace" programs also harness the power of art for peace through discourse and network building (30, young man, South Sudan).

> *"By giving the visuals to people, you can influence their attitudes and behaviors. So this is very important. I would not say art as a tool, because art itself is very important, but I would see art as an approach. So, as an approach, you can use this art, to shape the ideas, to shape the attitudes and behaviors"*
> *- (27, young man, Afghanistan)*

Text Box 7

These mechanisms for dialogue support peace processes as they are embedded in the everyday, making them accessible to a broad range of young people. Because they exist in public spaces they present opportunities for older generations to come and learn from and with youth about their experiences and perceptions of peace.

Collective action through networks provides an effective platform to learn and develop strategies for peacebuilding amongst and with youth.

Skills and Training

Training programs for skills development are key strategies developed by youth peacebuilders. This approach acknowledges that developing effective conflict resolution, mediation and leadership abilities is critical for capacity building. Prioritising the building of youth's capabilities demonstrates the importance of creating an expansive enabling environment.

Youth peacebuilders in Afghanistan and South Sudan have noted an emphasis on fostering skills that enable "human centered or bottom up" peace practices (38, male, South Sudan). Building knowledge around conflict resolution strategies was also common in conversations with youth peacebuilders.

Nurturing interpersonal interactions through skill development acknowledges the importance of everyday engagements in peacebuilding. Relationships create conditions for mutual respect, while providing alternative conflict resolution strategies.

Throughout the activities discussed with youth peacebuilders there was a focus on centering the voices of young people and providing them with the tools to be knowledge producers and disseminators.

In South Sudan there is an emphasis on "empowering [youth] through peacebuilding training,... mediation, and public relations" (young man, South Sudan). In one example, adult peacebuilders help "train young people on media skills and to be able to produce programs that are heard on radio stations in different languages" (30, young man, South Sudan), demonstrating the importance of intergenerational relationships.

In Afghanistan "programs such as debate, and also research" are used to provide "students [with] training and then [opportunities to] discuss various national and international topics." The goal of these programs "is acceptance, that they are developing or improving their critical thinking skills and also extending their general knowledge on different issues" (28, young woman, Afghanistan).
Youth prioritise learning and skill building that empower them to exercise leadership and agency over their lives.

This skill development has a ripple effect within communities as youth take the knowledge that they have gained back to their communities to share with their peers. As the NWERO mentorship program in South Sudan demonstrates these skills enable youth to advocate for their own inclusion in local contexts (text box 8), Such initiatives were common amongst the programs provided for young people.

In Afghanistan, the establishment of a Model United Nations by youth leaders provided an important opportunity "to improve their leadership abilities, skills, their public speaking, their team making, the group working and everything you think that is good for a diplomat, because the focus is to empower youth" through knowledge and the practical attainment of skills (22, young woman, Afghanistan).

The importance of these types of skills was also emphasized amongst youth activists in Myanmar. One explained that their work with youth has revealed "that, one of the major things that youth ha[ve] been lacking is communication skills, negotiation skills, or sometimes it's team building and leadership skills and our goal is to try develop these in youth activists" (30, young man, Myanmar).

Discussions with youth peacebuilders reflected a broad conception of what constitutes skills training for peace. In Afghanistan women's writing projects provided opportunities for women to be heard. As one peacebuilder explained, "I was training girls from all the 34 provinces of Afghanistan, I was teaching them writing skills and helping them publish their work" (26, young woman, Afghanistan). Writing projects, art, social enterprises and leadership programs all demonstrate the importance of foundational skills that strengthen the link between sustainable peace and development.

"We extend it. We give the knowledge to the young people in the grassroot that did not get that training... Also, we encourag[e] young women to be involve[d] in our work through decision making... we also encourage them that they know enough to participate in any decision making, whether it's local or national"
- young woman, 21, South Sudan

Text Box 8

Training young people in a wide range of practical leadership skills underpins an idea of foundational peace, which seeks to look beyond the absence of violence and build peace in the everyday. Furthermore, the emphasis of skills for positive interpersonal communication lend legitimacy to calls made by youth peacebuilders that sustainable peace is responsive to diverse voices.

Mentorship

Creating spaces for youth to work together and to learn from each other was amongst the key approaches to peace shared by youth peacebuilders. Mentorship acts as a key strategy for empowering young people to develop knowledge about and leadership for peace.

The cyclical nature of mentorship amongst youth peacebuilders was noted as essential for sustained inclusive peace. As one peacebuilder suggested "I think the most important part of young women educating young women is that when a fellow young woman sees another young woman in that position, they get inspired, they are like, I can do this, too" (26, young woman, South Sudan). Power, agency, and ownership is derived from horizontal engagement, and thus building the capacity for peer-to-peer support was a key priority for mentorship.

In Afghanistan, mentorship is utilised to "work with youth to help them change their sphere. In fact [youth-led organisations] provide [youth] with resources like education, learning tools, and also some financial resources to change their ideas into action in their community" (24, young man, Afghanistan).

Afghan peacebuilders also highlighted that the aim of mentorship programs is "...to train [youth] in various ways on how to advocate for WPS and YPS agenda, how to advocate for their rights and how we can involve them in the current peace process with the Taliban, how we can localize peace at the grassroots level" (22, young woman, Afghanistan).

The value of knowledge sharing was also a key element in the development of mentorship strategies in Myanmar. Youth activists interviewed highlighted that "talking to them about communication strategies, especially with nonviolent communication, and helping them to raise funds for specific activities, is very important in our mind, and in our work" (30, young man, Myanmar).

Underpinning strategies for mentorship are practices that pursue visibility for the peacebuilding work that youth peacebuilders are doing, particularly those programs that they have created.

In South Sudan for example, Crown the Women is an organisation that uses the openness of Facebook and Twitter to tell the stories of women doing peacebuilding work (text box 9). By sharing the stories of women conducting peacebuilding training, and learning through their mentorship, programs such as Crown the Women reinforce the importance of relationships building for peace. Sharing these stories is also important for inclusive peace as they demonstrate the value of knowledge for empowering youth to actively engage in peace practices.

"We have been sharing videos of young women, the young women we have mentored. And the young women that have been also shared that biographies have been shared by the different organizations, what they are doing, they are doing different things. And I am amazed when you see the videos, you'll see that young women are doing a lot. There is one that we took from our mentorship. It was her first time to go and mentor in some place.... She had a facilitation session where she talked about the UN Resolution 1325., she talked about the Maputo Protocol, she shared about CEDAW. And these are things that I told her, it's up to you to decide what you want to talk about"

- (26, young woman, South Sudan)

Text Box 9

Evident in these discussions of mentorship is a focus on creating space for youth to exercise agency and ownership over their own ideas for peacebuilding programs. For the youth peacebuilders in South Sudan, Afghanistan, and Myanmar the importance of passing along knowledge and building networks of peace was central to building sustainable peace. Knowledge sharing through mentorship creates a positive enabling environment for youth peacebuilders and continues to be a central concern.

Protest and Rallies

Youth peacebuilders utilise public, collective movements to ensure their interest are visible.

Protests are important tools for youth advocacy and lobbying as they provide a more accessible forum for the free exercise of their rights, and expressions of agency.

In Myanmar, the consensus amongst activists was that "public events are the most powerful tool of advocacy... So, in this situation [the coup], young people stay in the major role of advocacy, to motivate people to join them, to support them, and also to fight for democracy" (28, young woman, Myanmar). Likewise in Afghanistan, it is acknowledged that gatherings have in the past provided opportunities "for the youth to raise their voice and [gain] momentum. [At] any specific time...we could raise our voice, we could protest, we could do our advocacy" (29, young man, Afghanistan).

While protests and rallies offer opportunities for the active engagement by youth peacebuilders, they also present significant security challenges. Rallies and protests in South Sudan were an integral part of engaging outside the room when the negotiations for the peace agreement were occurring in 2018. Yet as many of the youth peacebuilders noted "...right now [early 2021] they have banned mass gathering" (28, young man, South Sudan) as governments are reluctant to engage with voices of dissent.

The risks of this approach for peacebuilding should not be understated. In Afghanistan "right now [early 2021] it is even worse than before 2015 and 2008... as people cannot be in the streets" without risk to their wellbeing (29, young man, Afghanistan).

This raises important questions for youth inclusive peacebuilding advocates. Balancing strategies for visibility and inclusion against the challenges associated with conducting peacebuilding practices outside formal spaces is critical for ensuring youth peacebuilders can continue their vital peace work safely.[20]

4. CHALLENGES TO YOUTH INCLUSION IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES

Key ideas

• Exercising their political agency and participating in formal peace processes and informal peacebuilding increases the risks to young people.

• Youth face contextual challenges that include social and cultural barriers that dismiss their capacity. Complex, evolving security and political environments characterised by lack of political will for youth inclusion limit their abilities to exercise leadership.

• Youth face practical obstacles that include the divide between rural and urban youth, and obstacles for all youth in accessing education and employment.

• Youth peacebuilders find their work limited by lack of opportunities for skill development, funding and resourcing

• COVID-19 has exacerbated existing challenges and presented new barriers for youth.

While youth actively work for inclusion and undertake initiatives in their communities, and at regional and at national levels, the challenges they face are multiple, intersecting, and profound. These challenges manifest in different ways in every context, however, there are commonalities reported by youth across Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar. These challenges are both contextual, producing barriers for young people's participation, and practical, limiting youth's capacity to participate in peace processes. Complicating efforts for inclusivity, the constantly evolving security landscape in 2021 means that efforts by youth to pursue peace take place in environments, where increasingly their personal safety is at risk.

Key contextual challenges include social and cultural barriers that dismiss the capacity of youth and limit their opportunities, complex contexts of insecurity and violence that present significant personal risks to youth leaders, and political environments often characterised by a lack of political will for youth inclusion.

Youth also face practical challenges including the divide between rural and urban youth, as well as obstacles for all youth in accessing education and employment. Opportunities for skills development, funding and resourcing are also limited, with youth repeatedly identifying these as a key challenge in the sustainability and success of their initiatives. Finally, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbate all these challenges and present new ones for youth peacebuilders in these contexts.[21]

Social and Cultural Barriers

One of the most fundamental challenges youth peacebuilders face in all contexts is culturally embedded assumptions about the capacities of young people, and the 'appropriateness' of youth leadership on peace and security issues.

Youth are highly conscious of the ways in which they are seen, characterising the adults' perspectives as seeing youth as "immature", having "limited experience", "not capable", or "not being taken seriously". A young Afghan peacebuilder explains:

> As a youth who is only 23 years old... they [the elders and community] do not see me as someone who is going to train them, they do not see me as a person who knows something" (22, young man, Afghanistan)

Deeply held cultural beliefs, the idea that youth "cannot challenge an elder at the community level, or the political national level" make it extremely difficult "even if you are skilled, experienced and qualified to challenge some of the systems and cultures that are not really supportive of young people progress" (37, young man, South Sudan).

In Myanmar, youth peacebuilders report their requests for inclusion and meaningful participation are often deferred: "You stay very young, you still have time" (30, young woman, Myanmar). Such deferrals of youth inclusion by adults are evident elsewhere too. In South Sudan youth demanding inclusion are "often told by the older generation that this is not yet the time" and this youth peacebuilder astutely notes, "you wonder when exactly will be time?" (27, young man, South Sudan).

These assumptions are compounded for young women. Young women in all three countries shared their experiences of being dismissed based on the combination of their gender and age and pointed to dominant cultural norms that limited opportunities for young women. Young women are not "trusted" that they "can also bring change in the community" (22, young woman, Afghanistan), or people "think that young women don't know about peace and security" because the men "held the guns, while the women did nothing" (26, young woman, South Sudan). Young men also commented on the "patriarchal system" (37, young man, South Sudan) that makes it harder for young women to be involved in peacebuilding work.

Young people's peace work is complicated by entrenched ethnic or religious divisions in all three countries. Reaching out across these lines can be difficult. In South Sudan, "tribalism" (26, young woman, South Sudan), the suspicion between tribes post-war makes dialogue difficult (young woman, South Sudan). In Myanmar, ethnic tensions are exacerbated by school curriculum and lack of knowledge; while people of different backgrounds may mix in the cities, in rural areas "there is very little access to awareness programs" (22, young man, Myanmar). In Afghanistan ethnic divisions are compounded by language barriers between the north and south of the country (28, young man, Afghanistan).

> *"We are often told by the older generation that this is not yet the time...you wonder when exactly will be time?"*
> *- 27, young man, South Sudan*

Text Box 10

These tensions and cultural divisions can make young people's work difficult and produce contestation over which youth should 'represent' the young people of a particular city, region or even country.

Insecurity and Risk

Insecurity and risk were among the most frequently mentioned challenges for youth peacebuilders from Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar. Across interviews, insecurity was described as an acute personal risk for youth undertaking peacebuilding work. It was invoked to explain limitations to the work youth could undertake, and included in lists of challenges that youth face generally, which inhibit their ability to participate in peacebuilding opportunities.

Experiences of insecurity, risk and violence pervaded accounts by youth of the work they are engaged in. The *If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Space* report, commissioned by the Office of the UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth, documents the widespread risks, challenges and threats youth face around the world for engaging in similar activities.[22] Although the actors differed in each location, one key way that insecurity impacted youth peacebuilders was in making their work more difficult or impossible to undertake.

First, generalised environmental insecurity in each country presents risks and challenges for youth peacebuilders and their work. In Afghanistan, multiple youth highlighted the inaccessibility of remote areas and rural provinces due to generalised insecurity, despite this being where those kind of interventions and programs are most needed (31, male, Afghanistan) (text box 10)

"We would love to go [to rural areas], we would love to talk to those youth there too. But since we cannot ensure the safety of ourselves and our team, we just try to reach out to those communities that are accessible, that are feasible for us to visit."
- (27, young man, Afghanistan)

In South Sudan, despite a peace agreement, persistent insecurity makes travel by vehicle highly dangerous because of "road ambushes" and "robbery". As a result, travel is either very risky or those who can afford it fly (30, young man, South Sudan). As adult allies note, this makes bringing together youth very expensive for underfunded youth peacebuilding organisations, and as a result "young people do not travel" (51, male, South Sudan).

Consequently, the insecurity preventing travel also diminishes opportunities for dialogue, networking and collective peace work. Youth living in remote and rural parts of each country who are often more at risk of recruitment to armed groups are less likely to be reached by the peacebuilding programs run by youth or other organisations.

In Myanmar, an already-precarious environment for peacebuilding work has become frighteningly hostile to youth since the coup. While protestors are committed to nonviolent action, youth peacebuilders share videos and photos via social media and with news outlets to show how "the military is really killing and terrorizing the whole country." (30, young man, Myanmar) In this context, internet shutdowns, violence by armed forces, and arbitrary arrests and detentions challenge young people's efforts at resistance (22, young man, Myanmar).

Cultural gender norms against women's participation also heightened risks for young women, including death threats, the risk of sexual violence, and sometimes even the risk of punishment by the young women's families.[23] One young Afghan woman explained that she simply could not undertake work in some parts of the country (28, young woman, Afghanistan), while another who lived in a southern province near the border with Pakistan described the complex security protocols she follows to carry out her work.

An environment of pervasive insecurity and violence also manifests in the digital space. In South Sudan, a young woman activist explained that "when you want to speak, you have to be careful of what you speak and where you share it", detailing how friends' phones had been hacked or tapped into by national security services (26, young woman, South Sudan). Youth across all three countries described the additional steps necessary to secure their digital communications to enable them to work safely.

Second, young people's activism often threatens the status quo, and youth themselves are threatened directly in return. Across all three countries, youth describe receiving direct threats against their person or their family.

In Myanmar, since the February 1 military coup in 2021, human rights monitoring bodies report hundreds of deaths of protesters, amongst them are many youth.[24] Even before the coup, youth often faced violence for trying to be included in political processes.

In Afghanistan, "targeted killings" by the Taliban of anyone who "jeopardises their interests" occurs (27, young man, Afghanistan), which has caused young people to be "very scared" (22, young woman, Afghanistan). Youth activists from South Sudan have been forced to flee the country due to threats against their life, and instead must try to undertake their advocacy externally.[25]

The unpredictability of violence also informs young peacebuilders' daily practices. In Afghanistan, youth are aware every time they leave the house they risk not returning.

Several young people describe a widespread practice of keeping a note with identifying details in their pocket so their families will know if they've been killed.[26] With the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan, youth peacebuilders fear the increase in violence and targeted attacks. In Myanmar, youth peacebuilders who mobilised in early 2021 in response to the coup, describe the necessity of participation despite the risks; mourning and memorialising fellow youth who have been killed has become entwined with protest activities.

There are limited to no protections for youth peacebuilders in Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar. As demonstrated in the *If I Disappear* report, lack of protection and significant risk is a common problem facing youth globally. The lack of support inhibits young people's activities and prevents them from being included in informal and formal processes of peace.

Lack of Political Will

Working in insecure contexts presents significant risks for youth. These risks are compounded when decision makers and political leaders either do not see youth as worth including or actively undermine or dismiss their legitimacy. Inaction by the international community also exacerbates these risks.

First, this manifests as a generalised lack of political will to engage with youth or to take their contributions seriously. Before the Taliban takeover, lack of support from the government "cause[d] many difficulties" for youth (28, young man, Afghanistan) in Afghanistan. While in Myanmar before the coup youth peacebuilders described the government as unwilling to listen and as lacking capacity (30, young man, Myanmar). When youth are included in formal processes they are often brought in "just to observe... they were not allowed to say anything" (27, young man, South Sudan).

This lack of political will for youth-inclusive peace practices in the present, also has implications for the future of these countries. In Afghanistan the government did "not have a clear program for empowering the youth, enabling youth to participate in decision making" which means any negotiations with the Taliban were "not according to the ideas of the youth in Afghanistan" (24, young man, Afghanistan).

In South Sudan, one youth peacebuilder shared their concern of a "huge generational gap" in the country if "there is no clear process and deliberate policy to start nurturing and positioning (youth) for leadership" (37, young man, South Sudan). Lack of political appetite for including youth raises issues into the future.

"Unfortunately, I didn't see any political will from the government or others. Including youth people is just a cliché... It's just a resolution... It's just lip service... We want more.
- 26, young woman, Afghanistan

Second, the lack of political will is also evident to youth in the unwillingness by decision makers, particularly political representatives, to adopt and implement the formal Youth, Peace and Security agenda. Often this was linked by youth to a reluctance to move forward on related agendas such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Many youth emphasised the lack of awareness in society which enabled decision makers to "drag their feet."

In Afghanistan, a survey deployed by the former Afghan Youth Ambassador to the UN in 2019 found that 90% of youth respondents were not aware of the YPS agenda. As was noted "Five years after its adoption, it is unfortunate to see that in a country that is so much in dire need of having young people on board and the peace processes yet young people are not familiar with this agenda." As youth noted: if youth do not know about it, "how can they push the government to implement it at the grassroot level?" (26, young woman, Afghanistan).

The need for youth themselves to push governments to honour their commitments to international frameworks was also evident in Myanmar. One youth peacebuilder suggested that although youth have been advocating for years, they "might not have had the stronger... influential voices" to persuade leaders.

However, the resolutions that form part of the YPS agenda gave them something to hold on to: "from the moment that we had UNSC 2250, we can grab it and say hey, we're not the only one who thinks this, look at this. This is from the UN" (30, young woman, Myanmar).

Persistent lack of political will, undergirded by social and cultural norms that overlook or deligitimise young people's inclusion and leadership constitute significant barriers for youth peacebuilders in all three countries.

Rural-Urban Divide, Education and Employment

In each country, youth experience unevenness in access, resourcing, and participation between urban and rural contexts. The political context, pervasive insecurity, and ethnic or religious divisions exacerbate the gap between urban youth and non-urban youth.

While youth in urban areas can more easily access resources and support, and interact with decision makers, donors, and other stakeholders; youth in rural contexts often find accessing support a challenge. Despite this, youth are active across rural areas of Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar.

Youth peacebuilders based in rural areas note that they are sometimes excluded both by adult- led formal peace initiatives, and other youth-led initiatives; with geography, language, ethnicity and religion often limiting opportunities for exchange and participation.

Although youth in both urban and rural contexts can face issues in accessing education and employment opportunities, the obstacles are more significant for rural youth. Lack of access to education for many youth in rural areas limits both their ability to engage with peace processes as well as their capacity to effectively advocate for themselves and their communities.

Education is often "lacking quality" (22, young woman, Afghanistan). One young women peacebuilder in Afghanistan argues that although "after so many times of repeating and repeating it, it doesn't sound genuine, but we need education"; she says that schools need to be "smart", so education can move with children if necessary. In Myanmar, youth in rural areas find education opportunities "very limited" (28, young woman, Myanmar) and the politicisation of the curriculum has a detrimental effect on their learning.

Young women face particular obstacles that limit their capacity to participate in peace and lead. In Afghanistan young women in rural areas are often "not encouraged to pursue further education" (22, young woman, Afghanistan); while in South Sudan the practice of forced marriage can see girls taken from school "even if she's doing very well in her studies" (30, young man, South Sudan).

Several of the youth peacebuilders described programs they had initiated to respond to this obstacle, including building literacy programs, supporting young women's education, and awareness-raising in communities about the importance of schooling.

Alongside education, youth peacebuilders describe the lack of employment opportunities and sustainable livelihoods for youth as an ongoing challenge they navigate in their work. Lack of employment and limited education can compound the risk of youth engaging in violence or being recruited by armed actors, and in undertaking their work. Youth peacebuilders are acutely conscious of the structural factors which lead to these outcomes.

The lack of education is seen to make youth "easily manipulated by someone sitting in Juba...tell them what to do in his own interests" (51, male, South Sudan). One young woman from Afghanistan articulated the intersecting factors that impact rural youth (see text box 11).

"Most of the marginalized parts of the country, they do not have access to education, they do not have access to the employment opportunities, and they're often excluded from important decision making processes. They are not as privileged as young people living in Kabul city, and the capital cities around the country. And most of them are recruited easily by the insurgent groups just because they are not educated. They do not have access to employment opportunities and most importantly, when there are drone strikes in villages and in marginalized parts of the country, they get a sense that the government and international community is against them."
- (26, young woman, Afghanistan)

Text Box 11

Structural barriers compounded the challenges faced by rural youth producing a divided between the urban and rural youth communities. While many youth are working to address these issues, the enduring challenges make young people's participation in peace processes more difficult and unlikely.

Skills, Funding and Resources

Despite growing attention to the need for youth inclusive peace processes, youth-led efforts remain chronically underfunded, under- resourced, and poorly supported by local authorities, national governments, and the international community.[27]

Most youth undertake activities on a voluntary basis, and often lack core skills required by funders and gatekeepers to be able to access funding and support.

Youth across all three countries expressed frustration at not being able to successfully execute planned projects due to lack of resources and funding. This frustration is exacerbated by recognition amongst youth that the technocratic processes of current funding models require expert skills to access the limited funding and support that does exist.

In South Sudan some youth peacebuilders reported investing their own money to kick start initiatives. One young man sold his car to enable his project of opening a civic education centre and youth hub (young woman, South Sudan). In Afghanistan, several youth described projects they had established with funds of their own, or relying solely on volunteer labour of friends and family.

Another issue raised was the unequal distribution of attention and resources, with disproportionate funding being directed to projects based in urban areas, while those in more remote provinces struggled to access opportunities. In South Sudan, youth similarly felt international donors, in particular, were reluctant to leave the cities for rural areas to support programs (20, young woman, South Sudan; 23, young woman, South Sudan). Those youth living and working in rural areas believe their geographic distance excluded them from opportunities: "We don't have access to all that crazy money. We don't have access to all these influential policymakers" (23, young woman, Afghanistan).

Youth often found themselves in competition for scarce resources, rather than being able to work collaboratively with other youth-led organisations. Youth in Afghanistan and South Sudan described the large amounts of time they spend trying to network and access funders which takes time away from the core work of their organisations in helping youth and their communities (27, young man, Afghanistan; 34, young man, South Sudan; 22, young woman, Afghanistan).

"[Rural youth] don't have access to all that crazy money. We don't have access to all these influential policymakers"
- 23, young woman, Afghanistan

Obstacles imposed by funders prevent youth from actively being involved in peace efforts. Across all three countries, requirements for formal registration of organisations (often expensive and bureaucratic), and the prerequisite that organisations be operational for five or ten years exclude youth from pursuing large, long-term grants. Youth also required skills such as literacy in formal grant applications. The bureaucracy of grant schemes is often scoped beyond the capacity of small youth-led organisations necessitating partnerships with larger institutions.

There are some positive stories, including a university in an Afghan province that provided access to their computer labs for young women receiving training so they had a safe and secure place to learn. Also in South Sudan a responsive funding arrangement enabled youth to establish radio programs in multiple cities. However, overwhelmingly access to funding, resources, and skills development presented significant and enduring challenges to the sustainability of youth-led efforts, their ability to plan for the future, and to effectively advocate and have their voices heard.

Impact of COVID-19

Finally, events in 2020-2021 have exacerbated the intensified challenges already facing youth. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a threat multiplier for youth peacebuilders, resulting in further shrinking of civic space, revealing inequalities in access to healthcare and social security. It has made visible the 'digital divide' where many youth are unable to access or afford reliable internet and technology to participate in virtual spaces.

> *"Now they are using it as a tool to control the people. So people, even if it is not a threat, even if you have organized a very good venue, you have nice spacing. If you're not in line with the people who are in that local political group, if you're not in same political standing with the people who are in that area, they will not give you the permission, the police will frustrate you, they will keep on coming to distur b you because they want to intrude into whatever you guys are discussing"*
> *- (28, young man, South Sudan)*

Text Box 12

Youth peacebuilders reported widespread disruptions to their programs and planned activities due to not being able to travel, to meet in large groups, or in person at all. While some work could be moved online, "there are certain programs that cannot [be] virtual, because it will implementation" (37, young man, South Sudan). Another young man from South Sudan explained the government is using it to limit civic activity (see text box 12).

This shrinking of civic space poses risks to youth peacebuilders themselves as well as their decrease the effectiveness and the outcome of it" (27, young man, Afghanistan). Of programs that moved online, access is a constant challenge. The lack of "real reliable and quality internet connection in different locations of Afghanistan" (24, young man, Afghanistan) prevents many youth from accessing events, training and support.

Before the coup in Myanmar, the pandemic had actually reduced violence in some parts of the country with groups declaring unilateral ceasefires to enable "more work for the COVID-19 prevention" (22, young man, Myanmar). However, in other parts of the world, the pandemic was used to limit the work of civil society organisations, including youth. In South Sudan, youth peacebuilders reported that COVID- 19 "has been exploited to slow down [project] programs. There are concerns that post- pandemic these restrictions and political manipulations will endure.

> *So during COVID, when the situation was really bad, and when the cases were, like so much. And then people were actually in their homes, and like not renting, like giving just like their homes to be used as hospitals or giving their business centers or restaurants, to be used as hospitals, and... volunteers delivering these other things like masks and sanitizers. So I think this sense of our community can be love for the community. And again, the idea of in the long term is like, okay, building the community and at least building peace."*
> *- (26 young woman, Afghanistan)*

Text Box 13

Despite the compounding challenges of the pandemic, some youth peacebuilders found other ways of delivering their peacebuilding programs.

In South Sudan, youth organisations also provided basic supplies including soap, sanitary products and food to those local communities impacted by COVID-19 and unable to travel. The youth organisation did a call out on social media and lots of people brought supplies which they delivered. In Afghanistan youth used social media to counter misinformation about the pandemic, and led efforts to support their communities through the crisis (text box 13).

In this "very challenging situation", young people's work demonstrated "the need for us to support the local people" (30, young man, South Sudan), and the vital role young people play in responding to crises, addressing insecurity, and building peace, despite many challenges.

5. YOUNG PEOPLE'S KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research demonstrate the urgent need for international stakeholders to meaningfully include, support, and fund youth peacebuilders. Formal peace processes must be designed from inception as youth inclusive spaces that recognise and enable the voices and leadership of youth. Concurrently, meaningful support must be given to youth-led organisations and initiatives committed to building the foundational conditions for peace and security at local, regional and national levels.

Coordination between formal processes and informal spaces where youth advocacy traditionally takes place will ensure youth's voices are enabled and embedded in peace processes. Greater engagement between these spaces will also address longstanding hierarchies within peacebuilding more broadly, which prioritize institutionalised, top down, technocratic approaches over those that exist within communities. Building communities of practice and partnerships that center youth leadership will create more opportunities for inclusive policy that fulfils the obligations mandated by the YPS agenda.28

Youth peacebuilders were asked how the international community could support their peacebuilding work. The following recommendations consolidate young people's own recommendations for international stakeholders, including UN entities, Member States, and civil society organisations. While these recommendations by youth were addressed largely to international actors, the lessons and key messages should also be heard and actioned by national governments and local decision makers, including cultural elders.

The normative frameworks for youth inclusion in peace processes exist at the international level, and concentrated efforts must be made by the international community to see these implemented at national and sub-national levels. Youth are engaging in peace practices, and their contributions make a meaningful impact within communities towards positive peace. Interviews conducted demonstrate that they have a clear understanding of their capacity and their agency, yet frustrations occur when their actions are minimised or silenced.

There are five key messages that emerge from young people's recommendations:

A. Enable and foster youth networks;

B. Support and facilitate substantive youth inclusion in formal peace processes;

C. Commit to sustainable funding, training and resourcing for youth before, during and beyond formal peace processes;

D. Protect youth peacebuilders;

E. Include an intersectional and diverse range of youth in formal and informal peace processes.

These key messages are supported by 15 actionable recommendations proposed by youth themselves.

A.
Enable and foster networks for youth peacebuilders connecting formal and informal processes and initiatives

1.

The *We Are Here* report demonstrates the role of young people in all 'layers' of peace processes—in the room, around the room, outside the room. As the youth voices in this report highlight, purposive coordination between youth with access to formal spaces and those focused on community level peacebuilding will strengthen young people's capacity.

The international community can play a vital role in facilitating connections, supporting existing youth-led networks, and resourcing youth. This will enable effective youth inclusion in all the 'layers' and beyond to translate gains made at the formal peace table into the everyday lives of those most affected by conflict.

2.

The role of intergenerational dialogue and co-leadership is crucial to bolster the participation of youth and young people's contributions. Adult stakeholders should work with youth to strengthen negotiating positions and ensure responsiveness to current political and social contexts across generations.

Key Message A:
In Young People's Own Words

The international community "*can also work in order to create or connect layers. For example, if actually there is youth inclusion and the inside the room, around the room and outside the room, they can actually work to connect those layers and make a network of young peace advocates and who can work for the sustainability of the peace process down the road.*"
- 26, young woman, Afghanistan

"*The reason why we have the intergenerational dialogue is to bridge the gap between the older women and the younger woman. And when we had it, we had a lot of grievances... But during that day, we had that communication with older women...And they took the initiative, they say they will be mentoring the young women in that room, literally the women in that room.*"
- 26, young woman, South Sudan

"*It was like organized by the military and the government and ethnic organisations between the negotiations. So, at that time, a very prominent and significant issue, was the youth participation in the peace process... because most of the political dialogue stakeholders are very old. And also they are carrying their own generation from their previous history.*"
- 28, young woman, Myanmar

B.
Support and facilitate substantive youth inclusion in formal peace processes

3.

The voices of youth must be supported and amplified. Young people have been calling for formal peace processes to be substantively youth-inclusive in design and practice. Yet they report their voices are often not heard or dismissed. Vocal support and advocacy from the international community to reframe how youth are included in any formal process is vital to enable young people to gain access to the formal negotiating table.

4.

Formal peace processes should be accessible to all youth. Access to these formal practices should be universal and equitable; not determined by social, political and economic circumstance or locality. Such work must be undertaken with a youth-sensitive lens and a commitment to do-no-harm to ensure inclusion is substantive and not tokenistic, that a diversity of youth are included, and to ensure that the processes themselves are responsive to the views and concerns of youth.

5.

International actors can ensure governments enact their commitments to international policy frameworks, working with them and other actors to co-develop mechanisms for the implementation of all three UN Security Council Youth, Peace and Security resolutions. Where strategies for implementing these frameworks already exist within informal spaces, these should be supported by the formal process (through resourcing and funding support) to avoid duplication and to enable the capacities of young peacebuilders.

6.

Opportunities for capacity building should be provided to youth. While youth have enormous capacity for positive change in their countries, they sometimes report feeling they do not have specific knowledge to be able to successfully advocate and participate in formal and institutional processes. Targeted skills development will ensure that when youth are able to access formal spaces of peace negotiation and funding models they are well equipped to effectively contribute.

Key Message B:
In Young People's Own Words

"The first thing would be recognition of the force of Afghan youth. That's important…They are hopelessly trying to bring change but when everyone is ignoring them, how can they have that motivation to move on when the government is not listening, and the international community will not support them?… That's discouraging for them… So, their recognition is very important"
- 27, young man, Afghanistan

"I think youth need to be supported by the international community…their voices should be backed up, because sometimes when youth advocate they were not heard."
- young man, South Sudan

C.
Commit to sustainable funding, training and resourcing of youth initiatives to create the conditions for peace agreements to be reached, and to ensure they endure.

7.
Youth-led peacebuilding efforts must be *sustainably funded* to ensure youth are able to participate and lead. Funding models for youth-led peacebuilding should be flexible, accessible, and designed in consultation with youth about their needs. Sustained funding for the development and implementation of youth-led peacebuilding initiatives will empower youth, enabling them to undertake activities that contribute to foundational peacebuilding efforts and create the conditions for successful formal peace processes.

8.
Provision of technical training and skills development to youth peacebuilders. Support technical training on leadership, project management, financial literacy and other skills to ensure the durability and effectiveness of youth-led organisations. Finance peer-to-peer training by youth, particularly in remote and rural communities. Empowering youth with these skills will ensure that financial investments by the international community are best utilised by youth.

9.
Invest not only in socially and politically popular and urgent issues, but in youth-led efforts to address deep-seated concerns and build sustainable solutions to violence and insecurity. This will enable youth to be secure in their work, foster collaboration, and build foundational peace conditions at local, regional and national levels.

Key Message C:
In Young People's Own Words

"What the international community can do is if the funding is actually sustainable. Let them help build this capacity... If the international community does not give me the capacity in such a way that I can actually be able to put down a very sustainable, long term structure in an area where I go, then they have failed."
- 28, young man, South Sudan

"I believe that [the international community] can also encourage youth led and youth owned initiatives for the peace process by funding it in a way that will be result oriented, create intergenerational discussions and councils that get both generations on board, where they can actually not only discuss the differences, the possible solutions, but they can also discuss the possible means in which we can actually implement these resolutions."
- 26, young woman, Afghanistan

"So even think even in the new era, we still need the awareness raising and education program for the especially for the Burmese people. So in that case... we still need these technical and financial support from the international community"
- 22, young man, Myanmar

D.
Ensure holistic protection for young people involved in peace processes and peace advocacy

10.

Youth peacebuilders must be protected to ensure they are safe when involved in formal processes and in local level peacebuilding efforts. This includes attention to addressing social-cultural norms as well as physical safety. Trust between generations creates holistic networks for youth to securely complete their work. This is particularly crucial in rural communities where support from cultural elders is necessary for effective and safe peace work by youth. The shrinking civic space that youth peacebuilders face presents urgent challenges to their work. Insecurity and threats of violence can inhibit young people's substantive inclusion in peace processes. The international community must ensure that vital civic space is secure and must advocate for all forms of safety and security for youth to be full social and political actors.

11.

Youth can also be supported through direct accompaniment, formal statements of support, and provision of tools for both physical and digital protection. As the *If I Disappear* report outlines, while risks are multifaceted there are also many ways in which international actors can tangibly help ensure the safety of youth peacebuilders. These efforts should be undertaken urgently.

Key Message D:
In Young People's Own Words

"They should be able to provide protection for the peace builders, because that has been one of the hindrances... But if someone is protected, they know that okay, fine. If I'm going to speak out tomorrow, I'll actually have [this organisation] standing with me. It will give people the confidence to actually say things the way they are... So, protection is very, very important."
- 28, young man, South Sudan
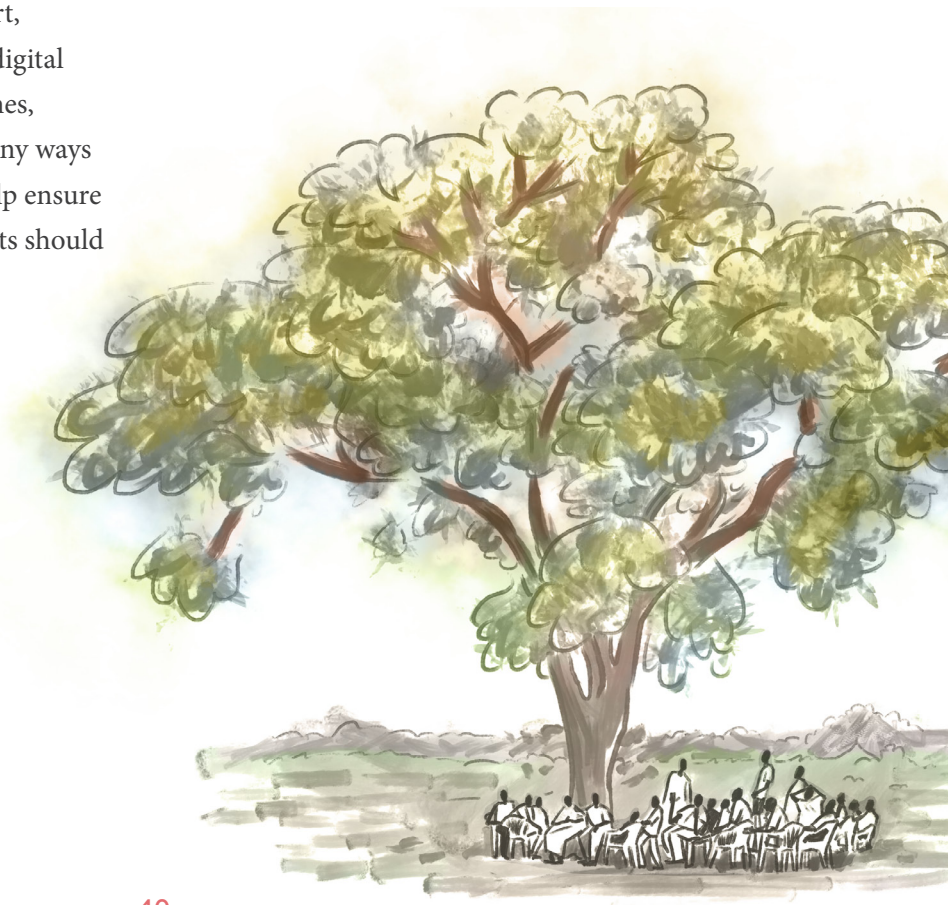
E.
Meaningful inclusion of a diversity of youth that is substantively attentive to intersectionality with respect to gender, race and ethnicity, class, and geography.

12.

Youth-inclusive design for formal peace processes must not reproduce or reinforce socio-political inequalities. Attention must be paid to ensure the voices and perspectives of a broad range of youth are heard and included. The international community and national governments undertaking peace processes must do the work to reach out beyond the urban centres when identifying youth to participate.

13.

Careful attention must be paid to gender when including youth. Young women often face social, cultural, and religious barriers that make their participation more difficult. The international community can do more to facilitate a dialogue between community leaders and young women in traditional communities and empower young people as they seek to educate customary leaders about the marginalising nature of current political and social attitudes and behaviours. Context-specific support and advocacy for their inclusion can ensure young women's substantive participation in peace processes and peacebuilding is more representative

14.

As well as 'bringing in' youth, efforts must be made to take processes, engagement, and funding or resources outside urban centres where formal political processes of peace negotiation occur. Youth should not be expected to come to the process, rather participation must be enabled in the regional and local contexts in which youth live and work. These activities will help ensure peace processes are responsive and representative, and that a wide range of youth feel invested in their outcomes.

15.

Inclusion requires a commitment from all stakeholders to take seriously the voices of all youth. Honouring the obligations established in UN Resolutions 2250 and 2249 it is vital that elites and leaders seek out voices of dissent amongst youth and create safe forums for these to be aired.

Key Message E:
In Young People's Own Words

"Because most times when they see women, they think, well, I don't like use the word inferior, because we can do a lot. But they tend to think that women don't know about peace and security... So, it's only the men that are supposed to be there. But that is something that we're trying to, to change, want to change that narrative and make sure that women and young women are in those spaces"
- 26, young woman, South Sudan

"The international community can also support youth in organizing, in supporting them to go out and participate at the regional level. If the peace conferences [are] outside Juba... it can help a lot"
- 27, young man, South Sudan

"So if there is any opportunity for youth, I personally request the international organisations and also the government to consider the youth who are don't, have access to any internet, or maybe they are not living in a place in a situation that they have access to all these social gatherings to share their opinion. So, I want them to have attention on them as well.
- 28, young woman, Afghanistan

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[7] Irena Grizelj. 2021. *'We are in this together'*

[8] The military coup which occurred on the 1 February, 2021 in Myanmar, meant this project was not able to interview as many young peacebuilders as planned in Myanmar. The incredible bravery and persistence of young people in resistance to the coup is a highly visible example of the ways in which youth face enormous risks to advocate for peace and secure societies and futures. Although this project was not able to interview as many youth in Myanmar, we also did not want to erase their expertise and experiences from the project or this report and we include the accounts of those youth we did speak to alongside experiences from Afghanistan and South Sudan.

[9] Altiok, Ali (ed). 2021. New Frontiers in YPS on its 5th Anniversary, *Journal of Youth, Peace and Security.* 1(1).

[10] Search for Common Ground. 2017. *Guidance Note: Supporting the Design and Implementation of Youth-Led Research Projects.* https://www.sfcg.org//wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Guidance-Youth-led-Research.pdf

[11] Interviews were originally planned to be completed January-February, however, were extended due to two factors. The first was the need to be flexible around the availability of participants, who often undertake peace work on a volunteer basis around paid work and who frequently had unreliable internet access among other challenges. The second was the coup in Myanmar which occurred at the beginning of February just as interviews were beginning. In consultation with our in-country partners, we prioritised the safety of potential participants, who were also suddenly busy with the vital and dangerous work of resistance and protest. We make these things visible here to emphasise the need for flexibility and to work in consultation with youth on designing and undertaking research.

[12] UN Secretary General, 2020 *Report of the Secretary General on Youth, Peace and Security.*

[13] Helen Berents and Caitlin Mollica (2020) Youth and peacebuilding. In Richmond, Oliver & Visoka, Gizem (Eds.) *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies.* Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

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[15] UN Secretary General, 2020 "Report of the Secretary General on Youth, Peace and Security' 2 March, S/2020/167 https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/167; Irena Grizelj. 2021. *'We are in this together'*

[16] Altiok and Grizelj, *We Are Here.* p29

[17] See: contributions to the first issue of the Journal of Youth, Peace and Security, 2021, 1:1, https://unoy.org/download/7961/; Ozcelik, Asli and Nesterova, Yulia and Young, Graeme and Maxwell, Alex, 2021. 'Youth- Led Peace: The Role of Youth in Peace Processes', Project Report. University of Glasgow, Glasgow. http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/242178/

[18] Ozcelik et al, 'Youth-led Peace', p21; Altiok and Grizelj, *We Are Here*

[19] Simpson, *The Missing Peace*, 78.

[20] The significant risks facing youth peacebuilders are outlined comprehensively in Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, 2021. *If I Disappear: Global Report on Protecting Young People in Civic Spaces*, New York: Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. Available at: https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2021/06/first-ever-global-report-on-protecting-young-people-in-civic-space- highlights-need-for-stronger-global-protection-mechanisms/

[21] Many of the challenges outlined in this section echo and reinforce the findings of the landmark *If I Disappear* report (2021), which organises the 'barriers and threats' to youth in seven categories as follows: sociocultural, financial, political, legal, digital, physical, and the impact of COVID-19. The findings of this report should be read as reinforcing and buidling from the *If I Disappear* report; however, the organisation of this section has been guided by the youth peacebuilders' testimony from the three countries focused on here.

[22] Izsák-Ndiaye, *If I Disappear.*

[23] On the gendered risks young women activists face see Nyachangkuoth Rambang Tai, 2020 'Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict; South Sudan', *Our Generation for Inclusive Peace*, https://ogiporg.wixsite.com/home/post/preventing-sexual- violence-in-conflict-south-sudan

[24] The monitoring body, Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), verifies and collates data on the continuing mounting death toll post coup in Myanmar, including on the ages of protestors: https://aappb.org/

[25] Front Line Defenders, 2021, "No Refuge: South Sudan's Targeting of Refugee HRDs Outside the Country", March, https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/no_refuge_-_final.pdf

[26] David Zucchino and Fatima Faizi, "'I Could Just Vanish': In Kabul, Pocket Notes to Prevent Anonymous Death", *New York Times*, January 12. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/12/world/asia/afghanistan-attacks-pocket-notes.html. Since the Taliban takover in August 2021, Afghan youth have faced even more dramatic insecurity and risk, which has seen many delete social media accounts, and attempt to erase evidence of their peacebuilding efforts online and offline.

[27] The 2018 UN Youth Strategy: Youth 2030 includes a specific focus on developing a greater funding base and mechanisms for youth-focused programming and youth-led activities. While there have been positive developments in this space, funding remains a key obstacle for youth peacebuilders on the ground. United Nations, 2018. Youth 2030: Working With and For Youth, https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080_UN-Youth-Strategy_Web.pdf

[28] Irena Grizelj. 2021. '*We are in this together*'.

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