# Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

The Commonwealth

# Youth Agency in Peacebuilding

## CONTENTS

The *Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Discussion Paper* series is produced by the Commonwealth Secretariat's CVE Unit. It contributes to fulfilling CHOGM's 2015 and 2018 mandates to counter the threat of violent extremism through strong co-operation, including international, regional and national co-operation and partnerships between civil society, businesses and Commonwealth citizens. Each edition in the series comprises credible, informative and useful opinion pieces, providing evaluative and strategic research on new and emerging violent extremism issues, exploring concepts and theories related to peacebuilding and P/CVE in the Commonwealth, with a view to broaden debates and instigate new ones.

Series Editor: Amy Longland

Countering Violent Extremism,  Governance and Peace Directorate

Commonwealth Secretariat, email: a.longland@commonwealth.int

Sign up to receive by email at CVE@Commonwealth.int group

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| **CARICOM** | Caribbean Community |
| **CHOGM** | Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting |
| **CCSS** | CARICOM Crime and Security Strategy |
| **CVE** | countering violent extremism |
| **CYF** | Commonwealth Youth Forum |
| **CYPAN** | Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network |
| **FTF** | foreign terrorist fighter |
| **GPI** | Global Peace Index |
| **IEP** | Institute for Economics and Peace |
| **IGAD** | Intergovernmental Authority for Development |
| **P/CVE** | preventing and countering violent extremism |
| **UNSCR** | UN Security Council Resolution |

**The Commonwealth**

# Editorial

## Amy Longland, Series Editor

The Commonwealth Secretariat's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Unit has always emphasised the importance of young people and youth mainstreaming within the work that we do. The event entitled 'The Power of Youth to Build Peace in the Commonwealth' was a partnership between the CVE Unit, the Youth Division and the Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network (CYPAN). CYPAN is a grouping of young people intent on optimising grassroots engagement to work at the national, regional and pan-Commonwealth levels. Its efforts promote peace and conflict mediation and prevent violent extremism.

A survey of CYPAN conducted by the Commonwealth Youth Programme in 2020 revealed that in relation to training and development needs, CYPAN's national and regional co-ordinators were lacking capacity-building opportunities around peacebuilding and preventing violent extremism within their localities.

It is clear that a large majority of youth leaders still lack the opportunity to be at the decision-making table and are not taken seriously as valuable partners to solve the global issues which are currently affecting them. This is especially important within the preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) context, which disproportionally affects youth across the Commonwealth. The recent tragic school attacks in Kumba, Cameroon, and in Peshawar, Pakistan, are clear examples of this. In addition, COVID-19 has intensified the urgency of addressing issues such as youth leadership in peacebuilding and has emphasised the need for young people to be at the very heart of shaping the policies and institutions that directly affect their lives.

Consequently, the CVE Unit organised 'The Power of Youth to Build Peace in the Commonwealth' in collaboration with CYPAN, in order to give young Commonwealth citizens that meaningful seat at the table. Taking place in November 2020, the event was a sub-session of the Commonwealth Action Series, organised by the Commonwealth Youth Programme. In lieu of a physical Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF) event taking place in 2020, the Commonwealth Youth Programme organised a series of virtual events that focused on the themes selected for the 2020 CHOGM. The November 2020 session focused on CHOGM 2020 Theme 5: Rule of Law and Youth Leadership in Decision-Making. The event was designed to be a unique opportunity for young leaders, peace advocates and experts in the field to come together and discuss ideas in a collaborative, informal and interactive way.

With 111 attendees, the session was well-attended, ran smoothly and provided an interactive platform which fostered much participation and questions. Sixty-four (64) per cent of signups were 'youth', as defined by the Commonwealth, a huge proportion and salient given the nature of the event. The session was successful in engaging Commonwealth youth in wide-reaching discussions about P/CVE, peacebuilding and CHOGM 2020 Theme 5. It also gave young people a platform to share ideas and ask questions to experts in the field.

The panellists were chosen by the CVE Unit from the Specialist Pool and from CYPAN, and each produced a policy paper relevant to the overarching theme of the workshop but within their areas of expertise. These fascinating, insightful and varied policy papers are published in this first edition of the *Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Discussion Paper.*

# Authors and Abstracts

**Kurba-Marie Questelles** is a peace and security specialist and a certified restorative justice practitioner with expertise in crime and violence prevention, P/CVE, and peacebuilding. In her paper, entitled 'Harnessing the Power of Communities and Empowering Youth to Prevent Violent Extremism in the Caribbean', Kurba-Marie argues that peace is a realistic concept that is both practical and possible. However, it cannot be achieved through violence, only through understanding and inclusion. She looks at the issue from a Caribbean perspective, arguing that the approach has usually been to react to events. As such, the region is more likely to direct its resources to prevention policies, instead of policies which promote and encourage peace; and innovative, proactive policies which harness the power and ideation of young people within the region. She argues that proactive approaches are needed to create a culture of peace and prevent violent extremism from becoming increasingly widespread within a region already has high levels of organised crime and is considered to have a violence problem. Her paper concludes that the countries of the region need to actively work together, via an 'all-of-society' approach to prevent evolving threats, such as violent extremism, which stymie national and regional economic development, peace and security.

**Mansi Arun Panjwani** is a founder of the Peace Collective. She is a peacebuilder and an international facilitator and trainer on humanistic leadership, organisational happiness and well-being, human rights, conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Her paper is on 'Decision-makers as Humanistic Leaders of the Twenty-First Century'. Here she explains how respect for the dignity of life continues to be at the centre of the characteristics of a humanistic leader. She describes how a humanistic leader does not intend to achieve perfection. We must recognise the stages of our own journeys and that we may struggle with some characteristics (of leadership) more than others. Nonetheless, she argues that the characteristics of humanistic leadership allow us to create roadmap, as we advance on our paths as peacebuilders . According to Mansi, as long as we are consciously and consistently aligning to these characteristics with our head, heart and hands, we will make progress. Her fascinating paper concludes that the characteristics of humanistic leaders are not only relevant to youth, but equally relevant to current leaders. It is important that we begin this journey simultaneously with current and future leaders if we are to move towards building lasting peace.

**Christine Odera** is a fierce advocate for peace and security and human rights, Christine has more than five years' experience in youth networks and alliance building, programming, advocacy, policy, intercultural and experimental learning, mediation and research. Her paper, entitled 'Leveraging Youth Agency in the IGAD Region', delves into issues of youth and violent extremism. The Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) is one of the regional economic communities in Africa. It has eight member states in the East and Horn of African regions: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. It is this region that most often suffers protracted violent conflicts. Christine explains how the approach that has been undertaken by government youth programmes has been intergenerational, rather than prioritising youth as key implementation partners. She argues for the adoption a transgenerational approach. In this way, governments can ensure youth representation and involvement at all levels of decision-making. Christine talks about how the 'violence of exclusion' pushes young people towards violent extremism. However, she convincingly argues that youth are resilient and that we need to adopt a society of inclusion to realise the importance of young people's own actions and their potential to advance the peace and security agenda in the region. She makes some interesting recommendations for the IGAD region going forward.

**Kosta Lucas** is an independent researcher and civil society professional in the field of P/CVE, with considerable experience in policy, research and grassroots programme development roles. He is the founder of his own consultancy, Synqup, whose mandate is 'turning conflict into community'. In his paper, 'Back to Basics: Centring Youth in Responses to Violent Extremism', he outlines how genuine youth engagement is difficult for a number of reasons. He highlights the tendency of youth programming to operate from a deficit orientation: it is often based on outdated and prevailing assumptions of young people having short attention spans or being unwilling to work. According to Kosta, the negative effects of these assumptions are compounded in the P/CVE space. His paper analyses the different tenets of this issue, arguing that if young people are the intended beneficiaries of a P/CVE programme, then any engagement must be genuine and respected – right down to the rethinking the starting assumptions made of young people themselves.

**Achaleke Christian Leke** is a youth peacebuilding and countering violent extremism expert with 14 years of experience working as a practitioner, researcher and university lecturer in Cameroon and other conflict-affected countries across the world. Achaleke has developed from a community actor to a global expert and consultant with young people, international organisations, governments and UN agencies across the world. In his timely paper, entitled 'Education under Attack: Violent Extremists' Strategy to Inflict Pain and Terror in Cameroon', he looks at the rise of two major armed conflicts in Cameroon (Boko Haram insurgency and the "Anglophone Crisis") and their impact on education. He argues that the ideology of violent extremist groups to target schools is informed by their vision to inflict pain, fear and terror in the communities where they are operating. For example, operations within Cameroon have been characterised by kidnapping of students and teachers, destruction of schools and the sporadic killing of unarmed school children and teachers. However, Achaleke outlines the myriad ways that young people are championing the process of rebuilding education in conflict-affected areas. He argues that efforts toward countering these attacks by violent extremists must adopt both civil-military responses and partnership with multiple stakeholders. His paper explores how the role of young people has greatly contributed to educating children and countering the efforts of violent extremist groups to destroy education in conflict-affected areas.

# 1. Empowering Youth to Prevent Violent Extremism in the Caribbean

## Kurba-Marie Questelles

Peace is a realistic concept that is both practical and possible. Yet it cannot be achieved through violence, only through understanding and inclusion. In Caribbean society, the approach has usually been to react to events. As such, the region is more likely to direct its resources to prevention policies, instead of policies which promote and encourage peace; and innovative, proactive policies which harness the power and ideation of young people within the region.

With 1.8 billion young people accounting for 25 per cent of the global population – and 60 per cent of those below the age of 30 years within the Caribbean Community (USAID-CYFR 2020) policy-makers ought to consider the utilisation of the youth generation as architects of peace at the policy and programming levels. Regionally, proactive approaches are needed to create a culture of peace and prevent violent extremism from becoming increasingly widespread within a region that already suffers high levels of organised crime, one that is considered to have a violence problem. Countries of the region need to actively work together, via an 'all-of-society' approach to prevent evolving threats such as violent extremism that stymie national and regional economic development, peace and security.

In 2013, CARICOM Heads of Government adopted the CARICOM Crime and Security Strategy (CCSS 2013). Within the proposed four-tier threat system, terrorism was considered a tier three risk; there was no mention of violent extremism within the document. What was noteworthy was that the aforementioned framework reflected terrorism and attacks on critical infrastructure as being 'high impact, low probability' threats. However, the threat of terrorism and associated violent extremism has significantly increased in the CARICOM region – to the extent that both Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago opted to co-sponsor UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014), which cautions member states to prevent and suppress the recruiting, organising, transporting or equipping, financing, and travel of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs).

Furthermore, in the years subsequent to the adoption of the CCSS 2013 video footage released by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) revealed the presence of Caribbean nationals within the terrorist organisation (Batchelor 2015). The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago was branded as the country with the largest per capita of foreign terrorist fighters in the Western hemisphere, as more than 200 nationals were believed to have travelled to Syria (CIJN 2019).

Trinidadian, Shane Crawford (CNW 2017), and Jamaican-based cleric, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Faisal (Saraswat 2020), were both designated as global terrorists by the United States Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control and Al-Faisal was later extradited to the US (Homeland Security Today 2020). Additionally, within the last few years more than 300 CARICOM nationals are believed to have travelled to conflict zones in Syria and Iraq (CIJN 2019). These examples cement the reality that the Caribbean region is not immune from the global threat of terrorism, the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters or the increased threat of violent extremism.

Cognisant of the multifaceted nature of violent extremism and its increasing prominence in the Caribbean region, a multisectoral and multidisciplinary approach that includes the community and youth as partners in peace, ought to be employed. Young people have played and continue to play a pivotal role in peacebuilding worldwide, including in the Caribbean region. Thus, it would be useful to provide youth with the opportunity to contribute to prevention programmes, the creation of counter and alternative narratives, and to the

facilitation of capacity-building opportunities for community groups to engage in prevention and response efforts related to violent extremism.

A powerful tool for success would be engaging, educating and empowering young people as stakeholders throughout the development of programmes that aim at preventing violent extremism at the community level. From a programme perspective, when youth are engaged all the way through – from defining the problem, conceptualising the programme, implementing strategies and measuring results – they are more likely to fully participate and encourage others to do the same. It is crucial that they be genuinely engaged, rather than inclusion being tokenistic. Young persons are more likely to passionately engage with programmes they have helped to co-create, because those are the programmes that promote self-confidence, feelings of belonging and result in the development of a sense of agency. These are all areas which, when lacking, tend to lure young people towards violence and extremist ideology (Rosand 2016).

Engaging youth also provides an opportunity to build resilient communities, so that young people and the groups with which they associate are empowered to withstand violent extremist ideologies or narratives and challenge those who espouse them. When young people are equipped with the necessary tools and understanding, it is easier for them to counter and promote alternative narratives that contribute to the prevention of extremist ideology. It is important when utilising narratives as tools, that it be a two-tiered process: focus should be placed on both narrative construction and the credibility of the messenger promoting the narrative. While narrative construction usually occurs in the online and other media spaces, when young people are equipped with the knowledge of intentionally crafting a narrative to promote social cohesion, instead of divisiveness, they are better able to provide valid counter and alternative narratives to violent extremism (Rosand 2016).

The choice of credible messengers is equally important, as people relate better to messengers who have been in a similar situation and can sympathise with the challenges they encounter. Utilising a former FTF who has experienced various degrees of marginalisation or disenchantment and their successful reintegration,

for example, may engender empathy and encourage others who were contemplating a similar path to reconsider (Rosand 2016).

Given the nature of violent extremism and its many layers, a top-down approach may not always be best for prevention. Preventing violent extremism works best when the community is involved and engaged during the process. The role of policy-makers at this juncture should be merely a facilitative one, providing capacity-building opportunities and engaging civil society and community or religious groups to work together to tailor programmes that enhance the capabilities of groups and individuals to understand, detect, and utilise tools and resources to prevent violent extremism at the community level.

This is imperative, as it also aids in determining the root cause and potentially indicates the type of preventative measures that need to be provided. Such measures include, but are not limited to, counselling, educational or employment opportunities, increased community social events, and/or vocational training – which can all contribute towards reducing the pull towards violent extremism. It should be noted that within Trinidad and Tobago, the Borough of Chaguanas can attest to the benefits of engaging the community in preventing violent extremism, as Chaguanas joined the Strong Cities Network in 2017 (Webb 2017).

Mindful of the borderless nature of violent extremism, regional governments need to understand that the life and well-being of future generations rests not only on the shoulders of the region's decision-makers, but on those of each young person within each community throughout the region. The nature of the threat of violent extremism is still being tackled the world over and has proved to be one that needs all stakeholders on board. As young persons are engaged, educated and empowered to prevent violent extremism within their communities, they will do so with the understanding that they are all stakeholders in creating, building and maintaining a safe and secure community, nation, region and world for future generations.

# References

Batchelor, T. "*ISIS in the Caribbean: Islamic State in alarming call to arms to jihadis on paradise isle*", Express, November 10, 2015, Islamic State - ISIS militants expand terror network to Trinidad and Tobago | World | News | Express.co.uk

Caonero, F and Rasmussen, P (2016), Preventing Violent Extremism in the Caribbean. Contemporary Security and Defense Issues in the Caribbean, Contemporary Security and Defense Issues in the Caribbean.pdf (williamjperrycenter.org)

CARICOM *Crime and Security Strategy 2013 (CCSS, 2013): Securing the Region*, available at: https://2009- 2017.state.gov/documents/organization/210844.pdf

*CARICOM Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, adopted February 2018 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

The Caribbean Investigative Journalism Network Online (2019), 'The ISIS Phenomenon in Trinidad and Tobago', available at: https://www.cijn.org/the-isis-phenomenon- in-trinidad-and-tobago/

Caribbean National Weekly (CNW) (2017) "*Trinidadian named as major terrorist by US State Department*", available at: https://www.caribbeannationalweekly.com/caribbean-breaking-news-featured/trinidadian-named-major-terrorist-us-state-department/

CIJN Staff Writers, (2019) "*The ISIS Phenomenon in Trinidad and Tobago*", The Caribbean Investigative Journalism Online, available at: https://www.cijn.org/the-isis-phenomenon-in-trinidad-and-tobago/

Creative Associates International, on behalf of USAID Community, Family and Youth Resilience (CFYR) Programme (2020) workshop report *"Creating A Culture of Peace, The Caribbean Youth Advocacy and Action Agenda on Violence Prevention"* https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00X45Z.pdf

Graham-Harrison, E and Surtees, J (2018), 'Trinidad's jihadis: how tiny nation became ISIS recruiting ground', The Guardian Online, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/02/trinidad-jihadis-isis-tobago-tariq-abdul-haqq

"*Designated Global Terrorist Shaikh Faisal Arraigned on Conspiracy and Terrorism Charges Following Extradition from Jamaica*", HomelandSecurityToday. US, August 16, 2020, Designated Global Terrorist Shaikh Faisal Arraigned on Conspiracy and Terrorism Charges Following Extradition from Jamaica – Homeland Security Today (hstoday.us)

Jessop, D and the Caribbean Council Online (no date), 'ISIS: a moment for Caribbean reflection', available at: https://www.caribbean-council.org/isis-moment-caribbean-reflection/

Rosand, E (2016), *Communities First: A Blueprint for Organizing and Sustaining a Global Movement Against Violent Extremism*. The Prevention Project, Washington, DC.

Saraswat, A. "Islamic Cleric Linked to 2005 London Bombing Extradited to US From Jamaica", August 15, 2020  Wanted global terrorist extradited from Jamaica to US (ibtimes.sg)

Slachmui-jlder, L (2017), *Transforming Violent Extremism: A peacebuilder's guide* (1st edn.). Search for Common Ground, Washington, DC.

Sutton, H and Ruprah, I (2017), *Restoring paradise in the Caribbean: combatting violence with numbers*. Inter-American Development Bank, Washington, DC.

United Nations (2014) UN Security Council Resolution 2178, available at: https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/2178%20(2014)

Webb, Y. "Mayor wants Chaguanas to be safest borough", Newsday, December 21, 2017, Mayor wants Chaguanas to be safest borough (newsday.co.tt)

Winter, T and Dienst, J (2020), 'Exclusive: video shows suspected terrorist extradited from Jamaica to the US', NBC News Online, available at: https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us- news/exclusive-video-shows-suspected-terrorist-extradited-jamaica-u-s-n1236848

Yagoub, M (2017), *Caribbean Has 'Violence Problem', Not 'Crime Problem': Report*, Insight Crime Online, available at: https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/caribbean-has-violence-problem-not-crime-problem-report

Youth4Peace (2018), *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, available at: https://www.youth4peace.info/ProgressStudy

# 2. Decision-Makers as Humanistic Leaders of the Twenty-First Century

Mansi Arun Panjwani

## Leadership, youth and peace

The world is on a 'leadership high' with leadership development programmes abundant across sectors. But being a leader is not enough today. If it was, we would all have peaceful families, great workplaces and everyone would be living in harmony. What the world actually needs is the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable current and future leaders to be humanistic leaders.

Youth, as decision-makers in society, are going to hold positions of influence. So, the question is, how can emerging youth leaders be fostered? What knowledge, skills and attitudes must be part of their 'toolbox'? In 2020, the Global Peace Index (GPI) of the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) reported that the global level of peacefulness had reduced for the fourth year in a row. Further, according to the GPI (IEP 2020), while the institutions and structures of 'Positive Peace' had improved over preceding decade, attitudes of Positive Peace had deteriorated. Here, 'Positive Peace' was defined as attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies.

So, what do these insights mean for us? What attitudes are important for current and future leaders globally? For us as peacebuilders, where do we focus our attention? Moving beyond age, expertise, sectors, nationalities, etc., let us ask ourselves about the critical 'values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life' that will create conditions for a sustainable culture of peace. What conditions are we consciously and consistently creating that act as enablers to a more sustainably peaceful society, beyond 'quick fixes'?

This paper intends to focus on the importance of such values, attitudes and mindsets that current and future leaders need to build if the world is to move towards sustainable peace.

## Youth as humanistic leaders

Daisaku Ikeda states that 'all external revolutions must arise from internal revolutions', and that a deeper revolution, a human revolution arising from the deepest strata of life itself, is what will prove to be a solution to humankind's dilemma (Miller 2002, 51). This internal transformation of attitudes and beliefs within human beings themselves is crucial to realising a transformation in the societies in which we live.

At its core, humanistic leadership is embedded in the value of respect for the dignity of life (of self, others and the environment). Humanistic leaders uphold respect for the dignity of life, not only as part of their values system, but also in the strategies and actions that they take. In other words, humanistic leaders strive to align their head (thoughts), heart (values and beliefs) and hands (actions) by upholding the value of respect for the dignity of all life.

What practical steps can young people today take towards becoming humanistic leaders? Along with strong technical expertise, what attitudes and mindsets can youth foster within themselves as humanistic leaders?

Based on my work with youth leaders in the field of peacebuilding, five core characteristics serve as a strong starting point for internal transformation. These characteristics are, I believe, of crucial importance to a humanistic leader who is committed to building a culture of peace.

### i.  Commitment to create sustainable conditions for systemic peace

Humanistic leaders do not limit themselves to managing violence; rather, they consciously work towards understanding the root causes of violence at various levels (the individual and familial levels, in workplaces, established structures and institutions, and at the overall societal level). While humanistic leaders create effective strategies to address and counter violence, they are driven by the mindset to create sustainable conditions in society, through the structures, institutions and attitudes required for building a culture of peace.

This essentially means that humanistic leaders do not view peace as the time between wars, nor as a 'normal, unadventurous' condition of 'getting by'. Instead, peace is viewed by humanistic leaders as a condition of increased well-being; an environment where individuals and groups are able to live to their highest potential, creating value for themselves and others.

Methods for controlling war by mutually reducing the production and use of weapons is not enough, just as placing an anti-bullying rule in schools is not enough. As Toh (2006) suggests, 'a partial analysis which overlooks the wider roots of a problem will only result in partial, unrealistic or ineffectual resolutions'. Humanistic leaders are committed to making the culture of peace a perennial condition. They are committed to asking themselves difficult questions that push them to distinguish an approach that is a 'quick fix' from one that will promote lasting peace and the well-being of all those involved.

### ii.  Commitment to keep people at the centre

Humanistic leaders are driven by 'equity and harmony'. Instead of exploiting, denying or ignoring their positions of influence, they find creative and authentic ways to use that privilege and power to serve those whose voices remain unheard. Humanistic leaders have people at the centre of their decision-making. Here they view people not as divided by nationalities, age and other differences, but rather through the common foundation of humanity, thereby moving away from the 'sanctity of the state' and towards the 'dignity of life' as a core attribute (Ikeda 1990, 26).

At the same time, humanistic leaders recognise that for sustainable peace, it is also crucial for their work to focus on empowering others to have voices of their own. They consistently and creatively find empowering solutions, so that more and more people are able to make their voices heard and their concerns seen.

### iii.  Commitment to being a continuous learner

A core mindset for humanistic leaders is to continuously learn and self-develop. This of course includes acquiring technical knowledge and building skills; yet far too often we tend to ignore opportunities to cultivate our mindsets. This is where we start moving into dangerous territory. Along with the strengths that come with being a youth, there is also the danger of having a mindset that says, 'I know it all'. While we may know more than a group of people around us, an open mind that allows for 'deep listening' may just lead to learnings we never imagined.

Consciously investing in opportunities that lead to growing self-awareness, through means of reflection and mindfulness practices, will benefit humanistic leaders. While technical aspects of leadership are commonly stressed, a commitment to evolve by building a spiritual foundation allows a person to move beyond their ego and ignorance.

### iv.  Commitment to non-violence

As a society, we are caught within a culture of violence. We have normalised violence and even celebrate it. We consume and further uphold this culture of violence through various forms, one such form being the media. A common example is our super(s)hero films, wherein the (s)hero defeats the villain after an action-packed sequence of violence.

This could be reflected in our own lives too. It is worth asking ourselves how we tackle situations when someone we know does something wrong or something we do not subscribe to. Does our instinctive response involve responding through some form of punishment for the other? How strong is our commitment to dialogue, to empathy and to compassion in situations that anger/harm us?

Humanistic leaders do not just identify the culture of violence; they are committed to consciously transforming this culture through non-violence. What does this look like in daily life? An example

could be making the effort to learn and practise the skills of 'Non-Violent Communication' founded by Marshall Rosenberg (cnvc.org) so that we can effectively and peacefully resolve conflicts in our personal, organisational and political spheres.

## v. Commitment to interconnectedness and interdependence between self, others and the environment

There is a powerful quote that highlights this characteristic:

*'Question: How are we supposed to treat others? Answer: There are no others.'*

– Ramana Maharishi (Kenway 2020)

Humanistic leaders do not necessarily give up their personal desires to serve and benefit others. For far too long, our interpretations of how life works has been driven by a 'win or lose' approach. Humanistic leaders understand that even a win/lose situation is actually a loss. They focus on 'win-win-win' solutions, where they can benefit themselves, others and the system/environment they are all a part of. Such solutions are possible when one is not driven by greed, animosity or ignorance. While having desires is natural, if we all think only about our desires and not about how those desires could affect others and the environment, society will crumble (Ikeda 1990, 24–25).

Humanistic leaders understand; they are able to perceive and conduct themselves in a manner that upholds the deep interconnectedness and interdependence that we have to each other, as well as to the environment. They are able to operate through a systemic and holistic lens, rather than viewing society in small, disconnected parts. Take the Positive Peace Framework of IEP, which suggests that when one pillar is improved, this leads to an improvement in other pillars (Popplewell 2018). For example, higher levels of the pillar of 'Human Capital' are likely to lead to improvements in the pillar of 'Sound Business Environment'. The more potential is created from increased education, health and youth development, the more economic value citizens will be able to bring to businesses. At the same time, both these pillars are enabled through the pillar of 'Well-Functioning Government' (Popplewell 2018).

Humanistic leaders do not operate or attempt to transform society through silos. They consciously build their capacities to operate within a strong sense of interconnectedness and interdependence, knowing all too well that a loss that an 'other' experiences is their own loss. In fact, there is no 'other'.

## Conclusion

The characteristics of humanistic leaders are not only relevant to youth, but also equally relevant to current leaders. It is important that we begin this journey simultaneously with current and future leaders, if we are to move towards building lasting peacefulness.

At the centre of the five characteristics of a humanistic leader is still respect for the dignity of life. The attitudes of a humanistic leader are not intended to achieve perfection. We must recognise the stages of our own journeys and that we may struggle with some characteristics more than others. Nonetheless, these characteristics of humanistic leadership allow us to create roadmap, as we advance on our paths as peacebuilders. As long as we consciously and consistently align to these characteristics with our head, heart and hands, we will make progress.

Where there operates a multitude of humanistic leaders across sectors, age groups, genders and nationalities, a sustainable culture of peace among individuals, families, organisations and societies will slowly but surely be fostered.

In conclusion, I would like to make a recommendation to the current leaders. As Ikeda says, 'One tall tree does not make a forest. Unless other trees grow to the same height, you cannot have a large grove. A true leader is devoted to raising capable people to whom the future can be entrusted'.

Peace is complex and requires multiple stakeholders at multiple levels, all committed to multiple activities. As humanistic leaders we must foster the next generation of leadership and support them by sharing our experiences, our learnings and our hopes by giving them access to us and to decision-making roles. We must actively create enablers to hone the skills of youth and participate together with them in creating strategic partnerships across sectors. We must ask ourselves about the structures,

institutions and attitudes that we are building to contribute to positive peace. We must break through and surpass our limited selves, to create opportunities for a sustainable culture of peace.

## References

Center for Non-Violent Communication, available at: https://www.cnvc.org/about (accessed 1 November 2020).

Daisaku Ikeda Website Committee (no date), *Soka Humanism,* available at: https://www. daisakuikeda.org/main/philos/buddhist/ buddh-05.html (accessed 1 November 2020).

Ikeda, D (1990), *A Lasting Peace* (3rd edn.), Weatherhill, New York, 24–26.

Institute for Economics and Peace (2020), 'Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring Peace in a Complex World', available at: https://www.visionofhumanity. org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/GPI_2020_ web.pdf (accessed 1 November 2020).

Kenway, W (2020), *There Are No Others*, available at: https://willkenway.medium.com/there-are-no- others-2370fd1a0853 (accessed 1 November 2020).

Miller, G (2002), *Peace, Value, and Wisdom*, Editions Rodopi BV, Amsterdam, New York.

Popplewell, E (2018), 'Positive Peace is the framework that transforms societies', Impakter, available at: https://impakter.com/positive-peace-framework- transforms-societies/ (accessed 1 November 2020).

Toh, S (2006), 'Education For Sustainable Development and the Weaving of a Culture Of Peace: Complementarities and Synergies', Kanchanaburi, Thailand, available at: http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/ viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.493.1182&rep=r ep1&type=pdf (accessed 1 November 2020).

United Nations (1999), Resolution 53/243A: A Declaration on a Culture of Peace (13 September), A/RES/53/243 A, available at: http://www.un-documents.net/a53r243a. htm (accessed 1 November 2020).

# 3. Leveraging Youth Agency in the IGAD Region

## Christine Odera

According to the World Population Index, as of 2020, Africa had a median age of 19 years. This means that the largest population of Africans to ever walk the earth is largely young. The African Union defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 35 years. The major challenge African leaders face is how to use their young populations to reduce income and wealth inequality and strengthen peace. And yet, the mean age of the ten oldest African leaders is 80.2 years (Anoba 2018).

African economies are yet to reach a developmental state that would allow them to afford the opportunities to significantly better the lives of their youthful populations. The strategy undertaken by government youth programmes has been to assert an intergenerational approach as guided by the United Nations. This approach however, does not prioritise youth as a key implementation partner but as recipients. This approach positions youth and adolescents as beneficiaries of programmes, rather than contributors to programme design or decision-making processes. One way to address the gaps within the intergenerational methodology is by adopting a transgenerational approach suggests Murray (2019). Such an approach by governments would ensure youth representation and involvement are at all levels of decision-making.

The transgenerational nature of conflict requires an increased contribution by young people into government-led programmes on peace, security and development. The Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) is one of the regional economic communities in Africa, with eight member states in the East and Horn of African regions: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. The Horn of Africa is the region that most often suffers protracted violent conflicts in Africa. In 2017, the number of recorded male and female people affected by such conflicts were 124.1 million and 125.7 million, respectively. Half of this population is youth, which emphasises the need to ensure young people are engaged as partners locally, nationally and within the IGAD region.

## Key issues experienced by youths in the IGAD region

Youth within the IGAD region continue to experience exclusion (structural and systematic) in critical policy advocacy and influencing processes. This is a form of 'violence of exclusion', defined by the Missing peace report as experiences of excursion as a form of structural and psychological violence that is indivisible from young people's political, social, cultural and economic disempowerment. Some government-led youth initiatives are challenged by inequality, negative ethnicity, systemic prejudice resulting from colonial legacies, endemic corruption, a growing distrust between people and institutions, and weak leadership and governance, among other issues. These challenges echo across many generations and are at the heart of the push and pull factors of violent extremism: a sense of alienation, exclusion, and desperation for survival and agency.

Nevertheless, young people remain resilient. Youth in the IGAD region continue to take a leading role in addressing community problems and, at the same time, challenge the status quo to realise the urgency for meaningful engagement and inclusive leadership that young people yearn for within the member states in the region.

## COVID-19 and the urgency of youth agency

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the urgency for young people to be meaningfully engaged and have a voice in key decision-making that affects them. This is especially with regards peace and security in the IGAD region. Globally, according to the United Nations Inter Agency Network on youth development (UN IANYD), young people have been at the forefront during the pandemic, leading in communication strategies to combat misinformation, stigma and discrimination. Local and grassroot efforts have largely been

youth led, disseminating accurate information about the pandemic to local communities in their local languages. Young people have also promoted World Health Organization measures on COVID-19. They have created initiatives to mitigate the risks that physical distancing poses for social justice and inclusion. These programmes have targeted addressing the needs of vulnerable communities, such as people living with disabilities, older people and refugees, notes Korane (2020). Therefore, to strengthen institutional integrity and the rule of law through transparency and integrity measures, young people also need to seek accountability for decisions made and for funding of national COVID-19 task forces. The COVID-19 pandemic is showing that young people are not waiting to be invited, but have been first responders to the pandemic. At the heart of their response is a sense of power, resilience and evidence that the exclusion they experience is not holding them down.

## Reimagining governance and the rule of law: Inclusive societies

An inclusive society is a society that overrides differences of gender and generation. It ensures equal participation, equality of opportunity, and capacity of all members of society to determine an agreed set of social institutions that govern social interaction. Globally, there have been tremendous efforts to address youth participation and engagement, especially in peace and security processes. Examples include, in 2015, the adoption of the ground-breaking UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250, and the subsequent UNSCR 2419 in 2018 and UNSCR 2535 in 2020. These resolutions have increased youth representation and inclusion in preventing and resolving conflicts as highlighted by a press release from the Security Council 8749 meeting. In August 2020, the African Union published a framework on youth peace and security. This was as a result of several countries in the IGAD region having youth as beneficiaries of peace processes and key decision-making platforms (Atuhaire 2019). The objectives of IGAD, as outlined in the agreement establishing IGAD, state that IGAD is strongly committed to the promotion and maintenance of peace, security and stability in the region.

Conflict prevention, management and resolution programmes that include activities and programmes in post-agreement follow-up of peace processes need to be structured in a way that accommodates an inclusive society approach. Such an approach would force us to rethink how a mediated process can become more accountable to the people most impacted by inter- and intra-state violence. There also need to be more partnerships and recognition of young people's own actions and their potential to advance the peace and security agenda in the region.

For example, in South Sudan, youth representatives benefited from the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration projects. Youth have also been invited to selected high-level meetings, such as the High-Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF). Here, they not only secured a broader governance structure, but also a guarantee that South Sudan's minister of youth would be below 40 years old. In Kenya, young people were recognised during the Nakuru County Peace Accord in 2012. The elders identified them as key people to the stability of ending election violence and were among the signatories of the Nakuru Peace Accord, as highlighted by Altiok and Griselj (2019).

Young people have started to 'own' projects and implementation strategies because they have started to be included in the processes. They are helping to address the governance challenges that states struggle to meet in the face of the growing aspirations of a youthful population.

To young people, justice and the rule of law are two of the most critical issues. Both youth and security and justice groups see each other as perpetrators of violence. There is an urgent need to transform this perpetrator mentality to a shared protector mindset. Young people languish in prisons with a bleak future for petty crimes. In Kenya, the Standard newspaper noted that 70 percent of cases processed through the justice system are offences related to lack of business licenses, being drunk and disorderly, and creating disturbance. This is not only physical jail but also a psychological one. This also shows that the rule of law does not benefit or represent young people fairly since governance and the rule of law cannot be separated from an inclusive society. Everyone needs to reimagine how the governance structures and orderliness can become more inclusive.

## Making the peace processes youth-inclusive

Shaping inclusive peace processes requires a new way of thinking. An integrated three-layer model – as introduced by Alitok and Grizeli (2019) – highlights how young people at the grassroots level ('outside

the room') are better connected to the other two layers ('around the room' and 'inside the room') of peace processes. This model gives more people a sense of participation in peace processes than the existing closed-track process that often only leads to 'men in government and men with guns' determining the future of a country. The consequences of such deals have long-lasting consequences for young people, as they are the ones who must inherit that future. This is yet another reason for thinking of the work as transgenerational in nature.

The IGAD region has had many peace processes, including the Ugandan government versus the Lord Resistance Army Crisis Group (2007) and the Building Bridges Initiative in Kenya (Building Bridges Report 2020). Over recent years, Somalis and South Sudan have held many peace and reconciliation conferences and have concluded many peace agreements, some between a few individuals and others between larger political alliances (Altiok and Grizelj 2019). However, these reconciliation conferences and peace agreements have excluded young people's participation and involvement.

## Recommendations for IGAD

- The IGAD Secretariat should ensure that the member states include peace co-ordinators and youth focal points who understand the gendered impact of conflict and peace at all decentralised and devolved structures of government. This will be a new way of increasing accountability and ownership of projects in the entire region.

- IGAD member states should ensure 5 percent of youth below the age of 35 are elected to parliaments and are directly involved in governance to develop ambitious plans that are community owned every ten years.

- IGAD should ensure member states invest in conflict management and resolution skills, as being equally important as literacy and numeracy. This will ensure that generations growing up are armed with tools and knowledge on how to deal with the increasingly complex world they are inheriting and are able to deal with the grievances and differences they see around them in constructive ways.

## References

Altiok, A and Grizeli, I (2019), 'We are here; An integrated approach to youth inclusive in peace processes', available at: https://www.youth4peace.info/node/348

Anoba, I (2018), *Is the Age of African Leaders the Continent's Heaviest Burden?*, available at: https://www.africanliberty.org/2018/11/21/africas-age-burden/

Atuhaire, G (2019), *African Union's Securitization of Youth: A Milestone for Regional Coordination of Youth Programmes in Peace and Security*, Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPS),available at: https://www.africaportal.org/publications/african-unions-securitization-youth-milestone-regional-coordination-youth-programmes-peace-and-security/

Crisis Group (2007), 'Northern Uganda Peace Process: The Need to Maintain Momentum', Crisis Group, Kampala, Uganda.

Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) (no date), *Labor Migration Statistic Report in Africa, second edition: Regional migration profile*. IGAD, available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39323-doc-intergovernmental_authority_on_development_igad.pdf

Korane, J (2020), 'COVID-19 in the IGAD Region: Peace and Security Implications', Horn Institute for Strategic Studies, 17 April, available at: https://horninstitute.org/covid-19-in-the-igad-region-peace-and-security-implications/

UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (UN IANYD) (2020), Statement of COVID-19 and Youth, available at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/news/2020/04/unianyd/

UNDESA (no date), *Youth and Intergenerational Partnerships*, available at: https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-intergenerational-partnerships.pdf

# 4. Back to Basics: Centring Youth in Responses to Violent Extremism

## Kosta Lucas

Having a high-level of youth participation in any given community initiative is generally attractive to not-for-profit organisations, government funders and philanthropic benefactors. It makes for great public relations and marketing photos. Yet, genuine youth engagement is also difficult for a number of reasons. One of these is the tendency of youth programming to operate from a deficit-orientation: that is, on the basis of outdated and prevailing assumptions of young people having short-attention spans or being unwilling to work (Williams et al. 2016).

The negative effects of these assumptions are compounded in the P/CVE space. Here we also often deal with issues of mistrust of authority and fears about how youth participation could arouse the suspicions of law enforcement and national security authorities. There are a lot of P/CVE programmes that provide good opportunities for youth to genuinely be front and centre. However, young people, who are supposed to be integral to successful programming outcomes, often that organisers are taking advantage.

There is no magic formula for working with youth. In fact, experience shows that we have forgotten the basics, while proceeding with wrong assumptions about what working with youth is actually like.

## Why do we focus on youth in P/CVE?

It is a well-established fact that young people aged between 16 and 30 years represent a large number of those who support or engage in politically motivated violence (Grossman 2017). There are a number of reasons for this. However, it is generally accepted that young people are specifically targeted by extremist groups, because the nature of 'radicalism and extremism are largely perceived as youth phenomena... whose very existence centres around a youth identity' (UN 2015). Moreover, in Australia,

33 per cent of young people reported being exposed to terrorist-related content online (Office of eSafety Commissioner 2018). Taken together, this forms a picture that is a genuine cause for concern. Not only are young people actively targeted, but the chances of them coming across extremist material (that they're not even looking for) is also high.

However, there is an often-under-appreciated aspect of this picture. Despite what we know about recruitment strategies, youth-centred narratives of extremist groups and the sheer volume of extremist material that proliferates youth spaces, the uptake of extremist violence is still low. (Grossman 2017). While keeping young people safe is an ongoing concern that requires consistent work, we also risk disregarding the resilience of the majority of our youth. What can we learn from them?

In addition to this is the growing acknowledgement of youth as the most powerful agents for change among their peers. Organisations such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID 2017) acknowledge that 'literature emphasises the need to switch the narrative to recognise youth as positive agents for peace-building and security rather than stigmatising them as risks and threats'.

Current research (Grossman 2017) and practitioner accounts (Williams et al 2016, USAID 2017 and Ritzmann 2018) suggest many benefits of genuinely youth-driven initiatives. These include:

- activating interest in the subject matter, where previously none existed;

- obtaining more truthful and useful insights into the various challenges in P/CVE;

- providing opportunities to repair broken 'linkages' between young people and critical community infrastructure;

- empowering young people to seek help and peer-mediate with confidence; and

- creating relationships between young people who share an understanding of the challenges and solutions.

## 'By youth' or 'with youth'?

As practitioners, how do we put our youth-centred programmes in the best position to achieve these results? The simple answer is: 'by centring youth'. Yet the reality is more complex, as there are many factors to navigate. The starting point of any prospective youth P/CVE programme is to be clear on a fundamental distinction: all youth programming is considered 'for youth' but the question is whether the programme is 'by youth' or 'with youth'?

In essence, 'by youth' programming refers to programming initiated by young people, while 'with youth' refers to programming that is normally driven by government or civil society organisations, in partnership with young people. The level of youth engagement in a programme will depend on various factors, including:

- Whose idea is it?

- Who is hosting and resourcing the project?

- What are the potential legal responsibilities? That is, risk and safety/parental consent?

- How will participation be supported or remunerated?

By self-auditing using these fundamental questions, we can put our programme in a position to adequately manage the boundaries, expectations and realistic outcomes that will underpin it. It also allows us to better ascertain what a sustainable youth engagement strategy looks like within the context. If the 'engine room' of our programme's output is driven by youth, then the overall needs orientation may be more about supporting structures and sustainability. Conversely, if young people provide more of a consultative or partnership function in an organisation's programming, then the needs orientation may be one of incentivising through opportunity creation, transparency and accountability mechanisms.

If young people are the intended beneficiaries of a P/CVE programme, then any engagement must be genuine and respected – right down to the starting assumptions we make about young people themselves.

*'Collaboration not only strengthens the design and implementation of P/CVE policies and programmes, it also helps address fundamental grievances that have exacerbated the spread of violent extremism and bridge divides between youth, society and government, more broadly.'* (Williams et al. 2017)

One thing remains incontrovertibly true: young people need a meaningful and guaranteed position at the table.

## References

Grossman, M (2017), 'Understanding Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism: A Standardised Research Measure', Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia.

Lucas, K, and Russell, J (2018), 'A Nimble (NMBL) Approach to Youth Engagement in P/CVE', Issue Paper, RAN YOUNG, Radicalisation Awareness Network, Amsterdam, NL, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/archive/nimble-nmbl-approach-youth-engagement-pcve-2018_en

Office of the eSafety Commissioner (2018), 'Online Hate Infographic', Office of the eSafety Commissioner, available at: https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/research/young-people-social-cohesion/online-hate-bullying-violence

Ritzmann, A. (2018), *RAN PP - Involving young people in counter and alternative narratives—Why involve peers?* (p. 10) [Issue Paper]. Radicalisation Awareness Network.

Stephens, W, Sieckelinck, S and Boutellier, H (2019), 'Preventing Violent Extremism: A Review of the Literature', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 1– 16, available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1543144

United Nations (2015), 'Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary General' in UN General Assembly, 17–18, available at: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674

US Agency for International Development (USAID) (2017), 'Promising Practices in Engaging Youth in Peace and Security and P/CVE', March, available at: https://static.globalinnovationexchange.org/s3fs-public/asset/document/Promising%20Practices%20in%20Engaging%20Youth%20in%20Peace%20Security_print_combined.pdf?2Zq0oW5C8mDmkuS2Zn8dzgjGFK.xFhI3

Williams, M, Walsh Taza, R and Prelis, S (2016), 'Working Together to Address Violent Extremism: A Strategy for Youth Government Partnerships', *Search for Common Ground*, available at: https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/YouthGovtCVE_StrategyDocument_122116.pdf

# 5. Education under Attack: Violent Extremism in Cameroon

Achaleke Christian Leke

Inflicting pain and terror remains a unique strategy used by violent extremist groups to further their social, economic, religion-based or political objectives. Violent extremism has seen a sharp rise across the world since the start of the twenty-first century, claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands of people of different religions, nationalities and races. From causing forced migration to kidnapping, looting and extortion, more than 103 countries suffer violent extremism (UNDP 2017).

Although the Global Terrorism Index 2019 (IEP 2019) shows a reduction in the number of deaths caused by violent extremism and terrorism across the world, schools and places of education are seen as a 'soft target' to demonstrate grievances and determination to achieve objectives. Even though young people and children have been caught in the crossfire of these school attacks, they also remain a symbol of hope and source of solutions.

For the past six years, Cameroon has witnessed a spike in violent extremist activities. This started with the rise of the Boko Haram insurgency, which spread from neighbouring Nigeria into Cameroon in 2014 (International Crisis Group 2016). More recently, separatist armed groups have formed in the anglophone regions. As a result, the country has suffered loss of life, the forceful displacement of millions of people and economic hardship (Amnesty International 2019).

## Why target education?

Violent extremist groups target schools in order to inflict pain, fear and terror in the communities where they are operating. The kidnaping of students and teachers and asking for ransom, destruction of schools, and the sporadic killing of unarmed school children and teachers have all characterised the operations of these groups within Cameroon (Amnesty International 2019).

Just as the name 'Boko Haram' means 'Western Education is forbidden' in Hausa, the group has adopted creating fear and destruction of school facilities as a way to disrupt education. A UNICEF report (2015) found that 120 schools were forced to close in ten districts of the Far North during the school year 2014–15; direct threats from Boko Haram towards school directors and community members were cited as a primary reason for school closures. Some 33,163 children (43 per cent girls) were out of school or had been forced to seek access to schooling outside of their native communities as a result of school closures. This situation is getting worse, as schools remain the target. The UN Security Council (2017) reported the detonation of explosive devices at Bodo primary school on 25 January 2016; 10 children were killed, with 20 others injured. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (2020) highlighted the incident of two suicide bombers who entered a school in Kerawa village in the Far North region and detonated their devices, killing four people.

Anglophone regions of Cameroon, despite socioeconomic challenges, used to be at the forefront of the drive to promote quality education in Cameroon. This came to an end in 2016, with the outbreak of the anglophone crisis. The teachers' union put schooling on hold as a form of civil disobedience and expression of its need for the educational system to be reformed. This peaceful protest became more radical as leaders of the movement decided to enforce school closures. The protests then transformed into a violent conflict, as armed separatist groups targeted education to obtain greater political recognition. Leaders threatened to attack students and teachers if they attempted to go to school. Amnesty International's report on Cameroon (2019) highlighted that as of December 2019, only 17 per cent of schools were functional and 29 per cent of

teachers were able to work. According to a UNICEF report (2019), the attacks and ban on education by non-state actors led to the closure of over 80 per cent of schools, affecting 600,000 children, with over 74 schools destroyed and hundreds of parents, students and teachers kidnapped.

Efforts toward resuming school in 2020 witnessed a favourable response, as there was an increase in the number of schools that were functioning. However, separatist groups promised more violence. A school in the town of Kumba was then attacked by armed men in October 2020, killing at least six children (BBC 2020).

## Young people championing education in conflict-affected areas

Despite the life-threatening attacks, efforts to provide access to education to children and youth in Cameroon's conflict-affect regions remains a top priority for the government, as well as national and international development stakeholders. Efforts have focused on providing security for schools; reconstruction of destroyed schools; free education and learning materials to affected persons; and training of teachers on providing psychosocial support to students and pupils.

Within these efforts, we are increasingly seeing how young people are grouping themselves into social movements to provide alternative strategies to provide education for their peers and to create safer spaces for learning within conflict areas. By creating physical safe spaces for formal and non-formal education and developing digital tools to support strengthened education within these regions, youths have made outstanding achievements in providing education to children who have been out of school.

Among these efforts is the Salaam initiative (available at: www.salaaam-initiive.org), which was developed by the youth-led civil society organisation Local Youth Corner Cameroon (LOYOC) in 2018. The initiative focuses on creating safe spaces for learning and re-education, providing free formal and non-formal education, life skills and psychosocial support for children who have been displaced and out of school due to the Boko Haram insurgency. Responding to the increase of the recruitment of vulnerable children by Boko Haram into their ranks, this initiative is providing innovative education for these children to prevent radicalisation. This initiative, despite little or no funding support, has

been able to enrol 150 children; of these, 20 were recently reintegrated into formal schools with a full scholarship. As of the time of writing, 40 per cent of the children could read and write, 20 per cent were enjoying different recreational activities, and 100 per cent had denounced violence and terrorism.

Miss Indira Bnaga, Programs Manager of LOYAC in the Far North region, said:

*'We started this program with no funding support. Even the community members were shocked that as a group of young people we were willing to go extra miles just to set up the program. The school runs in an open air space with a grass thatched roof, the children sit on the ground since we have no benches but we keep fogging ahead. We are grateful to have volunteer teachers. Today we are proud that 10 out of the 20 we reintegrated into formal school are among the best students in their school. What would have become of these kids if we did not act?'*

Similarly, by leveraging technology, a social enterprise developed a digital learning platform to support children who had been prevented from going to school due to the violent conflict. The EduClick platform (available at: https://www.educlick.africa/) is providing an online learning space for children. It is helping primary and secondary schools with revision for exams via SMS and is partnering with teachers and parents to provide lessons online. More than 1,000 children were being supported through this platform at the time of this report.

Despite efforts by young people to rebuild and strengthen access to education in conflict-affected areas, they receive little or no support. The project co-ordinator of the Sallam initiative shared her frustration:

*'Despite how impactful our educational programme is we are not getting any financial nor material support. It appears stakeholders do not understand that young people like us are their partners and working with us will change a lot on the ground.'*

The co-ordinator of the EduClick platform said:

*'My platform has contributed in preventing children from being killed or abducted, especially as studying online provides a safe space for both teacher and students to interact without any risk.'*

Despite the fact that violent extremist groups are targeting schools, education remains a fundamental right for everyone. Efforts toward countering these attacks must adopt both civil-military responses

and partnerships with multiple stakeholders. While the military protecting schools is important, responding to the challenges and providing alternative forms of educating children and youth in conflict is more so. Young people have greatly contributed to educating children and countering the efforts of violent extremist groups to destroy education in conflict-affected areas.

## References

Amnesty International (2019), *Cameroon 2019*, available at: https://www.amnesty. org/en/countries/africa/cameroon/report-cameroon/ (accessed 20 October 2020).

BBC (2020), 'Cameroon: Children killed in attack on school in Kumba', available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54678254 (accessed 17 October 2020).

Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (2020), 'Education Under Attack 2020', available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/world/education-under-attack-2020#:~:text=More%20than%2022%2C000%20students%2C%20teachers,Education%20from%20Attack%20(GCPEA) (accessed 20 October 2020).

Institute for Economics and Peace (2019), 'Global Terrorism Index 2019: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism', Sydney, November, available at: https://www.economicsandpeace. org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GTI-2019web.pdf (accessed 19 March 2021).

International Crisis Group (2016), *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram*, International Crisis Group Report 241, available at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/cameroon-confronting-boko-haram (accessed 18 October 2020).

UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2019), 'Over 80 per cent of schools closed as a result of crisis, denying more than 600,000 children access to education', available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/over-80-cent-schools-closed-result-crisis-denying-more-600000-children-access (accessed 31 October 2019).

UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2015), 'The Impact of Boko Haram and Armed Conflict on Schooling in Cameroon's Far North: Education Sector Rapid Needs Assessment, Far North, Cameroon', available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb. int/files/resources/CMRFarNorthEduction-Rapid_Assessment2015Final%281%29. pdf (accessed 19 October 2020).

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2017), 'The Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, incentives and tipping point for recruitment', New York City.

UN Security Council (2017), *Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Nigeria*, Report Number S/2017/304, available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport. org/un-documents/document/s2017304. php (accessed 21 October 2020).

The Commonwealth

P17439