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**Promoting Youth Participation in Peace and Security Efforts in
Kilifi County**

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1. Introduction

Youth participation in peace and security efforts is critical for progress. It is important to recognize the needs of young people, and the influence they have on the trajectory of the coast region, as a critical component for sustainable peace and security. Young people are a major force for social, economic and demographic change – and their wellbeing and meaningful participation is fundamental to achieving a peaceful and secure society. Steps should be taken to facilitate meaningful youth participation in peace and security interventions.

In Kilifi County, many young people have been working on peace, security and conflict resolution initiatives on a small scale. They have proven themselves at this level and, if they are given a chance to do peace building at a larger scope, there's no telling what sort of impact it would have. In addition to coming up with policies and laws, there is a need to effectively involve the youth in finding solutions to peace and security dilemmas. They need to be involved in peace and security processes and create monitoring mechanisms where youth have a role.

Opening decision-making to youth is not doing them a favor, it is doing the society a favor as young people are central to the nexus of peace and security, development, and human rights. Youth participation has shown to be a critical element for the achievement of sustainable peace, security and development. It is also vital for the promotion of human rights, among other wider peace and security agendas. Therefore, adequate measures should be taken to contribute to enabling young people to play an essential role in building peaceful, secure and just societies.

2. Overview of Youth Peace and Security

The active engagement of youth in peace, security and development efforts is key to achieving sustainable, inclusive and stable societies, and to averting the worst threats and challenges to sustainable development.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has continued to call on member states, regional organizations and the UN institutions, including peacekeeping and special political missions, to coordinate and increase their engagement in the implementation of resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) on Youth Peace and Security. The resolutions importantly recognize the role that young people play in security processes and are integrated into five pillars, namely: Participation, Protection, Prevention, Partnership, Disengagement and Reintegration. Relevant to the Youth, Peace, and Security agenda is also UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security that was passed in 2000, and specifically addresses how women (including young women and girls) are differently impacted by conflict. Specifically, UNSCR 1325 highlights the critical role that women and girls can (and already) play in peacebuilding efforts. Resolution 1325 also is important in the way that it affirms that peace and security efforts are more sustainable when women

are equal partners in the prevention of violent conflict, the delivery of relief and recovery efforts and in the forging of lasting peace.

Similarly, the African Union (AU) recognizes the important roles and contributions of the continent's youth in the promotion of peace, security and stability within the framework of the AU Master Roadmap of Practical steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020, and Aspirations number 4 of Agenda 2063¹ – a peaceful and secure Africa, as well as UN Security Council Resolutions 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020). Other important efforts on behalf of the AU include the adoption of the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) in 2020, and the continuation of the process of implementing the 10 years Implementation Plan for that framework, as well as a study on the Roles and Contributions of Youth to Peace and Security in Africa.

In Kenya, the promotion of sustainable peace and security is enshrined in the constitution and Kenya's economic blue print – Vision 2030. Equally important, youth development is anchored in the constitution. In 2016, the Government of Kenya initiated the review process of the Kenya National Youth Policy to align it to the 2010 constitution and factor in new and emerging youth challenges and opportunities. The new national youth policy has key provisions on youth peace and security. The policy recognizes that peace, security and sustainable development can only be achieved through meaningful engagement of youth, and by comprehensively tackling issues that affect young people - the policy seeks to involve the youth in security and peace building processes as stakeholders and decision makers. The Kenya Youth Development Policy provides a framework for youth engagement in peace and security processes at the national and county levels. Kenya is a young nation. Nearly 80% of the country's population is aged 35 years and below with the median age being 19 years old. Supporting the inclusion of youth as specific stakeholders in community driven security and peace building initiatives is vital as they are both largely affected by conflict and instrumental to peace building.

Countries including Kenya face complex and long standing conflicts, and many of the solutions that have been tried have not worked as they were intended. There is everything to gain by including young people who bring new ideas to peacebuilding processes. The country should continue looking to youth for creative ways to solve conflict, and promote lasting peace. Participation of the youth in all the governance affairs has remained abysmal in African countries such as Kenya. However, through numerous self-initiated programmes, young people have played a critical role in promoting peace and security. As a member state of the UN, Kenya should carry out and accept decisions of the UNSC, and promote youth engagement in peace and security processes.

Youth participation in peace and security efforts lead to effective policy responses to the threats. Across the world, young people are rolling up their sleeves, introducing innovation,

¹ African Union Commission (AUC), Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, 01 Background Note (Addis Ababa: AUC, 2015), accessed at https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-01_background_note.pdf.

serving the needs of affected populations, and building hope, resilience and social cohesion in their communities and nations. Young people are substantively contributing to the discussions on key peace and security issues. And they are identifying solutions for – and indicators of – progress for the Youth, Peace and Security agenda.

Through Search for Common Ground’s *Inuka* Project, that is implemented in the coastal region of Kenya, young people have been increasingly involved in peace and security processes. Specifically, the project has provided leadership and placed young people front and center on the peace and security agenda. The project represents a key turning point in the way youth are engaged in peace and security issues in the coastal region, Kenya and beyond. Activities in the project also seek to ensure that county governments in the coastal region create an enabling environment for young people to be actively engaged so they can increasingly have weight in influencing important decisions and meaningfully participating in peace and security processes in the region.

This project gives a platform and a voice to the youth and provides the evidence needed to foster strategies and policies that would increase youth participation in peace and security interventions. Ultimately, the project has helped to highlight that sustainable peace, security and development can only be achieved through prioritization of youth voices, agency, participation and leadership – and a focus on youth as change agents other than risks is critical. Therefore, until the problem of young people’s exclusion is addressed, it will be hard to achieve peace and security – and so a priority that this policy brief emphasizes is fostering an understanding on how young people understand and interpret meaningful participation and inclusion.

In the *Inuka* Project, Search for Common Ground is working in partnership with Kenya co-applicants Kiunga Youth Bunge Initiative (KYBI), Human Rights Agenda (HURIA), Humanity Action Knowledge Integrity in Africa (HAKI Africa) and Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI) to implement a comprehensive, youth-focused community peacebuilding action across the coast region of Kenya. Search and partners believe that if at risk youth have skills to engage with one another and with community leaders, then the youth relationships with security actors will be stronger. This will allow security actors to better attack the root causes of violent extremism.

In this project, Search for Common Ground has worked with young people in all four counties of Kenya’s coast region, namely Kilifi, Mombasa, Kwale and Lamu, with an aim of enhancing their understanding and building their capacities to champion for peace and security. The project has brought out and emphasized the crucial role and contribution of young people to preventing violence, responding to violence and rebuilding peace, and informed contributions to the security and stability of counties and Kenya at large.

3. Key Challenges for Youth Participation



- i. **Hierarchy and Gap Between Younger and Older People:** Youth are culturally perceived as not being capable of holding decision-making responsibilities and are ignored because adults and elders dominate with the idea that they know best. There are often misunderstandings between the youth and adults, with conditions made unfavorable for youth to have a voice and make positive contributions in their communities. Some community leaders exhibit low tolerance for dissent and actively marginalized youth, who may respond by forming their own organizations or communities.
- ii. **Financial and Technical Support:** Much of the youth effort remains unrecognized and unsupported and represents a huge missed opportunity of support. Youth are eager and interested in engaging and implementing peace and security initiatives, but they lack adequate finances and technical support. Donors place stringent procedures that hinder youth from getting funding to implement peace and security programmes. On the other hand, both national and county governments fail to provide sufficient resources for youth to engage in peace and security interventions.
- iii. **Marginalized Youth:** Youth who are closer to authorities and at the centre are more likely to receive greater access and support, while many who are involved in initiatives at the very local level away from the centre and authorities are less known or recognized. Also, marginalized young men and young women may not have access to resources to have their voices heard and make contributions in their communities—further marginalized. Social marginalization “feeds a cycle of fear and resentment and a sense of injustice upon which extremists prey.”
- iv. **Political Disengagement:** If youth are not politically engaged, they are more likely to feel disenfranchised and frustrated. Long-term disengagement of youth can negatively impact the social cohesion of communities as well as their peace and security. Also, efforts to engage youth fail to acknowledge that the youth is not a homogenous group and that individuals experience different obstacles and opportunities that uniquely affect their civil, political, and socioeconomic rights.
- v. **Lack of Youth Involvement in Peace and Security Processes:** Young people are often discriminated against, socially marginalized and excluded from decision-making. More often than not, youth are excluded by mainstream society from fully participating in economic, social, cultural and political life. Some of the reasons for which youth are excluded from equal participation include, the assumption that they are inexperienced and that they are leaders of tomorrow, not today. In some cases, they are viewed as mere beneficiaries, victims or perpetrators.
- vi. **Drug Abuse:** Despite the intense interventions by the Government, religious organisations, non-state actors and many other stakeholders to curb the problem of drug abuse in Kenya especially in the coast region, the menace seems to be escalating by the day. Most drug abuse among the youth starts in school. Lack of awareness amongst the youth regarding the harmful effects of drug abuse is cited

as one of the main reasons for the youth getting involved in this harmful behavior. Also, extreme poverty in conjunction with childhood behavioural problems are factored for increased risk for drug abuse. There is a close relationship between drug abuse and crime. Drug abusers commit crimes to pay for their drugs and this inflicts damages to the society. Moreover, many criminals are often under the influence of drugs while committing crimes.

- vii. **Lack of Capacity:** In some cases youth lack capacity and expertise to effectively participate in peace and security processes. Those in authority intentionally fail to provide capacity building opportunities to young people because they are afraid that youth with high skills may surpass and eventually dethrone them. Information and knowledge are critical for effective youth participation. When people are informed they get involved.
- viii. **Reintegration and Rehabilitation Gaps:** In many cases, there is lack of support for young people, making gangs and militia groups more attractive if they're unable to find employment and be integrated into the community. Offender rehabilitation and reintegration is weak – there is no support from the community to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders. The coast region does not have effective deradicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for youth.

4. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

- i. **Develop a Framework for Youth Engagement in Peace and Security Processes:** The need for county frameworks to guide efforts to enhance youth participation in building peace and promoting security in the coastal counties cannot be overstated. The policies should put in place infrastructure for effective youth participation in peace and security processes, taking into account unique county contexts. The infrastructure should propose systems for youth representation and engagement in peace and security platforms. Equally important, county youth policies should align to the Kenya National Youth Development Policy and include provisions on youth peace and security. The county policies should recognize that peace, security and sustainable development can only be achieved through meaningful engagement of youth, and by comprehensively tackling issues that affect young people. The policy seeks to involve the youth in security and peace building processes as stakeholders and decision makers.
- ii. **Provide Funding for Youth Peace and Security Initiatives:** If youth voices are to be included in the peace and security processes, secure ear-marked and special funding for youth organisations and youth related initiatives will support this. There is a need to support innovative projects, focused on youth empowerment and participation with the potential for catalytic effects and peace building outcomes. It is crucial to invest in young people's participation, organization and initiatives. Setting up a Youth Peace and Security Fund in the county would be an invaluable tool. Most important, policies on peace and security should provide a legal

framework for allocation of resources to youth peace and security interventions and initiatives in the respective counties. This will go a long way in ensuring that youth are effectively involved in addressing matters related to peace and security. The Youth Peacebuilding Fund can play a key role in encouraging youth leadership and participation in peacebuilding.

- iii. **Provide Capacity Development and Technical Support:** It is important to provide youths with training opportunities to take an active part in peacebuilding. With their youthful energy and capabilities, and ability of adaptation to new technological trends, for example, youths could act as mediators, community mobilisers, humanitarian workers and peace brokers. Like any particular conflict affected population group, the mobilisation of youths' capacities requires a targeted and long-term approach. However, greater support could be provided in supporting implementation of strategies, coordination, and programming. Providing support structures for actors in peace and security processes can substantially enhance their influence and quality contributions to negotiations. It is imperative to strengthen capacities of county governments and civil society, including youth and youth-led organizations, for evidence-based policy formulation and evaluation to ensure that they address the concerns of the youth as stipulated in UN Security Council's resolution 2250, 2419 and 2535 on Youth, Peace and Security.
- iv. **Conduct Marginality Mapping and Apply a *leaving-no-one-behind* Approach:** Taking into consideration that youth networks are diverse and spread across the coast region, it is important to recognize that there are youth groups that are more visible than others. A mapping and solid understanding of the different youth groups and their dynamics is needed to ensure funding allocation is not biased and supports the variety of youth networks more equally. Seeking out and including marginalized youth that are most affected by the issue at hand are essential for devising and implementing effective, sustainable solutions. Applying the leaving no one behind will help to amplify the voices and stories of the most marginalized groups with unique vulnerabilities.
- v. **Enable Youth Participation and Ensure Inclusivity:** Stakeholders should bear youth in mind when designing negotiation and dialogue structures, at all levels of the peace and security processes. Youth need to be encouraged as they work for peace and security, while a space for youth to input their opinions and perspectives meaningfully into the peace process should be facilitated. Making meetings and events appealing to young people, and scaling up the use of digital tools and using new technologies and communication platforms are critical to youth participation.
- vi. **Implement UN Security Council Resolutions on Youth:** National and county governments should implement UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250, 2419 and 2535 on youth, peace and security, securing the necessary financial and other resources, and developing long-term national and county action plans, with the involvement of young people and youth organisations in their design,

implementation and evaluation. Also, implementation of resolution 1325 on women peace and security is crucial. Voices of young men and young women should be included in the work related to the implementation of the UNSCR 2250, 2419 and 2535 specifically and the youth peace and security agendas more broadly. Most important, intersectionality is key to inclusivity in the implementation of the youth peace and security agendas, peace and security policies and programmes more broadly.

- vii. **Involve Youth in County Peace and Security Processes:** County governments should take concrete steps to increase representation of youth decision-making at all levels providing ways to give youth a greater voice. Importantly, County governments in the coast region should involve young people in the peace, security and conflict prevention processes in addition to supporting local initiatives such as awareness-raising campaigns and capacity building to curb forced migration, including internal displacement. Also, there is a need to create more spaces for diverse youth to engage in processes to influence the county and region's state of peace and security.
- viii. **Carry Out Advocacy and Awareness Raising:** Meaningful inclusion of young men and young women in peace and security processes efforts requires generation and strategic dissemination of research and resources highlighting their instrumental role in building sustainable peace and security. Advocacy and awareness raising regarding the positive impact that young men and women have in peace and security efforts need to be considerably enhanced and widely disseminated, to mitigate the pervasive stereotypes that lock out youth. Efforts should be made to sensitize all and sundry to ensure understanding and buy into the importance of inclusion of youth from diverse backgrounds in advocacy and decision making spaces. Enhancing knowledge and awareness is therefore one of the protective factors against drug abuse for young people. It is essential to create awareness through mainstreaming capacity building on drug abuse related issues including the effects of drug abuse and addiction in learning institutions.
- ix. **Provide Better Opportunities to the Youth:** Governments and partners should address the social and economic grievances that violent extremists exploit by working with at-risk communities to better understand those grievances and design effective responses, whether they are in the areas of social services, education, employment opportunities, or security and justice. Much more attention has to be paid to the youth by increasing opportunities for education, employment and political participation. The youth need to be able to engage productively in a politics that builds unity, is based on common values and holds out the real prospect of change by democratic means if the extremist ideologies are to be starved of new recruits. Also, youth leadership exchange programmes should be promoted. Self-evidently more support is needed for the organisations working in the coast region on education, youth activities, vocational training as well employment.

- x. **Support Deradicalization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration:** In order for the individual to go through and sustain behavioural change, support from the community is needed. Therefore, when it comes to offender rehabilitation and reintegration, communities have a crucial role to play as they can serve as the foundation to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders in numerous ways. There is a need for counseling services and support for essential services to vulnerable youth returning to the communities.

The meaningful inclusion of youth in peace and security processes in the coast region is critical, but is currently insufficient and unstructured. Youth and youth organisations making efforts to engage in peace building and security initiatives face monumental challenges. However, youth have found ways to have their voices heard, whether they are provided with that space or not. Overall, youth find space to engage in peacebuilding and there is evidence of agency and creativity in how young people have leveraged their talents to advocate for good governance, and build social cohesion in communities. Recognising the needs of the younger generation and the influence they have on the trajectory of the coastal region is important for sustainable peace and security. Youth can bring unique perspectives, skills and impetus to problem-solving and help to creatively deal with peace and security issues in the coast region.