

Disclaimer:

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Search for Common Ground and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.



Search for Common Ground, Policy Brief

Promoting Youth Participation in Peace and Security Efforts in
MOMBASA County

Table of Contents

Introduction and Summary	3
Overview of Youth, Peace and Security	3
Key Challenges for Youth Participation	5
i. Criminal gangs, radicalization and terrorist recruitment among youth	
ii. Hierarchy and gap between younger and older people	
iii. Multiple Roles of Youth in Intercommunal Violence	
iv. Drug Abuse	
v. Negative Political Influence – Using Youth for Political Gain	
vi. Lack of Framework or Policies	
vii. Lack of Capacity	
viii. Counterproductive Authority Behavior and Police Brutality	
ix. Reintegration and Rehabilitation Gaps	
Conclusion and Policy Recommendations	7

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 Mombasa 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, 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

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.

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. **Criminal Gangs, Radicalization and Terrorist Recruitment Among Youth:** There has been an increase in the amount recruitment into criminal gangs and violent activities in coastal Kenya. Juvenile gangs have been on the rise in both Mombasa and Lamu counties. A majority of those engaging in crime are primary school dropouts who have become drug addicts. These juvenile gangs have been prevalent and the problem is especially significant in Kisauni sub-county, Likoni, Changamwe and Mombasa’s old town. There is high youth vulnerability to recruitment into criminal gangs and violent extremist organizations in the coast region. Although it was previously more pronounced in Muslim youth, especially of Somali descent, the region is now witnessing enhanced recruitment of individuals from all religious and ethnic groups. Unemployment, discrimination in issuing identity cards and social alienation are among the reasons youth become radical. Violent extremism breeds by exploiting a range of economic, social, and political grievances.

- ii. **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.
- iii. **Multiple Roles that Youth Play in Intercommunal Violence:** Youth occupy multiple roles in intercommunal violence, as belligerents, victims and targets of violence and actors of peace. While young people are particularly susceptible to violence and crime, they are also disproportionately burdened by social and economic insecurities and are often victims of violence, political unrest and terrorism themselves. However, the burden borne by youths is often underemphasized as focus is often placed on the risk youth are seen to pose in society.
- iv. **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.
- v. **Negative Political Influence – Using Youth for Political Gains:** Young people drop out of school and start using drugs. Some of these young people end up in criminal organizations that are used by politicians to fight their opponents. Politicians manipulate the destitute position of some youth for selfish gains.
- vi. **Lack of Framework or Policies:** Lack of relevant policies have had an adverse impact on the ability of the youth to engage in peace and security interventions. To achieve sustainable peace and security, there is a need for robust policies that provide a framework for youth participation.
- 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. Information and knowledge on existing policies would bolster participation and effective engagement of youth.

- viii. **Counterproductive Authority Behavior and Police Brutality:** Counterproductive government behavior has been found to regularly sideline youth and unintentionally boost efforts of violent extremist organizations. Governments create grievances by tolerating incompetence, corruption, or the abuse of human rights. Police brutality is one of the major issues and concerns among the youth in the coast. There are concerns and allegations that a number of young people have been arrested and incarcerated without charges being held for months. Also, there has been reckless shooting and killing of suspects in the coast region, which often happen under the guise of fighting crime.
- ix. **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. **Youth More Engaged in Education and Skills development:** Education is an important tool to prevent crime and promote a culture of lawfulness. Education always has been, and always will be, the most effective way to combat adversity. Rather than creating harsher laws to deter people from making mistakes, there is a need to encourage them to become productive members of society by providing them with education and training.
- ii. **Set Up Peace Clubs in Schools:** Schools should establish peace clubs as a way of fighting negative ethnicity and religious extremism among the youth. These clubs can be used as avenues of promoting good relations, harmony and peaceful co-existence amongst students and teachers. They can also inform the youth that they will only make situations worse by creating instability through engaging in violent activities.
- iii. **Politicians Should be Held Accountable in Terms of Leadership and Integrity:** Politicians fuel political violence by promising money, jobs, food and other incentives to desperately poor young people who agree to terrorize their rivals and take on consequential societal blame. Youth political participation needs to be meaningful. Politicians who exploit young people in order to cause chaos should be held responsible.
- iv. **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.

- v. **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.
- vi. **Instill Morals and Strengthen Correctional Centres:** Parents or guardians should instill good morals and values, protect children from negative influences and bad company, and mould the attitude, behavior and approach of the children in their life. Positive education, correct information and good morals form a strong foundation for children. Also, there is a need for functioning, civilized, efficient, accountable and professional correctional services, with capable officers who possess specialized skill sets and operate on the basis of international standards.
- vii. **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.
- viii. **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.
- ix. **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.

- x. **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.
- xi. **Develop County Road Maps for Youth, Peace and Security Together with Young People while Adopting Participatory Approaches:** County governments in the coast region should enable participatory development and implementation of development, peace and security strategies. County governments should ensure inclusion and youth participation in responses to conflict. Also, there is a need for establishment of a participatory mechanism to monitor and evaluate the progress of youth engagement in peace and security processes.
- xii. **Support Diverse Youth Initiatives:** The engagement of youth in peacebuilding in a wider perspective can be ensured through the arts, culture, tourism, sports and education. The innovativeness and creativeness of young people in those areas could be mobilised effectively by connecting them with wider peacebuilding objectives such as building bridges between divided communities and ensuring a viable process of reconciliation.
- xiii. **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.

- xiv. **Carry Out Youth-to-Youth Peace and Security Dialogues and Training for Youth Getting Out of Crime:** Train young gang members and help them to reintegrate into the community. Dialogue should take place periodically to bring the youth in the community to meet and have dialogues on peace and security matters among themselves. This will increase awareness and knowledge on the role of the youth in promoting security in the county.
- xv. **Carry Out Youth-Police Dialogues:** It is important to carry out dialogue between the youth and the police on peace and security issues, crime reporting, processing procedures, and the need to strengthen youth-police relations in the area through trust building activities. The relationship between the youth and the police can be strengthened by civic engagement that can be fostered through joint activities such as sports, culture, art and music for trust building and demystifying the police force to the youth. Youth Awareness, Communication and Education (YACE) on insecurity and CVE among the youth and the police and the need for a stronger relation to prevent youth recruitment into criminal gangs and VEOs through police participating in beach activities, sensitization of the community on the importance of being close to the police through seminars, barazas by village elders, get together and open forums to discuss such issues freely without fear of victimization Socialization of the importance of peace and security. The public should be socialized into embracing peace and security as the most basic of the basic human needs and wants in the family, school, by peers, in religious institutions and the mass media. They should also be socialized on the importance of youth-police relations in preventing recruitment into violent groups.
- xvi. **Ensure Human Rights Compliance:** The journey towards human rights compliance should be embraced by all security agencies. Youth should work with the Independent Police Oversight Authority to ensure police reduce the level of professional misconduct in order to enhance practices that conform with international human rights standards and also to operate within the country's legal framework. Also, civic education to youth on laws and human rights can help put an end to police brutality and harassment, while promoting peace and justice.

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.