



YOUTH TALK

YOUTH VOICES FOR CHANGE



Search for
Common Ground
Trust, Collaboration, Breakthroughs



Search for **Common Ground**

Mali, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic have recently signed peace agreements. However, the negotiations were mainly limited to adult elites. Although they make up the demographic majority, young people in these three countries lack the means to express themselves and participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Yet they have incredible power to build peace, bridge divides and develop solutions.

Our Youth Talk project, funded by the Bezos Family Foundation, aims to change this dynamic. This initiative empowers a group of more than 100 young radio journalists to report on local conflicts and create radio programs to help people find common ground.

Over the decades, we have created similar programs in other parts of the world, from Sierra Leone to Burundi. The young people we trained eventually became nationally recognized investigative journalists. Leaders like former Liberian President Sirleaf and U.S. ambassadors have credited our radio programs with preventing mass atrocities and genocide and uniting entire nations around a common goal.

That's why Youth Talk is so promising.

These young people have used their unique stories to tackle the toughest challenges in their communities. They spoke about issues such as forced marriage, violence against minorities, and their first-hand experience with the horrors of war and the impact on their education. And they didn't just stop at reporting; they worked to find solutions to these problems, uniting their voices for the common good.

These are not just kids who have learned new skills. They have something powerful to say and have finally found a national platform to be heard - a space to give shape to their dreams of building a safer and more just country.

Here are their stories.

MALI

A stylized map of Mali is shown against a background that transitions from orange at the top to purple at the bottom. The map of Mali is white with a thick black outline. Inside the white area, there are dashed lines representing regional or administrative boundaries. The capital city, Bamako, is marked with a small orange pin icon and the word "BAMAKO" in orange capital letters.

BAMAKO



TOTAL POPULATION:

20.8 MILLION

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION
THAT ARE YOUTH:



PEACE INDEX RANK:

150

OUT OF 163



PEOPLE DISPLACED BY THE CRISIS:

378,000



YOUTH TALK ACTIVITIES IN MALI:



68

RADIO SHOWS



194

YOUNG JOURNALISTS



342

INTER-GENERATIONAL
DIALOGUES



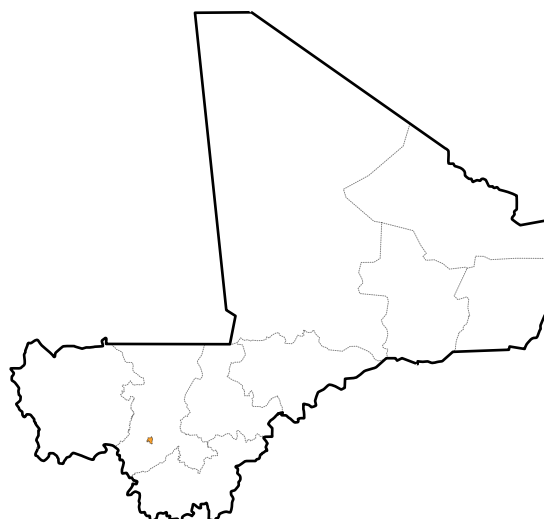
In 2012, Mali plunged into war following an insurgency by violent extremist and separatist groups in the northern regions.

Despite a peace agreement in 2015, violence continued to escalate, forcing people to flee from killings, kidnappings, recruitment into armed groups, and communal conflict.

By the end of 2021, the situation remained volatile; insecurity was gaining ground. For many, socio-economic opportunities are shrinking, resulting in increasingly precarious living conditions.

While this instability has a considerable impact on young people's daily lives and futures, they are often cast aside. Indeed, youth have few opportunities to participate in decision-making to help shape a more secure future.

Thus, in Bamako, Youth Talk provided a platform for young people to make their voices heard. Young journalists from all walks of life produced radio programs that addressed critical issues facing their country. Together, they showed adults that young people have the power to change things for the better.







AMBROISE

“I was traumatized by the war,” Ambroise confides. “I will tell you how I left Gao.”

In 2012, when fighting broke out in northern Mali, Ambroise lived amid the crisis, with his hometown on the verge of falling to insurgents.

“We wanted to take refuge with relatives in the capital, Bamako, but the first bus we took asked us to get off when they knew my father was a soldier. If we had been stopped on the way, all the passengers could have been killed,” added Ambroise. They lost the whole sum of 50,000 CFA for their ticket, more than the average monthly salary in Mali. Finally, “we found another vehicle. My father did not come with us. He couldn’t leave the front. For months we had no news of him. We thought he was dead”.

One day, a horn sounded outside the house. “It

“An 8-year-old should not have to see people die.”

was him, in his old jalopy,” Ambroise recalls with a laugh. Together they set off again for Mopti, a region that straddles the conflicting north and south. At the time, Search’s local team was training children to become young radio journalists committed to promoting peace. Ambroise joined them. “I started to open up, to talk, without being afraid to reveal where I come from. Because usually when you say you’re from the north, people fear you, they think we’re all dangerous.”

Today, Ambroise is back in Bamako, behind the microphone. Through Youth Talk, he tackles the socio-political issues facing his country. The conflict in the north remains at the center of his concerns.

“An 8-year-old should not have to see people die.” Ambroise pauses. Memories seem to fill the space around him; he lifts his head, looks ahead. “We hosted a program about the conflict in Mali, but it was still too difficult for me to talk about my experience.”

His heart still raw, his thoughts travel a thousand miles an hour, tracing a mental map of the roads between Gao and Bamako. “I told myself for too long that there was nothing I could do. Every time I heard about the number of displaced people, the number of deaths, I asked myself — how many could have been saved?” A feeling of helplessness that fades on air. His words have become his tools for change: “Today, I feel like I’m doing something.”

On air, Ambroise encourages people to find common ground. “It’s not too late. We may not reunite with those we have lost, but we can prevent more deaths.”

“The people of the north have been neglected for too long. Through dialogue, by listening to them, by taking into account their opinions, we can build peace. And this can only be done through mediators, most of whom are young people.”

When asked what his dream for the future is, Ambroise doesn’t take a second to think about it. The words come out instantly, “a Mali without war,” then silence, his eyes looking down as if to unravel something. “I want to help other young people traumatized by war to express themselves, to help others in turn, like an endless chain.”

“We are the future of this country.”



“I was traumatized by the war. I hardly spoke. But from the first radio show, I started feeling stronger.”





BINTOU

“There are people who die simply because they are albino,” says Bintou, referring to a violent crime that occurred four years ago. A five-year-old girl lost her life because some people thought it would change the course of the election. “Every time a child with albinism leaves home, they are on the lookout. Sometimes parents are even too scared to let them out.”

At 15, she wants to create change for those who suffer for no other reason than, like her, “having less melanin.” “I would like society to change its view of albinos, to realize that we are all equal.”

For the past two years, Bintou has been one of the stars of Youth Talk. With her soft voice, one might believe her when she says that she used to be shy. But once in front of the microphone, the magic happens. Bintou fills the studio with her presence, speaking with confidence. “From the very first show, I felt my fear disappear. I felt

free to say what I think, to believe in myself and my ideas.” Bintou speaks about the toughest issues: forced marriage, drugs, violent conflict. “The shows make me question things. Then, when I go home, I continue to discuss these topics with my friends.”

The young star is heard and noticed. The association for the protection of albinos, of which she is a member, asked her to co-host another program, *The Voice of the Voiceless*, dealing specifically with disability. “We reach out to these young people who sometimes don’t even believe in their own existence. It’s important to talk to them, to make them feel like they can meet their challenges, to tell them that their disability is not their fault.”

Her dreams, once timid as well, are coming true. “As a kid, I kept saying I wanted to be a journalist. Now I’m sure of it. I’ve found my calling.” Bintou is convinced that her dreams also have the power to make others shine. “Children with albinism are often left out. I think seeing me behind the microphone will give them confidence. It will open their eyes to the fact that they have the right to the same opportunities and the same life as others.”

“Albinos have the right to the same opportunities as others.”





“I felt my fear disappear. I felt free to say what I think, to believe in myself and my ideas.”



AWA

“Early marriage is a reality here in Mali. I have seen many of my friends get married and even get pregnant. I knew there would be repercussions if they got pregnant, but I didn’t say anything. I didn’t know how to talk about it,” says 15-year-old Awa.

For a long time, Awa remained silent. “I didn’t talk much. I was pretty isolated.” Yet, Awa took the plunge and joined Youth Talk to make her voice heard. She and other young journalists are speaking about early marriage on-air, knowing that their voices make a difference. “This gave me courage,” Awa says.

Back at school, “I went to talk to my friends, some of whom were only 14, and I made them listen to the show.” That sudden bravery quickly became contagious. “They then took it upon themselves to talk to their parents about the dangers and told them they didn’t want to get married at an early age,” she adds.

As the programs continue, Awa's confidence grows. "I'm not the Awa I was before. I'm speaking out and proud to be heard, to know that I can change things."

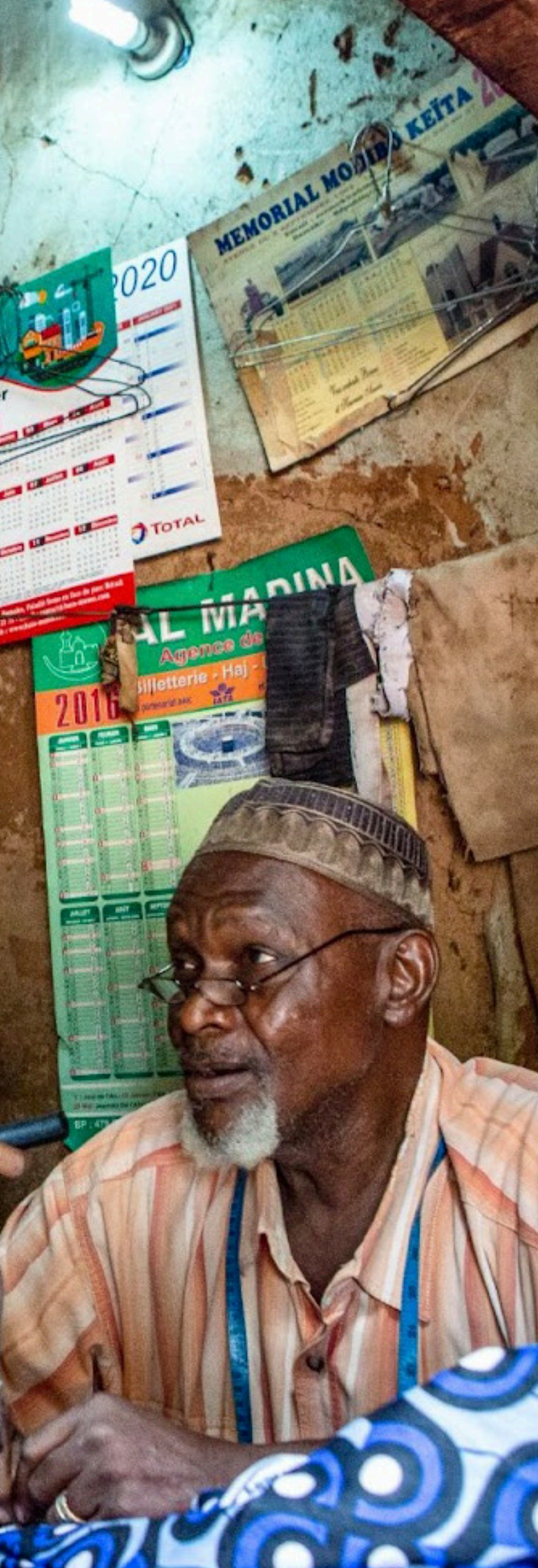
"Children have a huge role to play. They represent the majority of the population here. We are the leaders of tomorrow. So change has to start with us."

However, her audience is not limited to minors. "We need adult support to make a difference." And Awa left a strong impression on the adults she met. "We met with politicians, ministers. They couldn't believe how we expressed ourselves and the topics we were discussing. They said how happy and confident this made them about the future of Mali. This encourages us to keep going and inspire other children to follow us."

"Children shouldn't be afraid; we are capable of anything. There are no small changes. The small change you can make today can result in a big change tomorrow. This society belongs to everyone, young people or adults. So if we can make it better and safer, it will mean a safer society for everyone. So let's dare!"

"Change must start with us."





“The small change you can make today can result in a big change tomorrow.”





In all three countries, when Youth Talk was launched, only 43% of community members who listened to the young journalists' radio programs said they added value to critical social and political issues.

Today, 85% do.



HAROUNA

“The other kids saw me as a source of wealth and happiness. They said they needed my hair and blood to become rich,” Harouna confides, recalling his childhood in a village in Mali.

When Harouna was born, his mother reacted with shock. Faced with her white-skinned baby, “she was lost. She knew nothing about albinism. So she took me back with her to her parent’s village. She needed her loved ones around her. “

As Harouna grew up, he felt estranged from those around him. “I kept asking my mother why I wasn’t like the others.” However, things weren’t much different when they moved back to the capital. “People knew more about albinism because they watched television, but the beliefs remained the same. I was still a source of wealth.”

In school, Harouna realized he also had vision problems. “When I said I couldn’t see the board, the kids would laugh; the teachers wouldn’t be-

lieve me. The only thing that got me through was making a friend who understood me. He would let me copy his notes after every lesson.”

But sometimes, all it takes is a few people to feel like you belong. In 2019, Harouna found his new tribe. Then 16 years old, he joined other children, some of whom are also albino or visually impaired, to host Youth Talk radio shows. Since then, Harouna has been reporting on Mali’s most salient conflict issues.

“It gave me the desire to live again. This project, the other participants, allowed me to be me, accept myself. Now, if someone offered to make my albinism disappear, I would refuse. I am proud to be who I am.”

Harouna advocates for his own community on-air. “My favorite program of ours is about albinism. We need to talk about it so people can understand.”

Harouna’s voice echoes around the country. The albino advocacy association, of which he is a member, has offered him to co-host another radio show dealing with disability and albinism. His message sows hope and love. “I tell other kids to listen to us, to heed the voices that have the power to make you believe in yourself.”

“I am proud to be who I am.”



ABEL

“I didn’t understand why others were afraid of me. But I also started to be scared of them,” Abel says. Visually impaired, Abel grew up in a world where he depended on others. “I need help with most things: climbing stairs, crossing the street, a voice that dictates me what to write. When you don’t get that support, you feel increasingly isolated.”

Orphaned at a young age, Abel was placed in a boarding school with other visually impaired children. During the day, sighted students joined them. “For some, it was the first time they were in close contact with people with disabilities.” However, coexistence proved to be difficult. “The visually impaired are not well perceived in our society. People equate us with all sorts of things, like being beggars.”

Two years ago, Abel, then 15, joined Youth Talk. “On the first day, I felt alone, just like any other day. I still needed these new people to guide me.”

Today, arm-in-arm with the other participants, Abel is in his element. “They need me as much as I need them.”

Abel shares the microphone with children who face their own challenges: disability, discrimination, and trauma generated by the brutal war around them. “This show allows everyone to express themselves on the issues that affect them directly. But also, by not leaving anyone out, we avoid furthering the discrimination present in our society.”

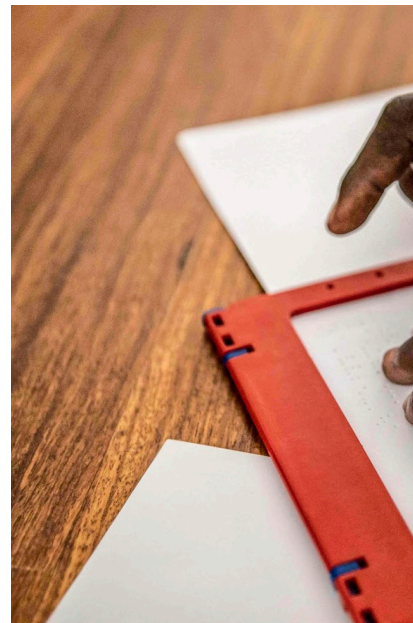
“We advocate among the authorities for the rights of young people to be included in decisions about the issues that concern us, such as education and employment. Some people tell us we should not discuss certain problems, such as early marriage. But, for me, there should be no taboo subjects for young people.”

Enveloped by the sounds of Bamako's bustling streets, walking with a confident stride, microphone in hand, Abel collects testimonies for the show. “We hosted an episode on street children. Who better to talk about their situation than themselves?”

At the boarding school, Abel continues to care for others. He helps the visually impaired students with their classes, sharing what he learns as part of Youth Talk. “Being blind does not have to be a limitation. With perseverance, these kids will succeed. Their disability will not stop them from

“We too have a place in society.”

studying or becoming who they want to be. All children have the same rights. We, too, have a place in society. I may be visually impaired, but my mind is intact, and I can offer solutions for the development of our country.”





One young journalist confided that, at first, they were afraid to sit next to their visually impaired peers for fear of turning blind as well. However, as the project progressed, these ideas quickly dissipated, enabling a shift in stereotypes.



AISHA

17-year-old Aisha's curiosity was often stymied by strict social norms. "There are so many taboos between adults and children. Even between my parents and me, I wasn't allowed to talk about everything."

A year ago, the taboos began to fall, her curiosity freed. As part of Youth Talk, Aisha joined other children in Bamako to produce radio programs about the country's socio-political problems. They then visit families, listen to the show with adults, and discuss them together.

"I will never forget the time we went to my family. The topic of the program was education. Usually, adults only listen to their elders, but this time I was able to speak my mind. My parents were so proud and surprised at what we kids had to say. It was liberating; it strengthened our bond to this day."

Indeed, for Aisha, “having a voice in society starts with your own family.” And it’s never too early to make your voice heard. “I want all parents to be interested in what their child has to say. They may be faced with problems and ask for input from everyone except their child; in reality, children can offer solutions, too.”

Aisha is planning her future and the future of her peers. Youth Talk inspired her to form an association with other young journalists to make children’s voices heard and promote their rights. Through activities such as cleaning a school for children with disabilities, Aisha “wants them to know that we are there, ready to help, to talk.”

The way she is perceived has changed. “When people see me, they call me the reporter, the president, the radio host.” So has the way she looks at herself. “I feel freer; I’ve realized that I’m important for society.”

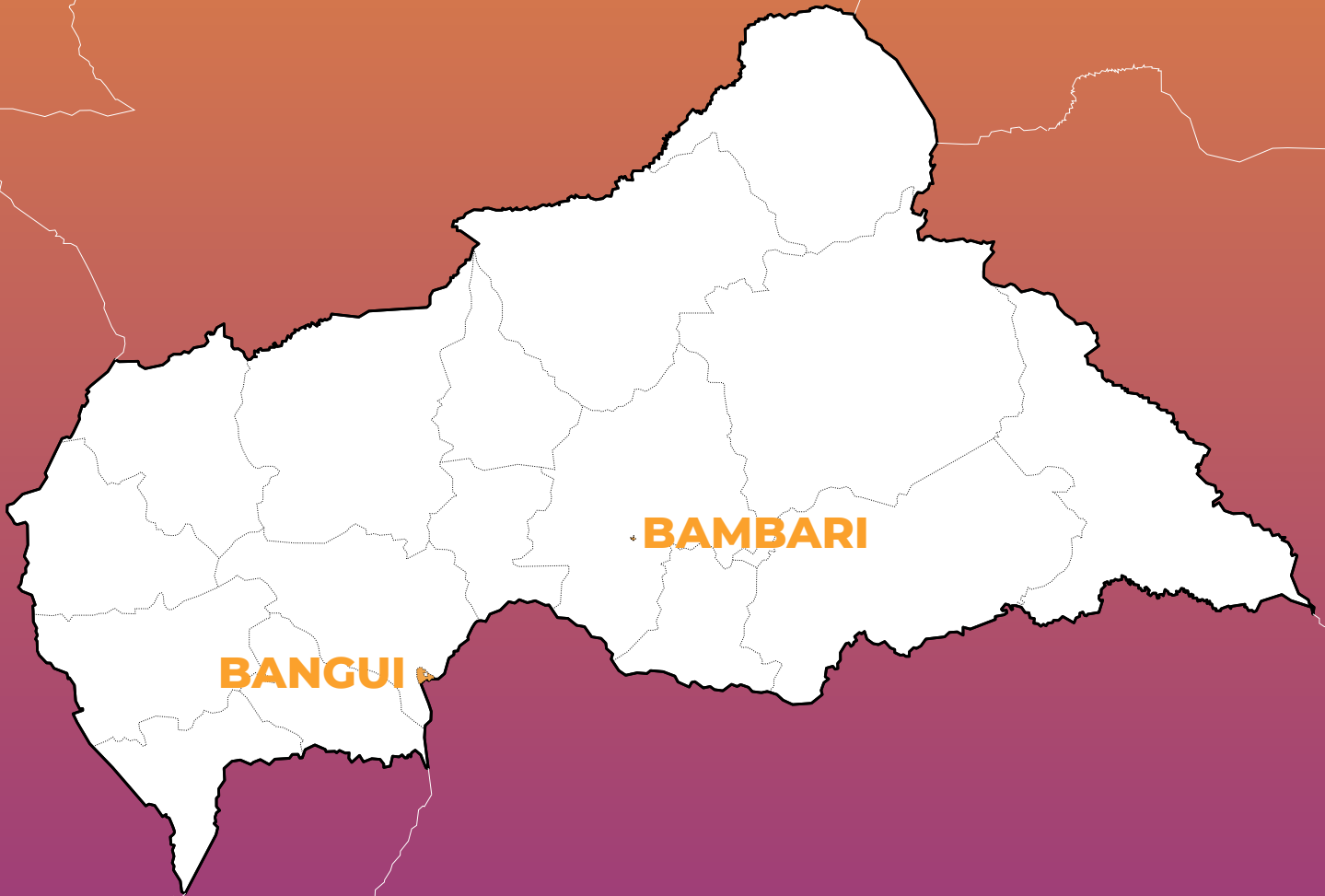
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“Usually, adults only listen to their elders, but this time I was able to speak my mind. My parents were so proud and surprised at what we kids had to say,” said Aisha.

Aisha is not the only one who has changed such dynamics. Another journalist said that, while it is usually taboo to talk about excision with one’s parents, the intergenerational workshops allowed her to speak openly about its harmful consequences.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

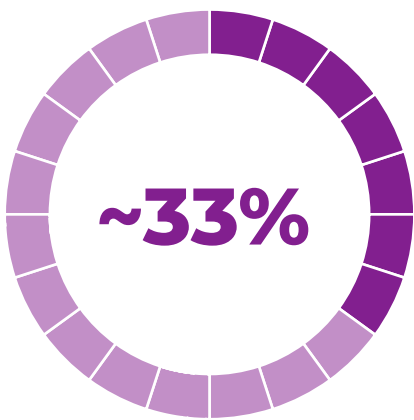




TOTAL POPULATION:

5 MILLION

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION THAT ARE YOUTH:



PEACE INDEX RANK:

155
OUT OF 163



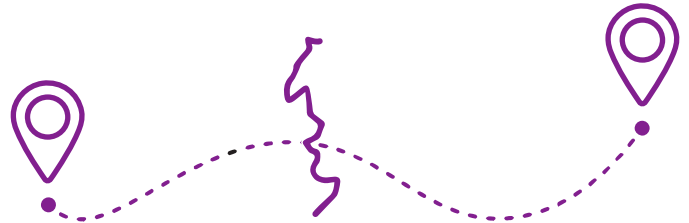
PEOPLE INTERNALLY DISPLACED BY THE CRISIS:

658,000



REFUGEES IN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES:

730,000



YOUTH TALK ACTIVITIES IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC:



78

RADIO SHOWS



150

YOUNG JOURNALISTS



10

INTER-GENERATIONAL
DIALOGUES



The Central African Republic has been plagued by rebellions, coups, and widespread violence for half a century.

The peace agreement signed in 2019 briefly restored hope. Yet the violence has not abated, and political tensions have only intensified, especially during the 2020 elections. Thus, barely a year after the agreement, civilians were again caught in the middle of the fighting after a new rebel coalition attacked major cities.

Today, the country faces an alarming humanitarian situation, with one in four Central Africans internally displaced or having fled abroad. This violence particularly affects young people who lack professional opportunities, making them an ideal target for recruitment.

In the cities of Bangui and Bambari, Youth Talk brought together these young people. While still largely excluded from decision-making on peace issues, they all have become catalysts for change.







DIANE

At 16, Diane became a mother. “I was too young to have a child. It’s not what I wanted,” Diane says. Then, lowering her eyes briefly, she raises them again: “Even though I was not ready, I now feel like a respected and responsible adult.”

In addition to this early pregnancy, the security situation in the Central African Republic brought another share of concerns to her young life. Indeed, the violence of the civil war soon reached her loved ones. In 2015, “a group of rebels entered our town to kill my father, the mayor. They opened fire on him. But, miraculously, he fainted and was not hit. After that, we crossed the river to live with my aunt and uncle,” recalls Diana.

At just 18 years old, Diana already had too many stories to tell. So the Youth Talk project gave her the means to do so. Two years ago, Diane joined forces with other young journalists to produce radio programs addressing the country’s issues.

While fighting continued in some provinces, her baby was born. These issues, then, took on a new dimension. Diane began to fear for two. “I don’t want my child to grow up in a country at war,” she says. However, as the radio shows went on, hope emerged. “I realized that we can change the course of the future through a dialogue between young people and adults on peace issues.”

Indeed, the project inspired her to take action. Being a radio host “makes me want to help my community, to use my voice to make a difference.”

Specifically, Diana draws on her unique journey to design a different future for herself and others. “I was shocked by how midwives acted with women about to give birth. So the program gave me the confidence to talk about this issue and become a midwife myself.”

“I don’t want my child to grow up in a country at war.”



DIEU-MERCI

“We have to stop the war,” said Dieu-Merci, 17, with a broad smile despite the seriousness of his words. Born in Bambari, the Central African Republic’s second-largest city, Dieu-Merci grew up in a country engaged in a civil war that has raged since 2013. Until last year, armed groups still occupied more than two-thirds of the country.

“My father, a teacher, was killed by the rebels during the last presidential elections,” recounted the teenager. This period brought the country to a new breaking point, resulting in many civilian deaths and the highest displacement since the war began. “Since then, I have been living with my uncle. I am selling phone credit to buy clothes and pay my school fees.”

Since 2019, the “Youth Talk” project has given young people like Dieu-Merci a voice on issues that affect them and their fellow citizens. Trained in radio show production, Dieu-Merci addressed

the country's socio-political issues head-on. "It showed me my calling!". Invested in a new mission, Dieu-Merci confided that he "wants to become a journalist to talk about peace."

"As long as there is life, there is hope."

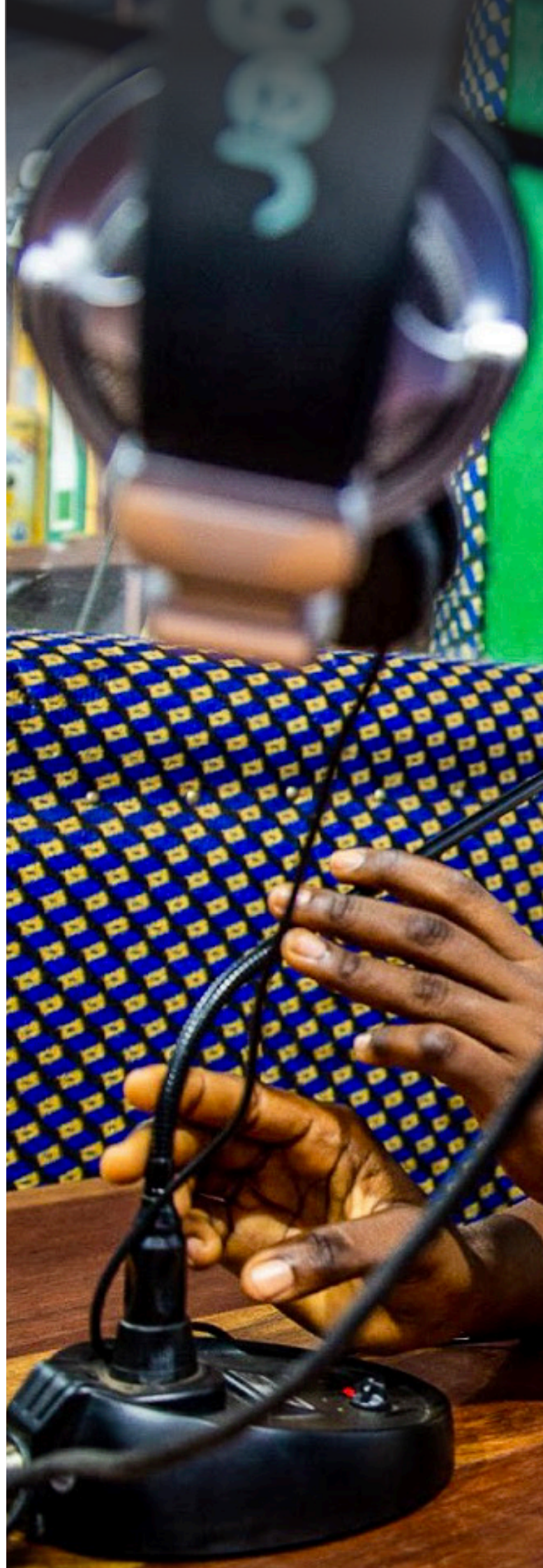
Paving the way for Dieu-Merci's mission, the program brought together youth from different communities to speak with one voice. "We helped and complemented each other," he added. As the fighting was still rampant in some provinces, Dieu-Merci knew such unity was even more valuable.

As the shows went on, Dieu-Merci became more vocal. "I am more confident. I can now talk to people without fear. I realize I have the right to ask questions of authorities and adults."

Building on this momentum, consultative workshops in families allowed youth participants and adults to listen to and discuss the radio programs. As a result, Dieu-Merci felt listened to, "freer" to talk about the severe problems in his community. "They take my word for it," he said proudly. At home and in his neighborhood, people started calling him "the ambassador of peace."

Amid a country still plagued by violence, Dieu-Merci now feels more resilient. Shaping his dreams, he plans to enroll in the capital's university to study journalism. "The project has given me the courage to face anything," he explains in a cheerful voice. "As long as there is life, there is hope."

In the Central African Republic, Youth Talk radio shows successfully brought the voices of youth to the forefront. Over the course of the project, we have gone from 40% to 97% of youth listening to the radio programs who said they reflected their views on peace, security, and social and political issues.







HILARY

“When the rebels entered our town last year, I was terrified. My family and I locked ourselves in the house. It had become impossible to go out,” says Hilary, 16. The fighting continues in Bambari, in the northeastern part of the Central African Republic. In a country plagued by civil war since 2013, this fear, present since Hilary’s early childhood, still hasn’t left her.

With soaring violence comes other difficulties. “I’ve experienced hunger,” adds Hilary. To this day, the situation remains critical regarding life expectancy, malnutrition, and lack of access to health care.

Despite this, Hilary is a teenager like any other. She is full of joy, enjoys singing, and watching Guinean television shows, and, most importantly, has many hopes and dreams for the future.

“We have to make peace,” says Hilary, convinced

that “young people can do it.” Aware that they still have a lot of work to do. “I sometimes feel discouraged when I see where we are today. My country has not yet developed, and many things are not working,” she admits.

Since 2019, the Youth Talk project has placed young people like Hilary at the center of their country’s socio-political issues. With training in radio production, Hilary now addresses these challenges on-air. Freedom of expression for positive change is now at the heart of her new battle. “I want to be a journalist to convey ideas and deep life experiences that people can relate to bring peace. If we can’t get our messages out freely, the country will remain at war,” she says.

Hilary also feels the change deep inside. “Before, I didn’t know how to speak in public,” she says, adding, “I believe in myself now, and I feel stronger to talk about difficult topics.”

“This project gives me a chance to be a journalist. I’m in ninth grade and want to study hard to get what I want despite my environment.” With newfound determination, the teen’s hopes and dreams for the future seem more real every day. “When I close my eyes, I now think about the person I want to be: someone who makes a difference.”

“If we can’t get our messages out freely, the country will remain at war”



“I believe in myself now, and I feel stronger to talk about difficult topics,” says Hilary.



JOSPIN

“I stopped my studies in 6th grade when my father died,” says 20-year-old Jospin, the pain still visible behind a shy smile. “Before he died, my mother and I lived in a big, beautiful house, but we had to sell it. We lost everything,” he adds. The two then moved in with Jospin’s older brother, who lives in Bangui, the Central African Republic’s capital.

“I had to stop going to school. I could not afford the school fees. So I sold candy and biscuits to support myself,” Jospin says. After years of selling on the street, he finally became a small store owner. “People in my neighborhood come to buy phone refills, food, and medicine from me,” the teenager explains. Jospin knows he has to be “resourceful” to survive. But while he proudly claims he can “fend for himself,” he has other dreams.

One is his education: Jospin first joined the “Youth Talk” project to learn. Indeed, together with other young Central Africans, Jospin learned to produce

radio programs where he discussed social and political issues to build sustainable peace.

Through these programs, Jospin was able to explore various topics. The issue of children's rights particularly touched him. "Even though I was born in a country in crisis where rebel groups often enlist children, I knew nothing about it. Now I want to talk about it on the radio."

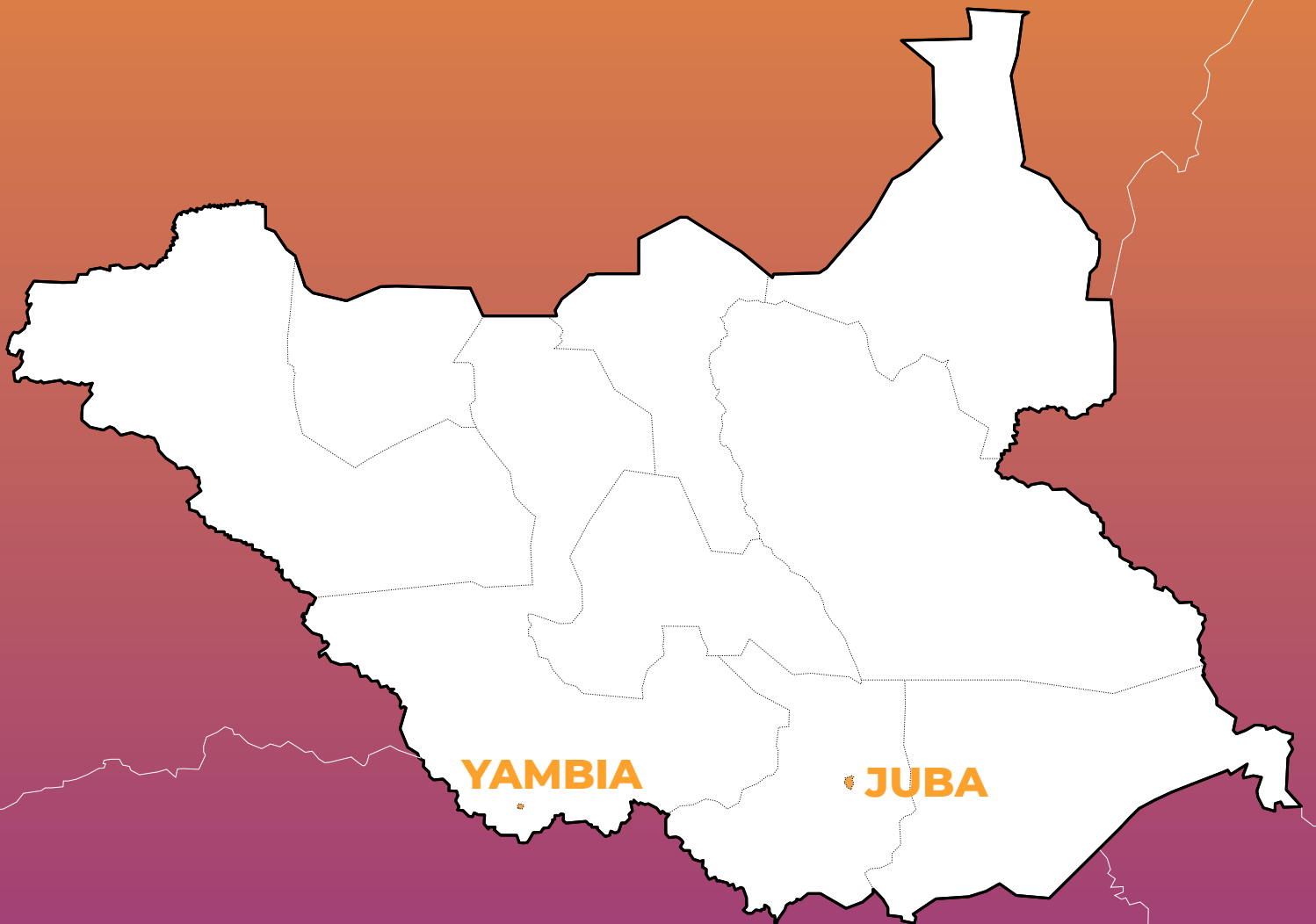
From there, even greater aspirations began to emerge. "When I realized that informing people and talking about the problems they face could change the country, I knew I wanted to be a journalist," says Jospin, hopeful.

Practice what you preach. The topics Jospin tackles on-air slowly became part of him. "Before, I was a troublemaker. I didn't respect the people around me." Bearing the stigma of a tough childhood, Jospin "was constantly angry, unable to talk about peace," he confides before adding, "It's thanks to the show that I changed."

More at peace with himself and others, Jospin continues to carry his messages and ideas wherever he goes. "Now I talk about peace on the radio with my friends and family," he says. Proud of his accomplishments, there are no more doors Jospin feels he can't open. "I now have four certificates. So when the project is over, I will go to all the radio stations in Bangui to achieve my goal: to be a journalist. "

"Now I talk about peace on the radio, with my friends and family."

SOUTH SUDAN

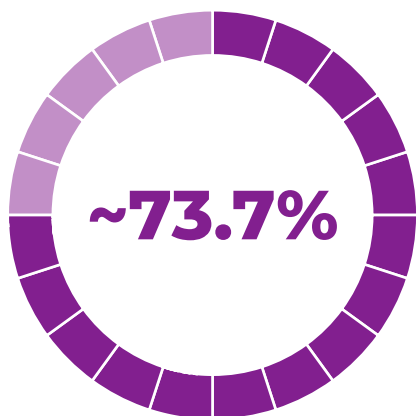




TOTAL POPULATION:

10.9 MILLION

PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION THAT ARE YOUTH:



PEACE INDEX RANK:

159
OUT OF 163



PEOPLE DISPAVED BY THE CRISIS:

4.8 MIL.



YOUTH TALK ACTIVITIES IN SOUTH SUDAN:



112

RADIO SHOWS



24

YOUNG JOURNALISTS



4

INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUES



When South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011, many hoped that sovereignty would bring peace.

Yet violence and division persisted, and the world's newest state descended into civil war in 2013. After a decade, the fighting fractured the state's leadership and displaced millions of people. Thousands of civilians have died, and insecurity threatens many more.

Amid this crisis, young people face numerous barriers to education and economic and civic participation. A situation that only increases distrust of adults and the decisions that affect them.

With Youth Talk, young people are taking action. In Juba and Yambio, young journalists are on the front lines of engaging their peers and adults in a dialogue to build a more secure future for all.







GABRIEL

“I was a child soldier,” says Gabriel, now 19. When civil war broke out in South Sudan in 2013, the warring parties did not hesitate to recruit even the youngest.

Gabriel was one of them.

“When my parents died, I found myself alone with my sister. I told myself I had no choice but to join these groups to change my life and hers. I didn’t know what impact it could have on me.”

“I was being used to perpetrate violence in my community,” Gabriel confides. Then, four years later, “I lost track of my little sister. So I decided to run away to find her.” And he did find her.

Soon after, a partner organization working to support local peace spotted Gabriel. They recommended him for Search’s “Youth Talk” project to amplify youth’s voices on socio-political issues. Gabriel learned about journalism, conflict trans-


formation, trauma healing, and stress management. He then produced the “Lugara Shabab” radio show with other young journalists.

“The show was a turning point for me. It allowed me to use my experience as a child soldier to advocate for children’s education and against their recruitment.” On-air and through intergenerational dialogues, Gabriel made a plea at all levels, “I reached out to parents, military commanders, government and community leaders to join forces to protect children.”

Embodying a new model of success, Gabriel also set out to convince young people to turn in their weapons. “I’ve seen young people fighting wars they don’t understand. So many of them have been recruited only to defend individual interests. Their future is now shaped by violence rather than education.”

Scarred by his years as a child soldier, Gabriel took time to adjust. “I was rough, violent even, at home.” But as the saying goes, be what you preach. His radio shows about peace became a catalyst for him. Juggling school and radio, Gabriel found his calling. “I’m now preparing to study journalism in college.”

“I’ve seen young people fighting wars they don’t understand.”

A young girl with braided hair, wearing a white shirt and a red vest, is smiling and shaking hands with another person. She is holding a small orange bag. In the background, a man in a red shirt and black jacket is walking past a blue pillar. The setting appears to be outdoors near a building with red and white walls.

“The show was a turning point for me. It allowed me to use my experience as a child soldier to advocate for children’s education and against their recruitment.”



The young journalists met directly with people involved in issues that affect them, such as military commanders for a broadcast on child soldiers. The show drew the attention of the Minister of Education, who visited the youth to congratulate them.







REGINA

“The kids in my neighborhood helped me survive.” Regina, 18, lost her parents as a child. For a time, she lived with relatives until abuse drove her to flee.

From then on, violence permeated her young life. “I became familiar with gangs.” Despite being Regina’s closest thing to a new family, gangs struck fear into communities. “Their members were violent. They would steal, fight with people, but they respected me.”

In 2019, Regina made new friends: young people determined to use their voices to build a safer community. Through the “Youth Talk” project, she became one of the leading voices on the “Lugara Shabab” radio show. Regina bridged the gap between gangs and communities, giving everyone a platform to express themselves. “Youth involved in gangs can now open up about their challenges and grievances and offer solutions.”

In addition, Regina underwent conflict transformation training, further empowering her as a champion for peace. As a result, she became a trusted mediator beyond the radio studio, often reconciling conflicts with and between gangs.

Recently, “one gang had taken machetes to fight another group. Their sole instruction was to cause considerable pain.” Alas, parents and elders had little influence on gang members to prevent their fury.

That’s where Regina stepped in.

“Their leader trusted me. I managed to talk him out of it.” Then she enlisted the support of a local leader to bring the two gangs together. Through dialogue, they eased resentment, prevented violence, and even turned gang members into allies to promote peace.

“Now both gangs are helping the local leader clean up the neighborhood and mitigate violence.”

“Youth involved in gangs can now open up about their challenges.”



GABRIEL

I only have my mother. So, in addition to school, I work to help her pay the rent and my education,” explains Gabriel.

A dedicated, energetic, and motivated child, Gabriel is curious about the world around him. A passion he shares with his classmates. “I started a journalism club at school. I wanted young people to be informed about current events in South Sudan and to be able to analyze this information.”

With no specific journalism training, the Youth Talk project gave him a leg up. Gabriel was trained to produce radio shows with other young journalists, where he covered various issues affecting the country.

His club and the Youth Talk project shared a joint mission: to bring people together. “With the club, I wanted to see young people united around a shared passion. It’s not like the divisions you see too often in adults. This is a club of sharing.”

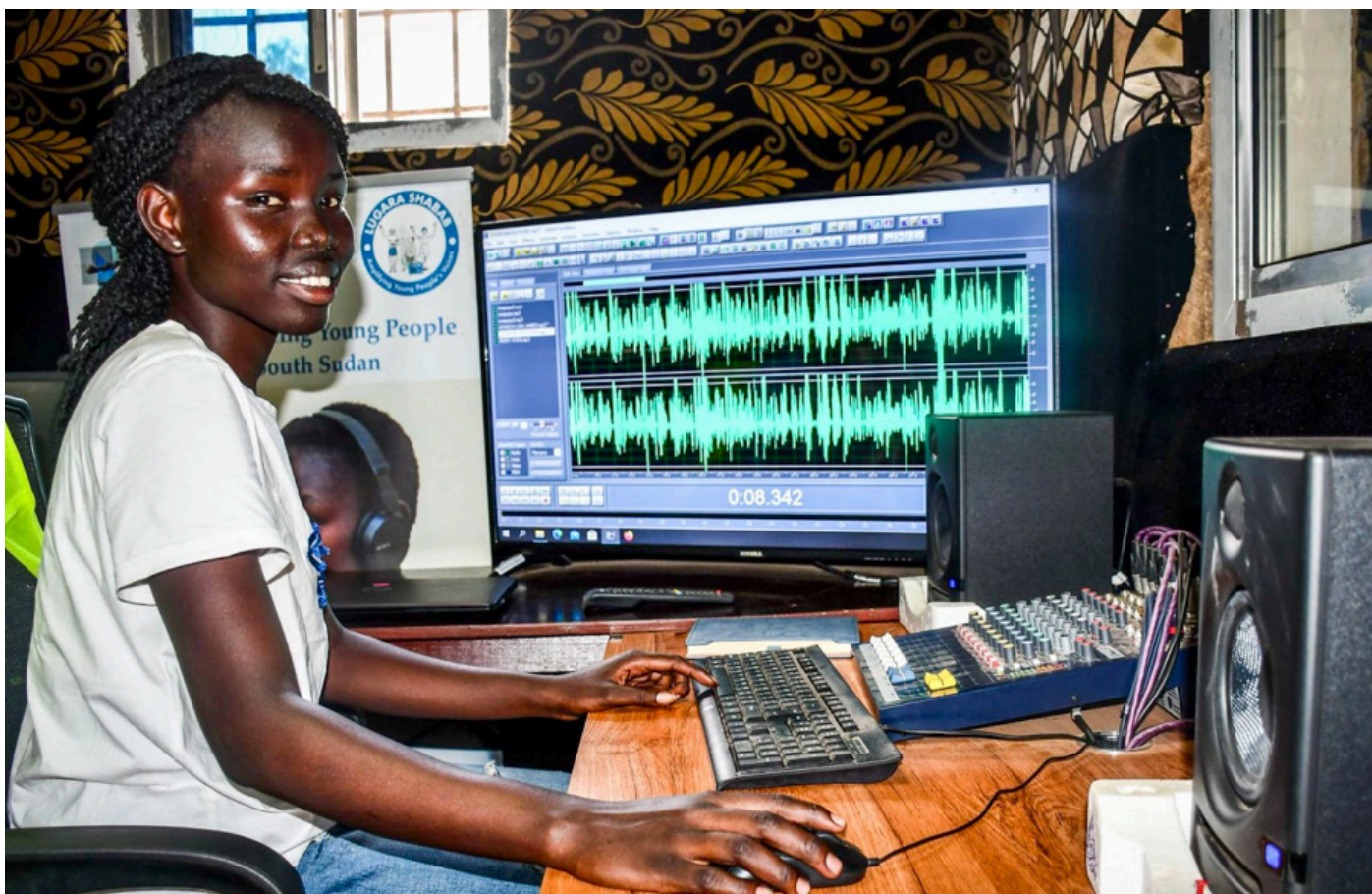
Indeed, Gabriel witnessed divisions and violence that ensued daily. “I am used to seeing and hearing about robberies, thefts, and murders. This violence is often done under the guise of ethnic differences. Young people can sometimes be influenced and are also drawn into this spiral.”

This was an influence that Gabriel tried to counter through the radio program *Lugara Shabab*. “I was immediately attracted to the idea of programs that address both youth and elders. To have everyone’s voice heard through interviews and challenge the youth on the importance of peaceful coexistence. Our intergenerational dialogue activities and radio programs provide a common platform for dialogue between youth and adults.”

As the radio shows continued, Gabriel’s determination only grew. “I have come to understand that when change is needed, it is up to me to make it happen.”

And to ensure that change happens, Gabriel is now passing the torch. Soon, he will be leaving high school. Thus, he’s training members of his journalism club in the journalistic techniques he learned and how to “help people find common ground.”

“When change is needed, it is up to me to make it happen.”



ALAKIIR

In South Sudan, when a girl is raped, it is common for her parents force her to marry the rapist, receiving a dowry in the process.” Around her, Alakiir, 19, often sees girls treated as mere objects of transaction. Thus, “communities legitimize and perpetuate gender-based violence. Men can rape a girl knowing that it will make her their wife,” she says.

Alakiir is determined to change that. Known for her willingness to stand up for women’s rights, her classmates unanimously appointed her to lead a club against gender-based violence. There, she educated students about sexual harassment and forced marriages.

Yet Alakiir dared not carry her voice beyond the school grounds. “I saw my family and community trading girls for cows. I felt helpless.” As the only girl among four siblings, “I didn’t dare to speak out. I was afraid of the reaction of my brothers and elders.”

Eventually, Alakiir broke free from her fears. In 2019, she joined Search's "Youth Talk" project aimed at amplifying young people's voices. There, she learned to produce radio shows about critical social issues.

"The men in my family only knew me for being calm and quiet." Little did she know that they were listening to her radio shows. And their reactions far exceeded her expectations. "My uncle told me that I should talk to the girls and elders in my village. That we should change the mindset about gender and stop underestimating young girls."

And that's precisely what she did. First, Alakiir, recorder in hand, went around her community to gather their views. Then, back in the studio, she and other young journalists aired them, digging deeper, joining forces to propose solutions and bring about positive change.

"I saw my family and community trading girls for cows. I felt helpless."

Search for **Common Ground**

Search for Common Ground (Search) is an international organization committed to conflict transformation.

Since 1982, Search has led programs around the world to help societies transform the way they deal with conflicts, away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative solutions.

With more than 600 staff and 1200 partners in 43 countries around the world, our programs reach more than 5 million people each year.

Using our Common Ground Approach, we work in many of the world's most difficult conflict environments, including situations of widespread violent conflict, to prevent and mitigate violence, empower local and national actors to build peace, and support reconciliation.

We do this by supporting inclusive dialogue and dispute resolution processes, developing media programs that promote fact-based public information and tolerance, and strengthening collective and community actions that solve local challenges.