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Challenges to Youth Engagement in Peacebuilding

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ABSTRACT: *The agentic capacity of youth as peacebuilders is now not in doubt. In this paper we used a mixed methods research to explore the views of elite youth concerning the challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. The study population included 120 females and 183 males. Out of the 303, we noticed that 145 had some experience with conflict while 26 were active fighters. From the results, we argued that there are three strands of factors affecting youth engagement in peacebuilding. First, youth are mobilised by political forces (actors) and traditional leaders. Second, youth are excluded from peacebuilding initiatives because they are conceptualised as troublemakers. Thirdly, the youth lack peacebuilding skills. Therefore, peacebuilding organisations, institutions and networks should actively train youth in peace programming initiatives. National architectures of peace should organize peacebuilding capacity training programmes for youth and engage them actively in peacebuilding initiatives.*

KEYWORDS: challenges, youth, engagement, peacebuilding

INTRODUCTION

Youth constitute the vast majority of Africa's population, and remain largely excluded from "mainstream economic life, political acknowledgement, and civic responsibility" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2005: 29). There are arguments to the effect that youth exclusion from key decision-making that affects their lives exposes huge deficits in democratic governance, exacerbates generational tensions, and presents an enormous risk for sustainable peace and development (Agbiboa, 2015; Agana, 2018).

Youth studies provide knowledge that disenchanted youth are most vulnerable to be recruitment by extremist groups (Agbiboa, 2013) or illicit crime networks (Onuoha, 2014). Most young people who are faced with the cocktail of political, economic and social disenfranchisement have begun to show their anger about being robbed of their own future (and present) with what Prantl (2011) calls 'the sacred rage of the young'. Such youth resistance tends to occur in hostile socio-economic environments where unemployment and poverty are rife. Agbiboa (2015) sufficiently demonstrated 'youth as tactical agents of peacebuilding and development in the Sahel' but raises the idea that exclusionary politics, poverty, unemployment, and under- unemployment frequently exposes youth to criminal ways of surviving and political manipulation. That lack of gainful jobs pushed an increasing number of youth into a "criminal-political economy" (Musili & Smith, 2013, p.1). Comaroff and Comaroff (2011) made an important submission that it is necessary to rethink the widespread perception of African youths not just as 'a signifier of exclusion, of impossibility, of emasculation, denigration, and futility …' but especially as 'a constant source of creativity, ingenuity, possibility, [and] empowerment'.

Youth and Conflict

The common trend in the literature is a presentation of youth and violent conflict is not favourable to their status. It is often remarked that "war would not be possible without youth – as combatants of any war, in any part of the world, are made up primarily by young people" (UNDP, 2006:17). According to Ochogwu (2010), the youth constituency in any country can be an active change agent as well as a force sustaining the status quo or fermenting conflict. Thus youth can be a catalyst for peace or for conflict, depending on the direction in which society channel youth groups energy and other resources.

According to Jeong (2000), conflict is said to exist when two or more groups engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rivals. When goal incompatibility or perception/value or goals differences reach a crescendo, a manifestation of actual hostility or clashes is possible between parties. These parties could be individuals, groups or countries fighting to have access to resources, the control of political power, their identity and values or ideology (Maiese, 2003). The realization of these needs and interests by people can lead to conflict. When groups or individuals such as youth groups pursue incompatible interests and needs which could either be political, economic, social or cultural, they engage in conflict.

Historically, young people have consistently been involved in political conflict (Ahiave, 2013; Seini, 2004). This has been especially apparent in recent years with the uprisings in the Middle East. It is important to understand how young people function in these challenging circumstances. Research is increasing on this important topic, but it has not yet adequately captured the complexities of conflict and youth functioning, such that we do not yet have a clear grasp on how young people are impacted by their experiences with political conflict. How can we move toward a clearer understanding of the impact of political conflict on young lives, and can this equip us to offer more useful insights for practitioners who work with conflict-involved young people?

There are claims that youth are uniquely affected by conflict and deterring youth from violence has never been more pressing. This has become necessary as a result of the known and unknown effects of conflict on youth. The question that this section seeks to answer is: How does exposure to or involvement in war and other forms of political conflict impact young people? Barber (2013) explained that the first answer must be that it tragically kills and maims many. According to Barber, this answer brings up another set of questions: But what of those young people – indeed, the large majority – who escape fatal or crippling consequences? How have their experiences impacted their functioning and development?

Youths' cognitive engagement with context and conflict Conventional models that begin the assessment of the impact of conflict by focusing on exposure (whether violent or otherwise) also ignore substantial cognitive resources that youths possess when they face political conflict. Chronicling the degree of violence experienced, as is classically done, does not illuminate the breadth or severity of such burdens or the degree to which the conflict has ameliorated or exacerbated them. One particularly useful theory in addressing this deficiency would be Hobfoll's (2001) conservation of resources theory. The theory treats many of these variables as resources and argues that the impact of conflict would be found in the conflict-related patterns of loss and gain of such basic economic, social and political resources.

Some argued that, even if the concern is violence per se (a questionable focus given that there is not strong theoretical or empirical evidence that political violence exposure reliably leads to enacting violence or antisocial behaviour; e.g. Punamäki, 2009), exposure to violence is itself multifaceted and therefore warrants specification. This includes, among others: witnessing vs. personally experiencing violence; the proximity, severity, frequency or duration of violence exposure; perceived intent or threat of violence (e.g. deterrence, destruction, humiliation, intimidation); and the personal consequences of violence (Catani et al., 2010; and Layne et al., 2010).

Youth are uniquely affected by violence and threats to their security. They are vulnerable as both victims and perpetrators of violence. It is often remarked that war would not be possible without youth in any part of the world (Sudan, 2007). Beyond violence exposure, political conflict generates other conditions that pose risk to development. Such conditions include features of the social ecology like displacement, access to basic resources, destruction of social networks, among many factors that threaten safety and security (Catani et al., 2010; Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Steel et al., 2009).

In Ghana Tsikata and Seini reported one case, the Dakpema Palace Brigade, a traditional law enforcement group linked to a chief clashed with youth at Sabonjida, Tamale in the Northern Region, leading to injuries and gunshot wounds. The relatively few studies that have discriminated between types of conflict conditions suggest that disruptions in access to resources in the social domain (e.g. loss of life, separation, loss of social support) and economic domain (e.g. economic self-sufficiency, ability to buy staples, breakdown of basic services,

access to health care) are significantly related to greater difficulty among youth and adults, and often more so than exposure to violence.

When studying the impact on young people of political conflict, political activism rarely enters the conventional models from psychology or psychiatry that are employed while classically and vigorously studied by sociologists and political scientists. As noted above, some political conflicts do not offer opportunity for activist engagement, but many do. Indeed, some of the conflicts that have been most frequently studied using conventional models are ones in which youth activism was a vital component of the conflict (but it has gone unmeasured). The best example of this is research on Palestinians. Of literally dozens of studies conducted on Palestinians in the occupied territories that have assessed conflict exposure and its impact, very few have attended to the activism component of youth experience. One study found that political activism on the part of Palestinian youth during the first intifada (e.g. demonstrating and throwing stones) – after accounting for its covariation with exposure – was related to higher levels of positive functioning years after the end of the struggle (e.g. higher levels of civic involvement, empathy, social initiative) (Barber & Olsen, 2009). Those findings are consistent with related work that documents the promotive effects of civic and political engagement, stemming, theoretically, from enhanced identity development, perceived efficacy and potency, agency and the sense of making history (Flanagan et al., 2007; Yates & Youniss, 1999). In sum, much precision relative to the impact of political conflict on the lives of young people could be gained by elaborating how political conflict is assessed. Such specifications would involve measuring conflict's impact on access to basic economic, social and political resources, as well as acknowledging the considerable capacity of young people to engage their contexts cognitively and behaviourally.

The vast majority of studies on the impact of political conflict on youth have focused on negative psychological functioning as the sole or prime indicator of youth well-being, with a small minority of studies indexing problem behaviours as well. Findings from such studies reveal consistent, but often weak, correlations between violence exposure and negative psychological functioning, most commonly, depression, etc. (Barber & Schluterman, 2009). Some studies incorporate indexes of positive functioning in overall adaptation scores, but such scores are still composed of primarily negative psychological functioning indicators (Catani et al., 2010). This concentration on individual psychological functioning characteristic of conventional models is problematic from a cultural perspective in a number of ways. One is pathologising stress that is normative in conflict situations (Honwana, 2006), but the core problem is that such a focus decontextualises the individual by forcing an artificial isolation of individual functioning from social functioning. Further, given that conflicts intend to change key political, economic or cultural contexts – and given that young people engage in those contests to varying degrees cognitively and/or behaviourally – a young person's well-being during and after conflict would be directly tied to the degree to which that contextual change has in fact occurred. Thus, an immediate focus of attention when considering wellbeing would be the youths' assessment of the adequacy of the change that conflict has produced in their prevailing contexts.

Motivations for youth engagement

The search through the literature suggests that motivations for youth involvement in conflict are less visible as an organized issue within the literature. However, there are pointers that are drawn from the causes of conflict. UNDP delineates the main motivations visible in the literature according to the criteria of demography, coercion and youth crisis.

The demographic thesis argues that 'youth bulges' lead to increasing insecurity and make such countries especially prone to conflict (Huntington, 1996). Youth bulge refers to the condition where there an unusually high proportion of young people in the total population. It has been argued, for example, that the French Revolution and the rise of Nazism can be linked, among other factors, to a percentage of young population above a certain critical level (Urdal, 2004). As Urdal's own conclusion is that there is no evidence of the claim made by Huntington that youth bulges above a certain critical level automatically make countries especially prone to conflict, but the combination of youth bulges and poor economic performance may be explosive. This demographic argument elegising youth bulges is now a popular explanation for the recruitment of young people into terrorist networks. According to Zakaria (2001) youth bulges combined with small economic and social change provided the fundament for Islamic resurgence in the Arab world.

The literature on youth bulges considers migration to be a safety valve for youth discontent (Urdal, 2004). Some authors go as far as saying that the possibility for Europe's youth in the 19th century to emigrate to the United States contributed significantly to limiting youth-generated violence in Europe in this period. As such, Urdal argues that if migration opportunities are substantially restricted, this results in a higher risk of violent conflict. One of the most extreme expressions of the demographic approach is the thesis put forward by Kaplan (1994), as an integral part of his vision of a 'coming anarchy'. Kaplan identifies an imminent security threat, directly connected to the presence of a large, unemployed and disaffected mass of youth. This argument is the most contested one as Kaplan selects West Africa to exemplify his apocalyptic vision, combining population explosion, resource depletion and social decay. Kaplan argued that in cities in West African countries I saw … young men everywhere – hordes of them. They were like loose molecules in a very unstable social fluid, a fluid that was clearly on the verge of igniting (Clapham, 2003). The demographic approach is criticized for concentrating primarily on quantitative aspects (ratio youth/total population) and not providing sufficient analysis of the motives behind youth violence. The demographic approach is criticized as promoting the view that young people fight because, quite simply, they are too many.

Coercion is a second set of motivations. According to this thesis, young people fight because they are forced to – either by physical abduction, or because of a lack of other alternatives for survival. The implication of this is that youth are not really responsible for their choice to fight, and that they should be treated as victims rather than as perpetrators of violence (UNDP, 2006). This view is present in the literature on child soldiers, produced largely by aid agencies and NGOs. It dominates reports based on witness accounts of former child soldiers (McIntyre, 2004:4). The attention paid to child soldiers has translated into a powerful advocacy effort,

leading to a number of concrete outcomes (Brett, 2003:2). These include the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which raises from 15 to 18 the minimum legal age for the involvement of children in combat (UNDP, 2006).
There are criticisms of this approach. Focusing on youth as victims, however, can also have the effect of diverting attention from other dimensions of the problem (UNDP, 2006). It can promote the idea of youth in conflict as a 'soft' humanitarian concern, detached from economic, social and political considerations and realities. As McIntyre (McIntyre, 2004) puts it: Horror stories of rape, abduction and systemic violence from the mouths of the children did serve their purpose – to mobilize and galvanize sentiments about the use of children as soldiers.

Research seeking to understand why young people joined militias reported that many (under-18) respondents perceived themselves as adults by saying that they had for many years fended for themselves and had made adult decisions (McIntyre, 2004). However, the question remains: "How voluntary is voluntary?" Can we really speak about a 'rational choice' in the absence of other concrete alternatives? Are youth often, in a way, forced into violence? Whether or not young people (especially minors) can be rational actors, or have the rational maturity to understand the implications and underlying causes of their decisions, is a highly contested question. Indeed, such questions are extensively debated in the juvenile justice arena – the debate on the death penalty for under-age offenders in the United States provides a significant example.

In the literature produced by United Nations agencies, NGOs and organizations that advocate for the protection of children, there is a reluctance to see young fighters as rational decision makers. One study points out that donors tend to be impressed by the victimhood of child soldiers while the thinking of people directly affected by the war tends – understandably – to be dominated by thoughts of punishing the young fighters who have caused widespread suffering in society (Peters, Richards and Vlassenroot, 2003). The coercion thesis has been fundamental to the concerted efforts to mainstream children's rights into UN peacekeeping missions recently. The visible expression is efforts specifically aimed at addressing child soldiers in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes. This thesis is criticized on the grounds that it is simplistic because the needs of youth are less understood within this construction. Part of this stems from a failure to recognize and address the variety of reasons for which young people fight (UNDP, 2006). New research reveals that there is an important element of volunteerism that should be more closely considered when looking at young combatants. Brett (2003), for example, observed that large numbers of young people volunteer for the armed forces, rather than being forced or coerced. The argument presented was that while children rarely go looking for a war to fight, war is also an opportunity: for employment, to escape from an oppressive family situation or humiliation at school, for adventure, or to serve a cause.

METHODOLOGY

The research that informed this paper was a sequential mixed-methods research involving a convenient sample of 303 youth selected with a 0.05 (5%) margin of error. The survey

participants were Level 300 students drawn from the Department of Social studies at the Ghana's University of Education, Winneba. They included 120 females and 183 males. Out of the 303, we noticed that 145 had some experience with conflict while 158 never experienced any active social conflict. In terms of involvement in hostilities, 26 were active fighters while 277 were never involved in conflict. The data were collected using questionnaires that returned an acceptable Cronbach α reliability score of 0.73. Follow up interviews were conducted with 15 students who were directly involved as fighters in active conflicts to learn from their experiences. The interviews were single face-to-face interviews. The qualitative data from the interviews were used to support the quantitative findings before conclusions were drawn. The data were analysed using descriptive and template analysis involving categorical aggregation, (clustering complex data into categories or classes to ease the search for meaning) and direct interpretation (researchers reach new meanings about cases).

Findings: Challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding

This section presents the results concerning the challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. The discussion focused on understanding the factors that prevent youth engagement in peacebuilding. The presentation is disaggregated based on demographic characteristics including gender, employment status, experience living in a conflict community and experience as an active participant in conflict.

Table 1: Perspectives of female on challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding

Challenges to youth engagement	D	SD	NS	SA	A
Acknowledging youth as victims or perpetrators of violence	23(19%)	12(10%)	21(17%)	32(27%)	32(27%)
Marginalisation of youth in decision making	2(2%)	16(13%)	13(11%)	66(55%)	23(19%)
Lack dignified livelihoods for youth	1(1%)	6(5%)	47(39%)	53(44%)	13(11%)
Elite influences on the youth	15(13%)	23(19%)	17(14%)	38(32%)	27(22%)
Inadequate support to education and capacity-building for peace	33(28%)	48(40%)	23(19%)	12(10%)	4(3%)
Referring to youth as the 'future leaders'	12(10%)	25(21%)	31(26%)	40(33%)	12(10%)
Targeting of youth during conflict	7(6%)	21(17%)	20(17%)	49(41%)	23(19%)
The need to defend themselves	3(2%)	5(4%)	12(10%)	69(58%)	31(26%)
Lack youth groups	3(2%)	14(12%)	18(15%)	62(52%)	23(19%)
Misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict	2(1%)	15(13%)	9(8%)	36(30%)	58(48%)
Lack of peacebuilding skills	2(1%)	8(7%)	12(10%)	66(55%)	32(27%)
Forced recruitment into fighting forces	0(0%)	5(4%)	9(7%)	33(28%)	73(61%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 1 presents the views of female participants on the challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. The results show that 64(54%) agreed acknowledging youth as victims or perpetrators of violence is a challenge to youth engagement in peacebuilding. Marginalisation of youth in decision making was selected by 99(84%) out of 120 participants who agreed. This suggests that majority of the participants think marginalisation of youth in decision making is a challenge to youth engagement in peacebuilding. Also, 66(55%) of participants agreed to lack of dignified life as a challenge to youth engagement in peacebuilding. Similarly, 88(73%) agreed that elite influences on the youth is a challenge to youth engagement in peacebuilding. In terms of inadequate support to education and capacity-building for peace, 81(68%) out of 120 participants agreed. Also, referring to youth as the 'future leaders' 83(69%) agreed. Targeting of youth during conflict was selected by 72(60%) participants who agreed.

The need to defend themselves was selected by 100(84%) participants who agreed while only eight disagreed and 12 were not sure. This indicates that most participants agreed that the need to defend themselves is a challenge to youth engagement in peacebuilding. Similarly, 102(88%) agreed that misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict whereas 98(82%) agreed that lack of peacebuilding skills was a challenge. Forced recruitment into fighting forces 106(89%) was the most frequently selected response. The results suggest that female participants thought that the main challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding were marginalisation of youth in decision making, the need to defend their community and the targeting of youth during conflict. However, the most frequently selected responses were misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict, the lack of peacebuilding skills and forced recruitment into fighting forces.

Table 2: Perspectives of male on challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding

Challenges to youth engagement	D	SD	NS	SA	A
Acknowledging youth as victims or perpetrators of violence	23(12%)	31(17%)	0(0%)	49(27%)	80(43%)
Marginalisation of youth in decision making	7(4%)	19(10%)	36(20%)	76(41%)	45(25%)
Lack dignified livelihoods for youth	7(4%)	14(8%)	29(15%)	89(49%)	44(24%)
Elite influences on the youth	25(14%)	32(17%)	23(12%)	45(25%)	58(32%)
Inadequate support to education and capacity-building for peace	14(8%)	9(4%)	36(20%)	62(34%)	62(34%)
Referring to youth as the 'future leaders'	16(9%)	28(15%)	31(17%)	65(35%)	43(24%)
Targeting of youth during conflict	12(7%)	26(14%)	28(15%)	70(38%)	47(26%)
The need to defend themselves	9(5%)	19(10%)	45(25%)	89(49%)	21(11%)
Lack youth groups	9(5%)	23(12%)	24(13%)	86(47%)	41(23%)
Misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict	13(7%)	23(13%)	22(12%)	53(29%)	72(39%)
Lack of peacebuilding skills	4(2%)	12(6%)	14(8%)	91(50%)	62(34%)
Forced recruitment into fighting forces	22(12%)	31(17%)	22(12%)	51(28%)	57(31%)

Source: Field data, 2018

The table presents the views of the male participants on the challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. Generally, the results show that majority of the male participants agreed to all the factors as challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. However, the most frequently selected response was the lack of peacebuilding skills. A total of 153 (84%) out 158 participants agreed. This was followed by lack dignified livelihoods for youth to which 133(73%) agreed. The third most frequently selected response was the acknowledgment of youth as victims or perpetrators of violence. From the results, a total of 129(70%) of the participants agreed.

Table 3: Perspectives of employed youth on challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding

Challenges to youth engagement	**D**	**SD**	**NS**	**SA**	**A**
Acknowledging youth as victims or perpetrators of violence	4(9%)	8(19%)	6(14%)	16(37%)	9(21%)
Marginalisation of youth in decision making	1(2%)	9(21%)	5(12%)	18(42%)	10(23%)
Lack dignified livelihoods for youth	3(7%)	3(7%)	7(16%)	21(49%)	9(21%)
Elite influences on the youth	2(4%)	9(21%)	6(14%)	11(26%)	15(35%)
Inadequate support to education and capacity-building for peace	3(7%)	2(4%)	9(21%)	10(23%)	19(45%)
Referring to youth as the 'future leaders'	3(7%)	7(16%)	8(19%)	15(35%)	10(23%)
Targeting of youth during conflict	1(2%)	4(9%)	5(12%)	24(56%)	9(21%)
The need to defend themselves	1(2%)	7(16%)	5(12%)	23(54%)	7(16%)
Lack youth groups	1(2%)	7(16%)	4(9%)	26(61%)	5(12%)
Misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict	3(7%)	5(12%)	3(7%)	14(32%)	18(42%)
Lack of peacebuilding skills	1(2%)	1(2%)	5(12%)	27(63%)	9(21%)
Forced recruitment into fighting forces	4(9%)	5(12%)	4(9%)	18(37%)	14(32%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 3 presents the perspectives of employed youth on challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. As in the case of the male participants, the results showed that the majority of participants agreed that all the factors pose challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. However, the three most frequently selected responses were lack of peacebuilding skills selected by 36(84%), targeting of youth during conflict which was selected by 33(77%) and misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict where 32(74%). This was followed by lack dignified livelihoods for youth. This was agreed by 30(70%) of the participants.

Table 4: Perspectives of unemployed challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding

Challenges to youth engagement	D	SD	NS	SA	A
Acknowledging youth as victims or perpetrators of violence	40(15%)	54(21%)	38(15%)	65(25%)	63(24%)
Marginalisation of youth in decision making	8(3%)	26(10%)	39(15%)	124(48%)	63(24%)
Lack dignified livelihoods for youth	5(2%)	33(13%)	17(6%)	121(47%)	84(32%)
Elite influences on the youth	36(15%)	46(17%)	36(15%)	72(27%)	70(26%)
Inadequate support to education and capacity-building for peace	50(19%)	23(9%)	11(4%)	85(33%)	91(35%)
Targeting of youth during conflict	25(10%)	46(17%)	52(20%)	90(35%)	47(18%)
Referring to youth as the 'future leaders'	18(7%)	43(17%)	39(15%)	95(36%)	65(25%)
Misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict	11(4%)	17(6%)	28(11%)	135(52%)	69(27%)
Lack of youth groups	11(4%)	30(11%)	38(14%)	122(48%)	59(23%)
The need to defend themselves	12(5%)	33(12%)	28(11%)	75(29%)	112(43%)
Lack of peacebuilding skills	5(2%)	19(7%)	21(8%)	130(50%)	85(33%)
Forced recruitment into fighting forces	27(10%)	50(19%)	23(9%)	68(26%)	92(36%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 4 presents the perspectives of unemployed youth on youth engagement in peacebuilding. Like the previous groups of participants, most of the unemployed youth agreed that all the factors pose challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. The factor to which majority of participants agreed was the lack of peacebuilding skills (215, representing about 83%) misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict.

Also, 21(8%) were not sure, five (two percent) strongly disagreed and 19(7%) disagreed. This was followed by lack dignified livelihoods for youth to which 205(79%) agreed. Another 204 (79%) agreed that misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict is a challenge to their engagement in youth peacebuilding. The marginalisation of youth in decision making ranked third in terms of the factors that most participants agreed to. As the results show, 124(48%) strongly agree and 63(24%) agreed.

The results suggest that, for the unemployed youth, the main challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding were the lack of peacebuilding skills, misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict and lack dignified livelihoods for youth are major challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. It may be argued that the results lend some support to the literature suggesting that exclusion from mainstream economic life, political acknowledgement, and civic responsibility (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2005 p.29) as a challenge to youth engagement in

peacebuilding. It also gives some credence to the view that misrepresentation of youth as violent and the consequential exclusion from key decision-making that affects their lives exposes huge deficits in democratic governance, exacerbates generational tensions, and presents an enormous risk for sustainable peace and development (Agbiboa, 2015). In terms of lack of dignified life, the results seem to provide empirical support to views that poor, jobless and socially excluded youth are more likely to constitute those vulnerable to elite influence to engage in conflict instead of (Onuoha 2014; Agbiboa, 2013). As some suggest, young people seemed to be faced with the cocktail of political, economic and social disenfranchisement that prevents them from engagement in peacebuilding (Prantl, 2011).

Table 5: Perspectives of youth from conflict affected communities

Challenges to youth engagement	SA	A	NS	D	SD
Acknowledging youth as victims or perpetrators of violence	20(14%)	34(23%)	19(13%)	37(26%)	35(24%)
Marginalisation of youth in decision making	6(4%)	15(10%)	21(15%)	70(48%)	33(23%)
Lack dignified livelihoods for youth	3(2%)	11(8%)	39(27%)	67(46%)	25(17%)
Elite influences on the youth	20(14%)	31(21%)	14(10%)	42(29%)	38(26%)
Inadequate support to education and capacity-building for peace	50(35%)	47(32%)	28(19%)	14(10%)	6(4%)
Referring to youth as the 'future leaders'	10(7%)	26(18%)	35(24%)	44(30%)	30(21%)
Targeting of youth during conflict	9(6%)	18(12%)	18(9%)	64(45%)	36(25%)
The need to defend themselves	7(5%)	13(9%)	13(9%)	74(51%)	38(26%)
Lack youth groups	7(5%)	19(13%)	18(12%)	70(49%)	31(21%)
Misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict	7(5%)	13(9%)	19(13%)	44(30%)	62(43%)
Lack of peacebuilding skills	3(2%)	12(8%)	10(7%)	76(53%)	44(30%)
Forced recruitment into fighting forces	18(12%)	24(17%)	13(9%)	44(30%)	46(32%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 5 presents results on perspectives of youth from conflict affected communities concerning challenges facing youth engagement in peacebuilding. Aside from inadequate support to education and capacity-building for peace, the majority of the participants agreed to all the factors as challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. The need to defend themselves was the factor the most (87%) number of participants agreed to. This second factor was lack of peacebuilding skills (83%). These responses from the youth from conflict affected communities suggests that there are several factors affecting the engagement of youth in peacebuilding. Their concerns also indicate that youth are not the problem to peace.

Table 6: Perspectives of youth in communities that never experienced conflict

Challenges to youth engagement	SA	A	NS	D	SD
Acknowledging youth as victims or perpetrators of violence	24(15%)	29(18%)	25(16%)	44(28%)	36(23%)
Marginalisation of youth in decision making	3(2%)	20(13%)	28(18%)	72(45%)	35(22%)
Lack dignified livelihoods for youth	5(3%)	9(6%)	52(33%)	75(47%)	17(11%)
Elite influences on the youth	18(11%)	24(15%)	28(18%)	41(28%)	47(30%)
Inadequate support to education and capacity-building for peace	45(29%)	63(40%)	31(20%)	12(8%)	7(4%)
Referring to youth as the 'future leaders'	18(11%)	27(17%)	27(17%)	61(39%)	25(16%)
Targeting of youth during conflict	10(6%)	29(18%)	30(19%)	55(35%)	34(22%)
The need to defend themselves	5(3%)	11(7%)	20(13%)	84(53%)	38(24%)
Lack youth groups	5(3%)	18(11%)	24(15%)	78(49%)	33(21%)
Misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict	8(5%)	25(16%)	68(43%)	45(28%)	12(8%)
Lack of peacebuilding skills	3(2%)	8(5%)	16(10%)	81(51%)	50(32%)
Forced recruitment into fighting forces	13(8%)	31(20%)	14(9%)	60(38%)	40(25%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 6 reports the perspectives of youth in communities that never experienced conflict concerning challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. As with youth from conflict affected communities, the only factor that did not receive more agreement than disagreement was inadequate support to education and capacity-building for peace. From the results, 45(29%) strongly disagreed and 63(40%) disagreed while 31(20%) were not aware. Only 12(8%) strongly agreed and four, representing eight percent agreed.

Aside from this, the majority of the participants agreed to all the factors as challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. The results showed that 81(51%) strongly agreed while 50(32%) agreed that lack of peacebuilding skills is a challenge to youth engagement in peacebuilding. Similarly, 84(53%) strongly agreed that the need to defend themselves was the factor posing a challenge to youth engagement in peace building whiles 38(24%) agreed. These responses from the youth from communities that were not conflict-affected suggests that there are many factors affecting the engagement of youth in conflict.

The results showed that youth from communities that never experienced conflict were more supportive of the views that the need to defend themselves and the lack of peacebuilding skills are the main challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. This suggests that youth are forced by situations to engage in conflict whiles they are not supported to develop the skills they need to engage in peacebuilding activities.

Table 7: Perspectives of youth who were involved conflict

Challenges to youth engagement	D	SD	NS	SA	A
Acknowledging youth as victims or perpetrators of violence	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	15(58%)	11(42%)
Marginalisation of youth in decision making	0(0%)	0(0%)	4(19%)	10(39%)	11(42%)
Lack dignified livelihoods for youth	6(23%)	13(50%)	7(27%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Elite influences on the youth	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	14(54%)	12(46%)
Inadequate support to education and capacity-building for peace	11(42%)	4(16%)	8(31%)	2(8%)	1(4%)
Referring to youth as the 'future leaders'	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	13(50%)	13(50%)
Targeting of youth during conflict	0(0%)	(0%)	0(0%)	13(50%)	13(50%)
The need to defend themselves	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	15(58%)	11(42%)
Lack youth groups	0(0%)	5(19%)	0(0%)	11(42%)	10(39%)
Misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	11(42%)	15(58%)
Lack of peacebuilding skills	0(0%)	0(0%)	11(42%)	15(58%)	0(0%)
Forced recruitment into fighting forces	0(0%)	0(0%)	5(19%)	11(42%)	10(39%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 7 presents the perspectives of youth who were involved in conflict concerning challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. The results showed that 15(58%) strongly agreed and 11(42) agreed that the need to defend themselves was a challenge to engagement in peacebuilding. This will suggest that, a fundamental reason youth may engage in violence is the preservation of personal well-being (Gómez et al., 2011).

The results were the same for acknowledging youth as victims or perpetrators of violence. In terms of misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict, 11(42%) strongly agreed and 15(58%) agreed. This meant that all youth who have engaged in conflict agreed that their misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict is major obstacle to youth engagement in peacebuilding. This will suggest that the ascription of violence status to youth is counterproductive. Another evidence of the effect of viewing youth as violent was that 13(50%) strongly agreed and 13(50%) agreed that the targeting of youth during conflict is challenge to their engagement in peacebuilding.

Also, all participants either agreed or strongly agreed that referring to youth as the 'future leaders' which is coterminous with their marginalisation from decision making as challenge to their engagement in peacebuilding. On the score of marginalisation from decision making as challenge to their engagement in peacebuilding, 10(39%) strongly agreed and 11(42%) agreed. The remainder, 4(19%) were not sure. None disagreed. However, in terms of referring to youth as the 'future leaders'13(50%) strongly agreed and 13(50%) agreed.

Forced recruitment into fighting forces featured as a major obstacle to youth engagement in peacebuilding as 11(42%) strongly agreed and 10(39%) agreed. This would suggest that most youth would not have engaged in conflict if they are not forcibly recruited. This means that youth can be useful in peacebuilding. This is corroborated by the results where 14(54%) strongly agreed and 12(46%) agreed that elite influences on the youth is a challenge to their engagement in peacebuilding.

The results negated propositions in the youth bulge theory and other literature suggesting that poverty was a major challenge to youth engagement in peacebuilding as participants rejected lack of dignified livelihoods for youth as a challenge to their engagement in peacebuilding (Barber, 2013). The results showed that 13(50%) disagreed and 6(23%) strongly disagreed whiles 7(27%) were not sure. No participant agreed. Similarly, inadequate support to education and capacity-building for peace was not supported. As the results showed, 11(42%) strongly disagreed and 4(16%) disagreed. Another 8(31%) were not sure. None agreed. Whereas 15(58%) selected lack of peacebuilding skills as a challenge to their engagement in peacebuilding, 11(42) were not sure. Overall, what can be argued is that from the experience of youth who have engaged in conflict, the main challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding are not because of the violent nature of the youth. It is because of factors external to the youth. These include forced recruitment, marginalisation from decision making and infantilization of the youth as future leaders which relegates them. Primarily, therefore, it can be argued that the results support the view that youth can be agents of peacebuilding (Eggerman and Panter-Brick, 2010; Panter-Brick, 2010).

Table 8: Perspectives of youth who were never involved conflict

Challenges to youth engagement	D	SD	NS	SA	A
Ackno wledging youth as victims or perpetrators of violence	39(14%)	58(21%)	40(15%)	76(27%)	64(23%)
Marginalisation of youth in decision making	9(3%)	33(12%)	46(17%)	132(48%)	57(20%)
Lack dignified livelihoods for youth	35(13%)	74(27%)	79(28%)	52(19%)	37(13%)
Elite influences on the youth	7(3%)	19(7%)	37(13%)	128(46%)	86(31%)
Inadequate support to education and capacity-building for peace	84(30%)	106(38%)	51(19%)	24(29%)	12(4%)
Referring to youth as the 'future leaders'	24(9%)	47(17%)	50(18%)	97(35%)	59(21%)
Targeting of youth during conflict	17(6%)	4616(%)	46(16%)	108(40%)	60(22%)
The need to defend themselves	11(4%)	22(8%)	32(12%)	147(53%)	65(23%)
Lack youth groups	30(11%)	51(18%)	21(8%)	99(36%)	76(27%)
Misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict	11(4%)	36(13%)	28(10%)	80(29%)	122(44%)
Lack of peacebuilding skills	6(2%)	19(7%)	22(8%)	142(41%)	88(32%)
Forced recruitment into fighting forces	12(5%)	32(11%)	42(15%)	137(50%)	54(19%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 8 presents the perspectives of youth who were never involved in conflict concerning challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. The results showed that their views are not fundamentally different from those who were engaged in conflict. The results showed that 147(53%) strongly agreed and 65(23%) agreed that the need to defend themselves was a challenge to engagement in peacebuilding. The results were the same for acknowledging youth as victims or perpetrators of violence where 76(27%) strongly agreed and 64(23%). Another 40(15%) were not sure and 97 (35%) disagreed.

In terms of misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict, 132(48%) strongly agreed and 57(20%) agreed. This meant that majority of youth who have never engaged in conflict agreed that their misrepresentation of youth as the cause of conflict is major obstacle to youth engagement in peacebuilding. This will suggest that the ascription of violence status to youth is counterproductive. Another evidence of the effect of viewing youth as violent was that 108(40%) strongly agreed and 60(22%) agreed that the targeting of youth during conflict is challenge to their engagement in peacebuilding.

Majority of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that referring to youth as the 'future leaders' which is coterminous with their marginalisation from decision making as challenge to their engagement in peacebuilding. On the score of marginalisation from decision making as challenge to their engagement in peacebuilding, 132(48%) strongly agreed and 57(20%) agreed. The remainder, 46(17%) were not sure, and only 42(15%) disagreed. However, in terms of referring to youth as the 'future leaders', 97(35%) strongly agreed and 59(21%) agreed.
Forced recruitment into fighting forces featured as a major obstacle to youth engagement in peacebuilding as 137(50%) strongly agreed and 54(19%) agreed. Whereas 42(15%) were not sure only 23(16%) disagreed. This would suggest that most youth would not have engaged in conflict if they are not forcibly recruited. This means that youth can be useful in peacebuilding. This is corroborated by the results where 128(46%) strongly agreed and 86(31%) agreed that elite influences on the youth is a challenge to their engagement in peacebuilding.

The results negated propositions in the youth bulge theory and other literature suggesting that poverty was a major challenge to youth engagement in peacebuilding as participants rejected lack of dignified livelihoods for youth as a challenge to their engagement in peacebuilding. The results showed that 74(27%) disagreed and 35(13%) strongly disagreed whiles 79(28%) were not sure. Only 32% of all participants agreed. Similarly, inadequate support to education and capacity-building for peace was rejected. As the results showed, 84(30%) strongly disagreed and 106(38%) disagreed. Another 51(19%) were not sure. Only a total of 36 (33%) agreed. The point of divergence from the participants who never engaged in conflict on lack of peacebuilding skills as a challenge to youth engagement in peacebuilding. Here 142(41%) strongly agreed and 88(32%) agreed. The results showed that 22(8%) were not sure whereas a total of 25(9%) disagreed.

These results were not different from the interview data. From the interviews the typical comments on challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding included the following.

> *I will contend that the major issue is that people think youth are violent, … they see us as the problem than the solution. That mentality of youth as violent needs to be recalibrated, in my view. This is important if the youth are to be engaged in peacebuilding.*
>
> *The youth are not involved because they think we lack the knowledge and skills. Meanwhile it's the adults who are the problem everywhere. … From my experience, the problem is with the adults. Who buys the guns for the youth who fight during conflict? It's the adults who are the problem. Whether it is land or power, it's the adult who enlist the youth.*
>
> *No one looks for the youth when they are finding solutions. They think we know nothing. Meanwhile it's the adults who create the problem! Look at Africa, apart from the few revolutions, how many of the warlords are youth? The youth will have to fight to defend their people, communities etc. That's why they get involved.*
>
> *It's the way people don't involve youth in decision-making. Youth always want peace. I want to enjoy my life. But the adults will start the fight and push you into it. We know of child soldiers. They are forced to fight. They are forcibly recruited. And they are not involved in the peace talks. That's the problem.*
>
> *You see people start conflict and the youth have to fight. The problem is they do not involve youth in decision making. When the problem comes, they call you to fight. If you don't you also die.*

The evidence from the qualitative results indicate that the main challenge to youth engagement is the positioning of the youth as violent and their marginalisation from decision making. This exclusion theory is evidenced in the work of Comaroff and Comaroff (2011) about how it is important to rethink the widespread perception of African youths which 'a signifier of exclusion. Rather than youth being influenced by illicit crime networks (Koinova, 2016), it is adult elites that influenced them to engage in ways that have negative impacts on peacebuilding (Another important reason that emerged is the influence of elite that enlists the youth into conflict which supports coercion thesis that youth are compelled to participate in anti-peacebuilding activities by forces external to them, which sits concomitantly with generational tensions posing enormous risk for sustainable peace and development (Agbiboa, 2015). Thus, it can be argued that youth engagement in peacebuilding is impeded primarily by the ways in which society constructs the youth. Their construction as a violent group and their enlistment into violence by the elite in society have become a major challenge to their engagement in peacebuilding. This calls for fundamental re-orientation of the psychic of society. In other words, if the youth are constructed as peace agents, they will be useful to peacebuilding (Onuoha 2014; Musili and Smith, 2013; Heribert Prantl, 2011). This fundamentally discounts Huntington's (1996) arguments that 'youth bulges' lead to increasing insecurity and make

countries especially prone to conflict. It shows that youth can be fundamental to peacebuilding initiatives if society chooses to involve them and use them as such.

CONCLUSION

The views concerning the challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding are many. The central argument is that there are three strands of challenges to youth engagement in peacebuilding. First, youth are mobilised by political forces (actors) and traditional leaders to engage in conflict. Youth sometimes voluntarily follow the elites as part of already existing community defence force. Other times, they are covertly recruited by armed groups to engage in conflict. Second, youth are excluded from peacebuilding initiatives because they are conceptualised as troublemakers. Social conception of youth as troublemakers presents several challenges. As the arguments show, peacebuilding work is located as an arena for adults. Therefore, programming happens for youth and not with youth. This exclusion of youth represents a major challenge to their participation in peacebuilding. To change the situation, the social construction of youth as sources of conflict needs to be transformed. Youth need to be understood as capable peacebuilders. This means that peace programmers and national architectures of peace need to engage youth in designing peace initiatives. Third, the youth lacked peacebuilding skills. The disbarment of youth kibosh their participation in peacebuilding training programmes. As such, there is dearth of peacebuilding skills among the youth. Therefore, peacebuilding organisations, institutions and networks should actively train youth in peace programming initiatives. National architectures of peace should organize peacebuilding capacity training programmes for youth and engage them actively in peacebuilding initiatives. There is a need for national youth agencies and non-governmental organisations as well as youth groups to invest in capacity building training for youth to develop peacebuilding skills. This way youth can participate effectively in peacebuilding activities and initiatives.

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