

# Images of Post-conflict Youth and Resilience in Northern Uganda

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## Presentation Overview

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- Perspectives on Post-conflict youth
- Post-conflict youth and Unemployment
- Shifting Perceptions
- Research 1: post-conflict youth building peace and justice in Northern Uganda
- Research 2: Post-conflict youth and political participation in Northern Uganda
- Conclusions

## Basic definitions

- Conflict: entails a confrontation between one or more parties aspiring towards incompatible or competitive means or end. When not handled well, conflicts lead to violence and warfare.
- Post conflict: is a situation in which open warfare has come to an end. Such situations remain tense for years or decades and can easily relapse into large scale violence.
- In post conflict areas there is an absence of war but not essentially real peace; it is Usually a fragile social, economic and political situation. Galtung calls it negative peace.

## Basic definitions

- However, the end of fighting does propose an opportunity to work towards lasting peace but requires the establishment of sustainable institutions and human relations capable of ensuring long-term security. This is precisely where the post-conflict youth problem lies.
- Youth : UNICEF defines youth as being individuals aged between 15 to 25 years of age. We shall not go into the country or culture specific descriptions of youth.

## Basic definitions

- Post-conflict youth: are therefore those individuals in their specific cultural context defined to be youth who live in the context of a post conflict era.

## Perspectives on post-conflict youth

- In a post conflict era without better support and respect for their rights, young people will become more angry and disaffected, and are likely to become a major source of new unrest" (Twum Danso, 2005, 25).
- Youth in a post conflict situation are broken citizens in a broken community where societal structures and cohesion is lost, values and norms diminished,
- And a receding role of elders as custodians and transmitters of culture and tradition.....communal relations are shifting to individual needs (Angucia, 2010)

## Perspectives on post conflict youth

- In a post conflict situation there is usually a large number of demobilised and reintegrated post-conflict youth who continue to be vulnerable due to the prevalence of illicit drugs, violence, militias or urban gangs

## Post-conflict youth...

- Many practitioners and theorists consider post conflict youth as being trapped in a state of victimhood (vulnerable, helpless, disempowered, poor, security threats -Sommers,2006) (Albrecht Schnabel and Anara Tabyshalieva, 2013).
- Because of this they assume that post conflict youth need to be programmed for in post conflict peacebuilding , planning and implementation

## Post conflict youth, cont...

- A youth trapped in victimhood is a result of the spotlight on the massive involvement of children in warfare as experienced in the 90s and early 2000s (e.g., Machel, 1996; Honwana, 2006)
- In the last decade, the idea of children and youth as victims led to the need to reintegrate them (Angucia, 2010; Betancourt, 2008; Betancourt, et al, 2008; van der Bent, 2013; Schonfeld, 2014; etc)

## (Victim) youth and employment in post-conflict communities (World Bank,2013)

- A victim youth has psychosocial (cognitive, emotional and behavioural) impairment which severely undermine social functioning and productivity

## Victim youth and unemployment, Cont..

- Have higher rates of unemployment, absenteeism, poor job performance and difficulties in performing mental and interpersonal tasks
- Limited ability to develop self-reliance due to depression, demoralisation and feelings of worthlessness

## Youth and unemployment, cont...

- Productivity loss due to missed education and work experience during time spent with armed groups
- Have difficulty in integrating in the labour force and lower incomes (World Bank, 2010)

## Shifting perceptions of post-conflict youth....

- In the last decade, there is a shift in understanding youth:
  - From victims to being resilient
  - From unemployed/unemployable to primary economic and social resources
  - Being able to influence their own fate and that of others that depend on them (Sommers, 2006)

## Shifting perceptions...

- That post-conflict youth also have competences and opportunities in communities in which they live. Cfr the NCPO Model in Angucia,2010, Ch. 8; Schnelker,2013)

### Research 1: Young People Building Peace and Justice in Northern Uganda

- A research on post – conflict youth building justice and peace (IFCU funded)
- Focus on out of school youth (football youth group, boda boda youth group, church based youth group, farming youth group, performing youth group, a metal fabrication group)

### Four Global Policy Discourses involving youth in peace

1. children and youth have rights and should be protected
  - Draws from the human rights framework based on the convention on the rights of the child.
  - it seeks to address children and young people's needs in all aspects of their life: social, economic, political and cultural.
2. youth as development assets
  - Informed by the rights-based approach to development that recognises development as a right and also values the centrality of participation of the young people in the design, implementation and evaluation of the development initiatives.

### Global policy discourses...

3. Youth as a security threat
  - This flows from the recognition of the challenges that young people face when returning from armed conflicts and attempting to integrate into communities and find jobs or access to education."
  - Effective reintegration of victims and perpetrators of past violence and empowering them to participate in the development process is vital in stemming insecurity in post conflict societies.
  - When there is a youth bulge (78% in the case of Uganda) and increasing unemployment the risk of armed conflict is higher than when the structure of the population is generally more adult.
  - Note: where the young people make up an overwhelming majority of the population, the youth bulge frame also offers benefits for development actors for increasing policy-based interventions and resource allocation.

### Global policy discourses

4. Youth as agents of change
  - Lies within the youth agency and is thus embedded in the youth themselves.
  - the youth agency implies that the youth or young people, due to their energy and creativity, have the capability to effect change independent of outside actors.
  - This does not mean that young people should work alone without adults or outside established social and institutional structures.
  - The lens of youth as agents of change is not merely for romanticizing the youth, but rather to mainstream their interests and creative energies to impact positively on post conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding

## Major Findings

- Motivated youth conceptually rejecting the notion of victimhood
- do not need "programming" to find work;
- savings group – one group was saving up to 50M UGX;
- have become solidarity groups – training and employing other youth;

## findings

- sensitisation on post conflict social issues such as HIV, domestic violence, land wrangles.
- To them justice was doing the right thing and as long as they were doing the right thing in their daily lives they were building peace.
- In the end justice and peace turned out to be the same thing.

### Research 2: Post-conflict youth and Political Participation in Northern Uganda

- Carried out in the old Gulu district
- It focuses on post conflict youth in political participation
- Aim: to understand how the events of a conflict past influence youth participation in politics
- Methodology: qualitative action research (we conducted fgds; action inducing workshop still to be carried out)

## Theoretical Framework:

- From UNDP report (2014) on youth and political participation
- Conventionally, political participation encompasses several citizen activities that influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue
- Participation is more than voting (freedom to speak out, assemble and associate, ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs, the opportunity to be elected and hold office)

## Theoretical Framework...

- It entails joining civil society organisations, professional networks, the media, trade unions etc.
- However, both formal and informal engagement can be understood as political participation (UNDP, 2014)
- Young people can be a creative force, a dynamic source of information.
- Throughout history they have participated, contributed to and catalysed important changes in political systems, power sharing and economic opportunities

## Theoretical framework....

- In spite of these contributions of youth, the UNDP report states that there is strong evidence that the participation of young people in formal institutional political processes is relatively low compared to older citizens across the globe
- Interests of youth are often not adequately reflected in decision making and in the design of policies (Advisor Consortium on Conflict Sensitivity, 2013)
- This exclusion is usually prevalent even in post-conflict traditional justice systems designed for recovery.

## Theoretical framework...

- According to the Acholi Youth Agenda, youth have been used by politicians to push for their political agenda
- that in the face of poverty, unemployment, socio-economic and political exclusion, unaddressed legacies of war and a general state of neglect youth have limited or no choice but to be used as a way of survival or identity (Acholi Youth Agenda, 2015)
- Youth thus view political events as opportunities to get quick money

## Findings

- 1. the post-conflict youth situation in northern Uganda
    - Almost 10 years after the Juba Peace Process an analysis of the post-conflict youth situation can be summarised as a conglomeration of poverty, unemployment, orphan-hood, landlessness, stigmatisation, prostitution, teenage parentage, drugs and alcohol abuse leading to a "vulnerability trap"
- What one respondent referred to as: "It is now alcohol that is drinking the youth"
- This is a situation of adversity!

## Findings.....

- 2. Youth initiatives in the face of adversity: daring to hope
  - Formation of youth groups for savings, local transporters (Boda Boda), produce buying and selling, music, dance and drama, foot ball clubs
  - Joining vocational schools (hair dressing, catering, brick laying, farming, etc)
  - Sensitisation of fellow youth on social issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention, domestic violence, drug abuse
  - some youth are presenting themselves for leadership

## Findings...

- 3. youth perception of political participation
  - That they will always be used by politicians during high political season and then be forgotten after voting
  - That adults perceive them as liars who should neither be trusted nor engaged in politics; neither are they understood
  - That politics is a seasonal game for the gain of politicians
  - Politics is a waste or sharing of resources among politicians rather than support and build communities

## Findings...

- That today politics depends on "how much you don't have merit"
- That youth do not know the benefits of politics because they associate it with material benefits; they want to see immediate impact. Therefore will not participate if there is no tangible benefit
- Politics breeds wishful thinking from the manifesto's of political parties or individual politicians
- That politics offers nothing much; gains are from real hard work.

## Findings....

- 3. threats to political Participation
  - Monetisation/commercialisation of politics
  - Intimidation by the state often through violence
  - Political patronage and political god fathers that do not allow equal political participation for youth
  - Legislation that criminalises political participation - e.g., phone tapping and public order management bill
  - Domestic relations – unmarried women have to prove their credibility and husbands may prevent wives from joining politics

## Findings....

- 4. opportunities for youth to participate in politics
  - Availability of youth clubs in schools and youth groups for out of school youths that are platforms for capacity and confidence building
  - There are some politicians that the youth consider as their role models from whom they can learn good politics
  - The generation gap – older politicians are gradually phasing out naturally so the youth will eventually replace them

## Findings....

- Exposure to globalisation through technology and the internet
- A general human rights activism that defend the youth and their involvement in politics
- A slow but steady acceptance of the (Acholi) youth not just as war mongers – as has been - but people with dreams and aspirations

## Conclusions

- Two points:
  1. that most of the youth activities fall in the informal political activities which the youth themselves seem not to recognise as politics.
  2. That this informal level political activity is the location where their resilience is born and exercised.
- So what is resilience?

## Resilience Theory

- Is a multi-disciplinary field of study (social work, psychology, sociology, ecology, etc)
- It addresses the strengths that people and systems demonstrate that enable them to rise above adversity
- The emergence of resilience theory is associated with a reduction in emphasis on pathology and increase on emphasis on strengths because it is important to understand how people survive, cope and even thrive (Van Breda, 2001)

## Resilience....

- The field of resilience categorises:
  1. Individual resilience (thriving, hardiness, learned resourcefulness...)
  2. Family resilience (family stress and strength)
  3. Community resilience (importance of social support systems, resilience policy....)

## Resilience.....

- Many definitions of resilience but our preferred definition:
- Resilience means the skills, abilities, knowledge and insights that accumulate over-time as people struggle to surmount adversity and meet challenges. It is an on-going and developing fund of energy and skills that can be used in current struggles (Van Breda, 2001:5)

## Resilience...

- This definition summarises the story of the post conflict youth of northern Uganda whether they are struggling to build peace and justice or are struggling to identify themselves in political participation.
- It is a story of a constant thriving from a devastating conflict past.
- It is energy that is derived from their personal hardiness, learned resourcefulness and support systems that they are applying to overcome their conflict past and with time image a future that is more liveable.

## An upcoming Youth!

**Mom, I Swear  
I Didn't Touch Your Flour**



- Thank you for Your Kind Attention