

GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACEBUILDING

The United Nations Secretary-General highlighted, in his 2012 report on Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict, that “a successful peacebuilding process must be transformative and create space for a wider set of actors – including, but not limited to, representatives of women, young people, victims and marginalized communities; community and religious leaders; civil society actors; and refugees and internally displaced persons – to participate in public decision-making on all aspects of post-conflict governance and recovery.”¹

Fostering social cohesion and trust through an inclusive and participatory peacebuilding process during and after a transition or conflict is a challenging but necessary task. Many key stakeholders remain on the margins or excluded from the process. In particular, the potential contribution and inclusion of young people² to effective peacebuilding has received little attention and support.

Yet young people's leadership and roles in preventing and resolving conflict, violence and extremism are rich resources essential to achieving sustainable peace. Young people are valuable innovators and agents of change, and their contributions should be actively supported, solicited and regarded as essential to building peaceful communities and supporting democratic governance and transition. Moreover, young people's participation promotes civic engagement and active citizenship. Promoting the participation of young people in peacebuilding requires multiple approaches. These include:

- (1) A *human rights-based approach*, grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the World Programme of Action on Youth;
- (2) An *economic approach* that identifies young people as central to the economic development of their country, and promotes their access to economic opportunities as essential for their own development;
- (3) A *socio-political approach* that connects young people to civil society and the political arena, and provides them with opportunities, training and support for their active engagement and participation in public life; and
- (4) A *sociocultural approach* that analyses the roles of young people in existing structures and supports dialogue – including intergenerational dialogue – about these structures.

The principle of ‘do no harm’ is fundamental in all instances, and requires an awareness and active avoidance of the negative consequences that interventions can inadvertently create. In addition, all participation should be based on free will.

The principles listed below were identified to offer guidance to key actors, including governments; United Nations entities, funds and programmes; local, national and international non-governmental organizations; civil society actors; and donors. The principles are designed to inform participative, inclusive and intergenerational peacebuilding strategies and programmes that systematically promote and ensure the participation and contributions of young people in challenging contexts of conflict, where violence has often become the norm. The principles are not listed in order of priority and are each of equal importance.

1

PROMOTE YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION AS AN ESSENTIAL CONDITION FOR SUCCESSFUL PEACEBUILDING

- 1.1 Prioritize regular, systematic and meaningful participation of young people as an essential condition for the sustainability, inclusiveness and success of peacebuilding efforts. This is of particular importance when young people constitute a majority of the population.
- 1.2 Promote and abide by the understanding that the majority of young people strive for peace and stability and that a number of them are actively engaged in peacebuilding efforts; only a minority of young people engages in violence.
- 1.3 Link young people's participation in peacebuilding to all sectors (social, economic, cultural and political) and to all levels (family, school, community, and local, regional and national governance).
- 1.4 Promote sustainable, long-term and collaborative initiatives for and with young people, including joint initiatives that build on existing efforts and interventions at scale. Avoid short-term projects that will only benefit a few.

¹ United Nations General Assembly, Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding in the Aftermath of Conflict, A/67/499– S/2012/746, 8 October 2012, para. 36.

² Defined by the United Nations as between the ages of 10 and 24.

2**VALUE AND BUILD UPON YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIVERSITY AND EXPERIENCES**

- 2.1 Acknowledge that definitions of 'young people' vary depending on social, cultural and political contexts, and strive to understand the national and local contexts that young people have grown up in.
- 2.2 Value diversity among young people and develop targeted strategies to involve and include young people from different backgrounds, taking into account differences in age, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, caste, education, social status, place of residence (rural/urban), sexual orientation, physical and intellectual abilities, interests, etc.
- 2.3 Involve hard-to-reach young people and those who belong to groups often disproportionately affected by conflict, such as disabled young people and young people from minority and indigenous groups.
- 2.4 Make specific efforts to reach out to marginalized young people within all of these groups; do not assume that elite youth leaders from civil society represent them.
- 2.5 Support young people and youth-led organizations to reflect on patterns of inclusion and exclusion and to work proactively to address discrimination, which is often one of the root causes of conflict.
- 2.6 Respect the experiences of all, including those of young people associated with conflict, and make special efforts to facilitate the active participation of young people who are more vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups and/or otherwise involved in violence.

3**BE SENSITIVE TO GENDER DYNAMICS**

- 3.1 Avoid stereotypical assumptions about the roles and aspirations of girls, boys, young women, young men and young transgender people in conflict.
- 3.2 Recognize the specific grievances or vulnerabilities that young people may have as a result of conflict and violence, and that these experiences are often gendered.
- 3.3 Identify strategies to reach out to young women, seek their engagement, and create a safe space to raise their specific issues and concerns and support their initiatives.

4**ENABLE YOUNG PEOPLE'S OWNERSHIP, LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN PEACEBUILDING**

- 4.1 Identify young people and youth led-organizations involved in peacebuilding initiatives: find them, learn from them and support them.
- 4.2 Create opportunities for young people's sustained participation, ownership and leadership in local, national, regional and international mechanisms to prevent, manage and resolve conflict and maintain peace.
- 4.3 Foster trust and support power-sharing between decision makers and young people, especially through intergenerational dialogue and youth-adult trust-building activities and trainings.
- 4.4 Work with young people who are influential among their peers and foster their leadership skills, while simultaneously ensuring the participation of marginalized young people.
- 4.5 Facilitate mechanisms, both physical and virtual, for feedback and communication to enable young leaders to be accountable to their peers, communities and partners.

5**DO NO HARM**

- 5.1 Provide a physically, socially and emotionally safe and supportive environment for young people to participate in peacebuilding and post-conflict activities.
- 5.2 Acknowledge the trauma that many young people have suffered, and offer a safe space to share experiences, including access to psychosocial support, justice and other support services for their rehabilitation and reintegration.
- 5.3 Be sensitive to divides and inequalities among and between young people, their peers and their communities, and avoid exacerbating these, fomenting stereotypes, or creating potentially difficult or dangerous situations for young people before, during and after their participation.
- 5.4 Ensure that facilitators are specifically trained to handle difficult conversations and situations and know where to refer young people who might need specialized services.
- 5.5 Be cautious about offering too many opportunities and services to young people who have been involved in violence, to avoid incentivizing others to turn to violence or engage with armed groups to receive money or support.

6**INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE IN ALL STAGES OF PEACEBUILDING AND POST-CONFLICT PROGRAMMING**

- 6.1 Involve diverse groups of young people in identifying critical interventions that can change the dynamics of conflict and violence, and in analysing the conflict and the roles of different actors.
- 6.2 Use tailored and age-appropriate methodologies for young people to contribute directly to designing, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and following up on peacebuilding and post-conflict programmes and processes.
- 6.3 Advocate for and support institutionalizing young people's participation and representation in local and national governance processes so that they can influence practices and policies affecting them and ensure that youth have the appropriate training and support to engage in these processes.
- 6.4 Promote and facilitate young people's civic engagement and volunteerism for peace.
- 6.5 Have relevant decision makers, institutions and organizations commit to accountability to young people. Establish mechanisms to communicate with and receive feedback from young people, particularly as part of any youth-focused programme and policy framework.
- 6.6 Offer alternative sources of power to young people who have attained political, social and economic power using violent means.

7**ENHANCE THE KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE FOR PEACEBUILDING**

- 7.1 Nurture young people's skills in leadership, mediation, negotiation, conflict resolution, communication, life skills and positive social norms.
- 7.2 Create opportunities for young people to share goals and aspirations with adults in addition to one another; capitalize on their experiences and assets; and engage in multiple areas, including social, emotional, moral, spiritual, civic, vocational, physical, cognitive, personal and cultural development.
- 7.3 Identify young people who can serve as positive role models and provide guidance to younger individuals.
- 7.4 Promote positive relationships between young people and adult mentors who can help guide them during life transitions and provide them with the vision and confidence to realize their goals.
- 7.5 Develop violence-prevention strategies that go beyond simple security responses and encompass prevention of violence in the family, school and community, and which support reinsertion and rehabilitation.

8**INVEST IN INTERGENERATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMUNITIES**

- 8.1 Increase dialogue, understanding of and opportunities for cooperation among children, young people, parents and elders, in order to act jointly to prevent and resolve violence and transform conflicts.
- 8.2 Work with adults so that they see the empowerment of young people as a positive change, and not as a threat to their own power and position.
- 8.3 Recognize and promote the role of local, regional and national governments to support young people's participation in processes and decisions that affect their lives.

9**INTRODUCE AND SUPPORT POLICIES THAT ADDRESS THE FULL NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

- 9.1 Prioritize the development of youth-focused and youth-inclusive policies as important peace dividends.
- 9.2 Contribute to the establishment of or support existing local, regional and national forums and other appropriate channels of communication that can enhance young people's participation in the development of public policies that affect their lives.
- 9.3 Support research on youth and peacebuilding that can be used as a reference for policy.
- 9.4 Support the development of inclusive national policies that address the needs and aspirations of young people; contribute to young people's participation, development and empowerment; and fully align with international human rights standards, regional instruments and key policy documents.

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