

ENGAGING YOUTH IN DISASTER, CONFLICT, AND PEACEBUILDING EFFORTS



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INTRODUCTION

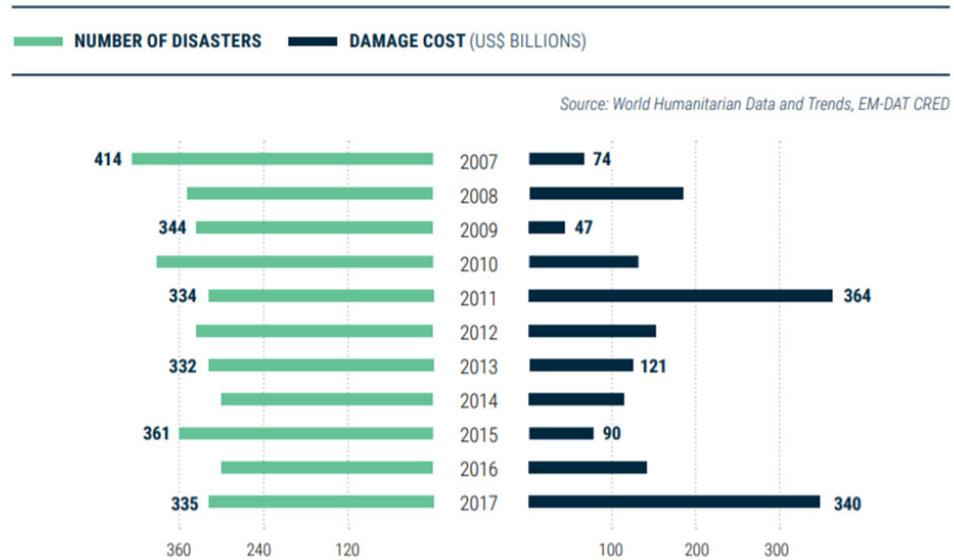
Over the past 15 years, the frequency, scale, and funding needs for responses to complex emergencies¹ and natural disasters have significantly increased. According to the United Nations, armed conflicts were a major cause of disruption across the humanitarian landscape over the past decade. In 2016, there were 402 ongoing conflicts compared to 278 in 2006. Knowledge, innovation, human capital, financial assistance, and new approaches are needed to save more lives, alleviate suffering, and reduce the impacts of ongoing and future conflicts and disasters.

Climate change, urbanization, and conflict—among other forces—are increasing vulnerability and exacerbating the impact and intensity of disasters. While the number of disasters has not recently increased, the number of people affected and the total damage to communities has doubled. In the last year alone, the international community responded to nearly 290 complex emergencies and natural disasters in over 100 countries affecting over 200 million people.



Figure 1: United Nations 2019 - Disasters are impacting millions of people each year

NUMBER AND COST OF DISASTERS (2007-2017)



Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Global Humanitarian Overview 2019; p. 15, <https://www.unocha.org/publication/global-humanitarian-overview/global-humanitarian-overview-2019>.

With the number of conflicts and disasters growing both more complex and longer in duration, the impact on communities and human lives is increasing at a staggering rate. Recently, numerous high-level summits and conferences have discussed the need for new ways and solutions to address, respond, and prevent the growing number of conflicts and disasters. An area identified as needing more focus or attention is how to better build resilience and preparedness at individual and community levels. Youth can be pivotal in this area as well as how we shape overall approaches.

WHY YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IS CRITICAL

Today’s generation of young people is the largest in history, and the majority of youth reside in conflict-affected countries and particularly situations of conflict, natural disaster, and fragility.² As a result, far too many young people are not getting what they need to realize their full potential especially in health, education, life skills, and economic opportunities. When disasters or conflicts strike, youth can face severe difficulties that threaten their immediate and long-term well-being. “In disaster situations, many young people experience simultaneous and ongoing disruptions in their lives including in their families, communities, education, access to healthcare, and suffer from trauma related to these shocks” said Jayathma Wickramanayake, Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth, at the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Discussion in 2019.³ To assist youth through these situations and ensure the largest

generation’s voice is included, it is critical to have their engagement early and throughout situations of conflict, natural disaster, and fragility.

Youth are a tremendous resource in responding to situations of disaster or conflict and playing critical roles in informing disaster and/or conflict response interventions that affect them and their communities. Investing in youth has the potential to strengthen response efforts, while also bolstering their ability to build a future for themselves, their families, their communities, and their countries. In disaster- and conflict-affected areas, young people are influencing the way conflict and disaster responses unfold and contributing to disaster response, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding efforts by utilizing their skills, abilities, local knowledge, and networks.⁴

As the Envoy of the Secretary-General on Youth recently pointed out, “Youth engagement is an integral part of the [Sendai] framework.⁵ As agents for change for DRR [disaster risk reduction], youth are already providing leadership, entrepreneurship, and innovative solutions to reduce disaster risk. [...] In places such as Kerala and Niger, youth are creating innovative mobile phone applications to strengthen disaster preparedness in their communities. The Youth in School Safety Programme by Red Cross Red Crescent Southeast Asia Youth Network has rolled out in six countries, training 150 youth volunteers who in turn conducted countless school safety actions.”⁶

KEY FACTS

- There are 1.8 billion youth worldwide⁷ —the largest cohort ever—and the most educated and urbanized.
- Young people represent the majority of the population in the top conflict-affected countries, where an average of 50 percent of the population is below the age of 20, and in some countries, more than 70 percent of the population is below the age of 30.⁸
- Of the 1.8 billion, 90 percent of youth live in developing countries.⁹ One in four young people today are living in or are otherwise affected by armed conflicts and violence.¹⁰
- Of the 1.5 billion people living in fragile contexts and conflict areas around the world, 40 percent are youth.
- One in four of the poorest youth have never attended school, and more than 200 million youth of secondary school age are out of school. Inequality in educational attainment is linked to violent conflict.¹¹
- The vast majority of young people do not participate and are not on the brink of participating in violence. Many young people are actively working for peace and security in their communities.¹³
- Youth-led peace groups are primarily driven by volunteers, who make up 97 percent of their membership. They operate on limited budgets amidst dangerous and difficult conditions, are uniquely able to mobilize both youth and other community members and have access where other organizations may not be present.¹⁴
- The political participation of young people during peace negotiations has been shown to contribute to more inclusive and representative governance structures.¹⁵

By applying a PYD approach and engaging in disaster, conflict, and peacebuilding efforts, youth:

- Gain a sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and efficacy;
- Find opportunities to make a difference;
- Make difficult decisions, build confidence, earn respect, and become advocates; and
- Develop skills and affect positive change.

2018 State of the World's Volunteerism Report:

Youth Volunteers as Peacebuilders

Young volunteers can be positive role models and advocates for promoting peacebuilding and social cohesion within fragile communities. Young volunteers can also play a role in discussing and addressing factors, such as social exclusion and cultural norms that can contribute to extremism.

In 2017, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization launched a regional youth-led advocacy campaign known as “Shughel Shabab” in response to a United Nations Security Council resolution on youth, peace, and security. The campaign aimed to highlight youth-led initiatives, transform perceptions about young people, and support them as change-makers and peacebuilders. Young volunteers from countries across the Arab States region worked together to showcase the myriad of positive ways in which young people—many of whom are volunteers—reduce social tension and violence and repair the social fabric of communities. In 2018, the campaign shifted focus to developing an enabling environment for sustained youth participation.

HOW ORGANIZATIONS ARE SUPPORTING YOUTH MOBILIZATION AND ENGAGEMENT

In crisis, recovery, fragile, and post-conflict settings, young people have repeatedly demonstrated and continue to show their ability to contribute to response efforts by bridging divides across communities, building coalitions of stakeholders, and promoting peace and reconciliation activities. Nonprofits, local government, community organizations, and other stakeholders are currently supporting youth mobilization and engagement before, during, and after crises and disasters through the following strategies:

1. Risk Assessment
2. Prevention and Mitigation
3. Preparedness and Response
4. Recovery and Rebuilding

- Promoting meaningful, inclusive youth participation in conflict- and disaster-related planning, strategy-setting, response, and recovery processes and mechanisms;
- Incorporating disaster preparedness, recovery planning efforts, peace education, socio-emotional learning, psychosocial support into education initiatives;
- Rehabilitating community infrastructure in locations particularly vulnerable to adverse effects of climate change;
- Using new technologies to organize and mobilize communities towards healing, reconciliation, and restorative justice;
- Including youth in the development of protection policies and programs—at both community and systemic levels—of children and other marginalized, at-risk, and vulnerable populations;
- Making youth a central pillar in conducting conflict and risk analyses and needs assessments in early stages of rapid-onset crises;
- Supporting and strengthening the capacity of youth organizations to help re-establish relationships and trust among communities;
- Prioritizing resilience-based approaches to youth engagement in disaster, conflict, and peacebuilding efforts over remedial- or risk-based approaches;
- Providing flexible funding, technical support, and

partnerships (formal and informal) with diverse youth groups as well as new initiatives working on disaster, conflict, and peacebuilding efforts;

- Analyzing and supporting gender-sensitive resilience and violence-reduction strategies;
- Providing opportunities to design and innovate new methodologies to solve community problems;
- Ensuring and advocating for the protection of human rights – including the freedom of expression, assembly, and movement as well as the physical and digital safety of young people, youth groups, and activists; and
- Creating platforms for policy dialogues and service delivery and advocating for the inclusion of youth in existing platforms to ensure youth voices are heard and all ideas are considered in decision making that affects their lives.¹⁶



Khine, 20 years old, a newcomer to the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) youth volunteer network in Rahkine State, Myanmar, at a training event. United Nations Volunteers, 2017

NEW ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

Recently, numerous stakeholders have engaged youth in local situations of disaster, conflict, and fragility. And, stakeholders at the global and multi-lateral levels have also begun engaging youth as well. The United Nation's Global Agenda for Humanity,¹⁷ which sets out five major areas for action and change to address and reduce humanitarian need, risk, and vulnerability, is beginning to reshape global and local approaches to preventing, preparing for, and responding to crises, and it is laying the foundation for greater changes to come. The Agenda will bring young people to the table, give them a voice in the discussions and decision making, and provide them active roles to participate. In addition, it is building on their efforts to maintain and promote international peace and security.

Recent efforts and commitments to continue engaging young people in disaster, conflict, and peacebuilding programming fora and decision making are promoting a new engagement approach. A few examples of these efforts include the World Humanitarian Summit, the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action,¹⁸ the Guiding Principles for Youth Participation in Peacebuilding,¹⁹ the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2250 and 2419 on Youth, Peace, and Security,²⁰ and Youth2030: The United Nations Youth Strategy.²¹

“In 2019, young people have truly moved the world towards the future our world deserves through their leadership in advocating for humanity and environment. I’m grateful to be a part of this journey. From their fearlessness in leading the global #ClimateAction movement to young people’s solidarity in standing up for Gender Equality, Peace and #HumanRights, and so much more. The world’s largest generation has proven that they are the leaders of today and tomorrow. As we end 2019 and step into a #DecadeofAction, I call for the world to work with and for young people, so that we can ALL achieve the #GlobalGoals in 2030. Thank you once again for all the amazing youth, who are working restlessly every day for everyone, everywhere. I can’t wait to start a new decade with #YouthPower and bring your commitment and fight to my work! #Youth2030.”

Jayathma Wickramanayake, UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth—December 2019

In an open letter to World Leaders, activists from 30 countries expressed the need for urgent action:

*“This is an emergency for people and planet. If we do not together ensure a Decade of Delivery for the Global Goals for Sustainable Development, from 2020 to 2030, we will together live with decades of disastrous consequences into the 21st century.”*²²

Early results from these requests and suggestions to include people most affected by conflict and emergencies (i.e., youth, local, and national organizations) are beginning to emerge and youth are gaining a greater voice in decisions that affect their lives before, during, and after conflicts and disasters. Development and humanitarian entities are making important strategic and operational shifts to better anticipate crises by directing more financing towards preparedness, disaster risk reduction, and resilience.

On the ground and across the globe, youth are now engaged in designing and implementing programs prior, during, and after conflicts and disasters. They are innovators, intercultural ambassadors, community mobilizers, advocates, and peer-to-peer facilitators.

Youth are helping communities improve their early warning and preparedness systems, update their disaster and conflict plans, and strengthen their food security. They are also contributing to environmental conservation, leading reconciliation and healing efforts, and improving access to clean, safe, and affordable drinking water. Recently, youth in the Central African Republic helped with trauma healing and the protection of those displaced by conflict. In Nepal, youth delivered livelihood assistance to earthquake victims. In Mali and Niger, they provided time and expertise to fight malnutrition. In Myanmar, they assessed disaster risks in three states. And, in Lebanon, youth provided market and livelihood assessments for local and displaced populations.

Below are highlights from three project examples that demonstrate the powerful role that youth can play in peacebuilding and post-conflict situations.

Liberia - Youth Connect for Peace

Land disputes, ethnic rivalries and clashes, and limited state capacity for peaceful resolution of disputes have been at the root of Liberia’s propensity for conflict, which was compounded by the Ebola outbreak. This series of events fractured the traditional roles between youth and the elders, robbing youth of the opportunity to go to school and leaving them in a more vulnerable state than previous generations. These issues also resulted in lasting distrust between the youth and elders. To find ways to reconcile and overcome mutual mistrust, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) implemented the USAID-funded Connect for Peace (C4P)²³ project. To help ensure that Liberian youth participated responsibly in the 2017 presidential election and post-elections processes, CRS implemented the Promoting Positive Engagement in the 2017 Elections by Youth project in 50 communities. The project focused on giving youth access to accurate election information and actively promoted peaceful behavior. Youth voter education volunteers carried out peer-to-peer voter education campaigns. The local programs run by CRS sought to re-establish healthy relationships between youth and elders by addressing past trauma and teaching self-healing techniques, forging relationships that allow for joint decisions on rebuilding their communities, and addressing youth vulnerability through skills trainings that assist youth to establish a livelihoods strategy with the support of their community.

According to the National Democratic Institute (NDI), “Liberia’s 2017 presidential and legislative elections represented an historic achievement for the country

and its citizens. The third polls conducted since the end of the 14-year civil war, they resulted in the first peaceful transfer of power from one president to another since 1944, and the first time ever that one democratically elected president succeeds another. Voter turnout was high, as many Liberians viewed peaceful dialogue and political action as important steps in the consolidation of the country's democratic progress." Furthermore, NDI reported that "youth played a prominent role in the election process, serving as election workers, party agents, and energetic partisans. In contrast to the 2005 and 2011 general elections, when parties and candidates used young supporters to cause disturbances and engage in violent protests, the 2017 elections saw a limited number of such instances. During the campaign period preceding the October 10 elections, young men in particular participated actively in rallies and debates, and marched in candidates' parades. Young people not only refrained from becoming involved in violence, they actively engaged in maintaining a peaceful process."²⁴

Uganda - Building Peace Through Young Adult Peace Champions in Post-conflict Communities²⁵

This project implemented by the Center for Conflict Resolution (CECORE), the Regional Secretariat for GPPAC Eastern and Central Africa Regional Network, and funded by the Federal Foreign Service of Germany through ifa-zivik, aims to prevent youth re-radicalization in Uganda. The project works with young adult groups (25-35 years) who have been engaged in violence, like such as ex-combatants and ex-warriors, and with youth groups (18-24 years) involved in peacebuilding and income generating activities at the community level.

A team of young adult and youth peace champions has changed attitudes of fellow youth in the community and provides the youth with skills in income-generating activities to address unemployment which is considered a key issue at the root of the conflicts. The project has shown success in several aspects: the young peace champions are reconciling conflicting parties, supporting fellow youth, and speaking up against practices like forced marriage. Another success has been the decrease in cattle raiding across the region.

Philippines - Mindanao Youth Peacebuilding

For decades, regions of Mindanao have been plagued with violence related to land disputes and political power. Thousands have lost family members, homes or livelihoods to the conflict. In addition, powerful typhoons, such as Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, and several others since then have ravaged many parts of the

Philippines. CRS Philippines launched its Mindanao Youth Peacebuilding Strategy, which engages local youth as major agents of peaceful change in conflict and post-conflict communities. By engaging local youth, CRS can create an adequate income stream and opportunities for the communities, sustain promotion of nonviolence and a culture of peace in rural villages, and empower youth participation in community decision-making and local governance.

The initial phase of the youth peacebuilding strategy began with the Youth Drive Project, which received 70 youth-led innovative social enterprise applications that led to 11 business prototypes and six start-ups through a business incubation program. CRS partnered with Bangsamoro region's Ministry of Trade, Investment, and Tourism (MTIT) to support young entrepreneurs. MTIT provided resources and shared technical expertise. In partnership with the local government agencies and civil society organizations, the initiative generated transformative approaches and opportunities, including an increase of youth entrepreneurship and life skills, partnership engagement with private- and academic-sector entities supportive of social enterprises, and open public conversations about youth social exclusion and local identity prejudices.

"RISE NEPAL" Youth Action after Disaster²⁶

In the aftermath of Nepal's earthquake in 2015, the Global Peace Foundation joined with the Asia-Pacific Peace and Development Service Alliance to coordinate youth volunteer efforts. As many residents were leaving Kathmandu for fear of aftershocks and disease, local youth volunteered with relief efforts in the city. The organizations trained and deployed these young Nepali responders. Experts from New Zealand's Christchurch, who mobilized student volunteers after their devastating earthquake in 2011, were invited to share their youth mobilization and training expertise with youth in Nepal. They trained youth in areas such as social media outreach, aid distribution, resource coordination, and use of information technology.

CONCLUSION

New engagement approaches that include youth in disaster and conflict responses are beginning to shape how development and humanitarian institutions make strategic and operational shifts to better anticipate crises. As the world's largest generation, young people must be engaged in decisions that affect their lives before, during, and after conflicts and disasters. They also must be part of the solutions to reduce the number

of conflicts and disasters and in identifying new ways to build better resilience and preparedness at the individual and community levels.

This brief summarizes ways to strategically, impactfully, and beneficially engage youth in these contexts. To cement youth engagement, development and humanitarian organizations should make youth engagement a required component of all conflict and peacebuilding programs as well as in all pre- and post-disaster response programs. Engaging youth in peacebuilding and disaster preparedness efforts, in conducting needs assessments in the early stages of rapid-onset crises, in creating platforms for policy dialogues and service delivery, and in designing and innovating new methodologies to solve

community problems yields clear benefits. Development and humanitarian entities also must invest in these future leaders through technical assistance, flexible funding, capacity and organizational development, and through partnerships with and among youth groups.

“We cannot achieve the... Agenda’s [goals] without redoubling our efforts to reach those left farthest behind: refugees, internally displaced people, women and girls, children, and all people whose lives have been overturned by conflicts or disasters. [...] The call to action set out... remains as urgent as ever.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres, May 2017

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USAID YouthPower Learning generates and disseminates knowledge about the implementation and impact of positive youth development (PYD) and cross-sectoral approaches in international development. The project leads research, evaluations, and events designed to build the evidence base related to PYD. Concurrently, YouthPower Learning employs expertise in learning and knowledge sharing to promote engagement and inform the global community about how to successfully help transition young people into productive, healthy adults. YouthPower Learning supports the implementation of the 2012 USAID Youth in Development Policy to improve capacity and enable the aspirations of youth so that they can contribute to, and benefit from, more stable, democratic, and prosperous communities.

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