



GLOBAL PEACE HUB

Stories & reflections from
a new youth network in 2022

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Preface

Youth are, and have always been, an essential part of FUF. At any given time, FUF has about 250 volunteers – of which a majority is youth – that contribute to our vision of increasing knowledge and debate on global issues, and commitment to a fair and sustainable world.

The idea of the Global Peace Hub was born during the pandemic, when the whole world had to level up their digital capacity. The purpose of a digital network of young peacebuilders is to empower youth all over the world in their efforts to work for a peaceful and sustainable future. It is FUF's first international project, and the aim is to support the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, which calls for strengthening meaningful participation of youth in decision-making arenas at all levels of society.

During the project period, we have been challenged by issues such as how to be digitally safe, how to arrange meetings when dealing with twelve time zones, and how to enable participation in locations with frequent electricity shortages or an unstable internet connection. Along the way, we have received advisory- and pro-bono support from organisations in all sectors of society, nationally, as well as internationally. This support has been invaluable, as well as the support from FUF-colleagues and FUF's knowledge-intensive board.

Most of all, we have had the privilege of working with youth from all over the world. In every meeting with them, I learn new things. Their engagement is motivating, and their ambition to create a more peaceful world is humbling. This publication concludes our project support from FBA and contains the stories of six of our participants, of how they came to work in peacebuilding, their hopes for the future, and the benefits of participating in the GPH.

Next, with continued support from the Folke Bernadotte Academy, we look forward to moving from the implementation phase onto the next stage of the GPH, which is achieving the goals that we have set up together.

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to the project since its start in 2021, and an especially big thanks to all the amazing participants, without whom we would have no network. It is truly inspiring to work with all of you.



Maria Kalingas Ruin,

Project manager of the Global Peace Hub
at the Swedish Development Forum, FUF





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Chapter 1, Abdaljabar Mahamed Ahmed, Sudan: *Empowering Youth in Sudan – for a Future Brighter than its Past*



Sudan has suffered many years of civil war, which has severely damaged social cohesion in the country. Research shows that growing up in a context of conflict has serious effects on physical and emotional well-being. Today, 61 percent of the Sudanese population are under the age of 24. This is why including youth in peacebuilding is likely to have a significant effect on the country's future, according to Abdaljabar Mahamed Ahmed, co-founder of Youth for Peace in Sudan.

Abdaljabar, Gabra for short, is 27 years old and lives in the locality Al Fao of Al Qadarif state, an approximate four-and-a-half-hour drive from Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. Gabra has been working as a peacebuilder activist for seven years. It all started when he began studying at university. For the first time, structural issues related to youth came to his attention, and he realised that if he desired change, he must himself become part of the solution. Since then, Gabra has worked at local, national, and international levels, holding trainings and workshops for organisations such as the Development Hub, Search for a Common Ground, the United Nations Development Program, and the United Nations Office of Counterterrorism. He has experience of working with groups of youth as well as groups of women.

The importance of including and working with youth on peacebuilding

Due to the many years of conflict, community cohesion in Sudan has been severely damaged, and differences based on ethnicity and religion have been enhanced and exaggerated – creating even greater division. Research shows that the participation of children and youth in conflict has serious implications for their physical and emotional wellbeing. They are more vulnerable to recruitment by warring groups, they are deprived of education and health care, exposed to violence and death, and separated from their families.



Sudan – Brief History of Conflicts

Sudan is a conflict-afflicted country, with two of the longest lasting civil wars on the African continent. After having reached a Peace Agreement in 2005, South Sudan seceded in 2011. This led to severe consequences on economic growth, and instability and conflict ensued. Mass demonstrations in 2018 led to the removal of then President EL-Bashir, after almost thirty years at the power. Under a Transitional government, that was formed in April 2019, a new Peace Agreement was signed in October 2020. A year after, the Transitional government was overtaken by the military, who dissolved key structures of the government system. The economic and social impact of Covid-19, floods, and political conflicts have had a severe and unprecedented economic and social impact on the country (The World Bank 2022). In October 2021, the military staged a coup. The people and the opposition have since been opposing military rule, and as a consequence, protesters have suffered a lot of violence and many have been arrested (Al Jazeera 2022).

In addition, they suffer from the consequences of conflict, such as poverty, unemployment and the disintegration of families and communities (UN Youth, n.d.).

Working with peacebuilding and inclusion of youth in a context such as Sudan, where 61 % of the population are below 24 years of age (World Population Review 2021), is important for a prosperous future population. A few years ago, Gabra co-founded a non-governmental organisation called Youth for Peace in Sudan. The purpose of Youth for Peace in Sudan is to actively work with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 for Youth Peace and Security (UNSCR 2250), to engage youth in peacebuilding. They work with youth between the ages of 13 and 18 years old. As Gabra continues to give trainings on topics like conflict transformation and prevention of violence extremism, his goal is to improve the capacity of young people to participate in this arena. He has witnessed the transformative power of peacebuilding – it empowers and encourages people to build their communities themselves, through enabling peaceful dialogue and preventing hate speech and conflict. However, speaking to them on topics like conflict sensitivity and conflict transformation is a delicate process, as tribal belonging and religious affiliation has been utilized to fuel the conflict. Whenever Gabra hosts a community talk, he begins by reminding the group of these ground rules; that everyone participating must adhere to not mentioning religion, nor matters concerning tribe. There are open wounds that can easily become conversational triggers, and quickly spiral into conflict. At this point, the best strategy is to avoid them altogether.

The era of the Sudanese youth has begun

Amidst all the economic, political, and structural challenges that Sudan is facing, empowering youth, including them in decision-making processes, and to instil hope, has the potential to change the trajectory of the country. It could lead to an organic and sustainable development, at community level, and long-term at country level. The future of Sudan has the potential to be much more positive than its past. Youth has energy, they are positive and motivated to work towards a country of peace. This engagement and energy motivates Gabra to continue his work in peacebuilding. Working with youth today, he says, is one of the most important keys to a bright future – and it is more exciting than ever.



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[United Nations Security Council \(UNSC\) Res 2250 \(9 December 2015\) UN Doc S/RES/2250](#)



Chapter 2, Itzel Pamela Pérez Gómez, Mexico: *Building Peace in Latin America – A Possible Achievement and an Urgent Need*



Talking about peace in Latin America feels slightly ironic. Although the region does not have open and declared armed conflicts like other regions, according to Amnesty International (2022), it is one of the most violent regions in the world. To achieve peace in places that have become characterised by their prevalence of violence requires change from within. A culture of peace cannot be implemented from above but must develop and grow in its specific context. According to peacebuilder Itzel Pamela Pérez Gómez, this requires the participation and inclusion of all actors at all levels of a society.

The Latin American region accounts for 37 percent of the homicides of the entire planet, claims a study carried out by the think tank Igarapé Institute (2018). Amidst growing organised crime networks and disappearances, citizens in Latin America live their everyday lives with an internalised feeling of insecurity. For women in particular, the situation is even more critical as the Latin American countries represent 14 of the 25 countries in the world with the highest rates of gender-based violence (UN Women 2017). Although laws have been implemented in some countries of the region (for example in Mexico, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Chile, and El Salvador) to classify gender-based crime as femicide*, impunity seems to prevail when it

Femicide

Femicide is defined as the murder of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure or a sense of ownership over women (Russel 2006).

comes to crimes against women. Behind all this violence, many Latin American countries suffer from poverty, a lack of job opportunities and widespread impunity. This situation is catastrophic, especially for young people, who represent about 25 percent of the population of the region.



Positive Peace

Points out that the process of peacebuilding arises when:

- Social harmony is built
- Violence in all its manifestations is reduced
- A community has learnt to solve conflicts and differences in a peaceful way
- There is a justice system that effectively and efficiently handles conflicts between individuals.

As such, the concept of a positive peace encompasses factors such as cultural and structural violence, and not only the absence of armed conflict (Galtung 2003).

Negative Peace

This refers to the simple absence of armed conflict, which is guaranteed above all through a strengthened military system. As such, a negative peace only takes into consideration the occurrence of direct violence and armed conflict, without any regard to structural challenges. An example of a negative peace context is post-apartheid South Africa, when a peace agreement had been achieved, yet structural inequalities remained (Galtung 2003).

This means that a quarter of the Latin American population are likely to have low expectations for their future, due to the absence of a positive peace.

The construction of a culture of peace must come from within

To start the construction of a Latin American culture of peace is not only a possibility, but an urgent need. The proposed solution of how to come to terms with these challenges revolve around methods of peacebuilding. This is an ongoing regional process, that is spearheaded by Colombia. However, in order to design a true peacebuilding strategy, it is imperative to recognize the ethnic and linguistic plurality of Latin America. The region is widely diverse, including at country level. As such, the construction of a culture of peace must be based on realities, definitions and needs of each specific country. A decolonial perspective about the implication of peace, and how it is best achieved, must be considered in a multidirectional way, allowing Latin American thoughts and concepts to be reproduced in a space that is respected. Along these lines, people like Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú, highlights the importance of considering native cultures, their customs and cosmogony in the construction of a culture of peace (Wagner, 2017). This is precisely how we must go about peacebuilding in our region.

The effects of a positive peace

Concepts like a culture of peace, conflict transformation, non-violence, tolerance, inter- and intra- cultural coexistence, must be openly discussed between Latin American governments, civil society, and the private sector – with the objective and desire to reach a joint solution. The correct tools must be identified and used to make changes in state

policies that allow an organic shift towards a culture of peace, with the hope of and ambition to create a new sense of culture.

The time has come to initiate this dialogue in an open and accepting environment. The only way in which we can achieve sustainable peace is through changing the culture starting at grassroot level. Such a change would have a transformative effect on our societies, as it would positively affect the education of children and young people, and it would be promoted by all sectors of society. Once we have fostered a culture of peace and openness, we can begin to integrate all voices of the population, and especially those that have been historically silenced – youth and women.



About the author Itzel Pamela Pérez Gómez

Itzel is a young Mexican scholar with a background in International Relations (IR), Middle Eastern and North African studies, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. She is a Culture of Peace coordinator at the civil society organisation Centre of Integral Attention María Reina de la Paz. She teaches at Anahuac Mayab University in Mérida, where she also holds a special project coordinator role at the Faculty of Law and IR. She has academic and volunteer experience from Mexico as well as from Turkey, Spain, United Kingdom, Morocco, and Tunisia. She considers her participation in the GPH as a possibility for increased exposure for her voluntary engagement, and she appreciates the valuable opportunity to learn from peacebuilders from all over the world.

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Chapter 3, Kinza Salamat, Pakistan: *Individual Transformation as an Effect of Peacebuilding*



This map includes the disputed areas Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh



Kinza Salamat is a 22-year-old peacebuilder from Pakistan. Her experience of diversity, peacebuilding and Nonviolent Communication as a peacebuilding method, has been transformative for her. She considers peacebuilding a helpful and important tool to bring different perspectives to people, and to positively impact communities. In addition, it can also be a powerful way to achieve change at an individual level.

Kinza grew up in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, where she had access to good quality education. After high school, Kinza pursued a bachelor's degree in Economics at the International Islamic University of Islamabad (IIUI). The IIUI is a melting pot of students from different countries of the world. Kinza recalls how amazed she felt to see the diversity of cultures and ethnicities at university. How everyone she passed in the corridor – no matter their origin and mother tongue – would greet each other with *As Salam Alekium*, more or less meaning *Peace be upon you* in Arabic, and the most common salutation in Muslim countries. The environment at university was kind and inclusive, and the exposure to diversity was an important experience for her soon-to-come engagement in peacebuilding.

Kinza's interest in peacebuilding awakens

While deeply immersed in macroeconomic models and all sorts of economic adventures, Kinza had a parallel interest in the world of social media, which brought her onto the path of peacebuilding. She was managing a student-version of the IIUI Facebook page when she was notified of a possible story to share. The story was about the achievement of a fellow student, who had participated in a youth research project of the Sehar Institute (School of Education, Harmony, Awareness and Research Institute). When Kinza got in touch with the fellow student, it led to her being recruited into their social media marketing team. Busy with life as

she knew it, Kinza did not imagine herself doing this for much longer than one or two months. Today, more than three years into her voluntary engagement, she is continuously amazed at how much they accomplish with almost only voluntary commitment. They are about 80 volunteers spread out over Pakistan, with the intent to engage youth from all over the country in peacebuilding initiatives. Kinza is working with marketing, she manages their social media account for youth empowerment and moderates web talks and events. The pandemic was an especially formative period when the whole organization was pushed into becoming 100 % digital (along with the rest of the world) and the Sehar Institute at one point gave 24 capacity building sessions in two months. Managing these sessions immersed her further into peacebuilding activities, which led to her becoming the Head of Peace Club Pakistan – a Sehar Institute initiative for building peace in Pakistan. Another training that they offer is Nonviolent Communication (NVC), which has had an important transformative effect on Kinza's own life, together with her unofficial diversity training at university.

The transformative effect of peacebuilding and Nonviolent Communication

More than just a training, NVC is something that permeates the Sehar Institute in all their work – it is a skill to speak peace in a world of conflicts. During the training, Kinza learnt how to practice empathy and compassion in communication with others. Ever since joining the Sehar Institute and participating in NVC-training, she has felt a remarkable difference in her own behaviour. She has always been frank and outspoken and would often blurt out positive or negative comments alike, as she rarely used to stop and think before speaking. Learning how to use NVC-language has made a big difference for her – she has felt herself becoming less judgmental and more empathetic. Three years of being active at the institute, she feels like a changed person. Her relationships have improved, and she has become a more compassionate human being.

Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is a method on how to be or remain compassionate with the use of language and words. NVC is "a specific approach to communicating – both speaking and listening – that leads us to give from the heart, connecting us with ourselves and with each other in a way that allows our natural compassion to flourish". It is a way to focus attention in a way that reminds us of what our desired outcome of our interaction with others is (Rosenburg 2015, p.5).



Kinza's hope and vision for the future

Having recently turned 22 years old and having graduated from the IIUI in August 2021, Kinza is now a freelancer in marketing – a career she is able to pursue thanks to her voluntary work experience in peacebuilding. Although Kinza continues to volunteer for the Sehar Institute, funding is a prominent challenge for all young peacebuilders who strive for a long-term professional career within the field. Kinza joined the GPH as she is hoping to learn more about advanced peacebuilding tools, so that she may help advance the work of her organisation. She considers the global exchange and collaboration a great opportunity to learn about peacebuilding tools implemented in other countries, and what success rates they have in using these.

Ultimately, Kinza is hoping to be able to continue her work in peacebuilding and to support other youths' transformative processes, in the same way that she has herself experienced a positive change.



Interview and text by: Maria Kalingas Ruin

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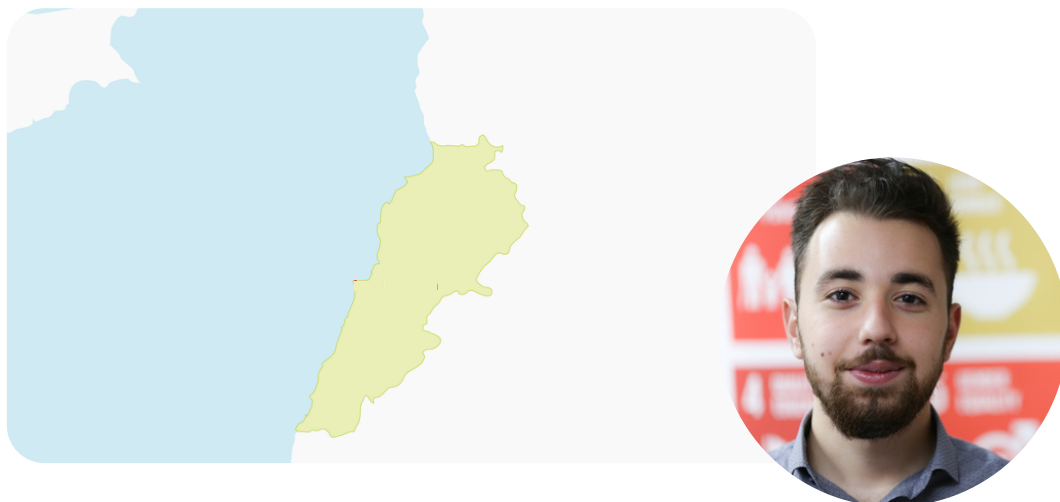
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Chapter 4, Mohamad Al Arnout, Lebanon

Youth Participation – A Game Changer to Overcome Sectarianism in Lebanese Politics



Mohamad Al Arnout is a political and social activist from Beirut, Lebanon. Mohamad is Muslim and has grown up with an awareness of religious-based discrimination. He has witnessed political representatives of all parties using religion to fuel conflict between Muslim and Christian groups. Amidst this political context of sectarianism, Mohamad is invested in increasing political awareness among youth, and has participated in initiatives that bring together youth of different backgrounds. This has fostered a culture of acceptance among participating youth and could be a real game changer for the future of Lebanese politics.

Mohamad's 24th birthday in 2022 marked his fourth year as a political and social activist. Having grown up in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, where 67,6 % of the population is Muslim and 32,4 % Christian (DOS 2019), he has been aware of the religious divide for as long as he can remember. Party representatives from Muslim and Christian parties alike would often give political speeches, urging people to give them their vote to prevent attacks and aggression from "the other side".

He was 13 years old when he was first confronted with what he perceived as a paradoxical behaviour of the politicians of his country. He was watching a political program with his father when the party representatives greeted each other with kisses and hugs, before sitting down at the same table. Mohamad was astonished. These people who hate each other, who want to destroy each other, were behaving like friends rather than enemies. He turned questioning to his father who said: "Well, now you understand politics". This was Mohamad's first conscious encounter with what he later would come to know as political sectarianism .



Sectarianism

Sectarianism can be defined as a "narrow-minded adherence to a particular sect (political, ethnic, or religious), often leading to conflict with those of different sects or possessing different beliefs" (Oxford Reference: sectarianism). Sectarianism in a political context can be used as a strategy to politicise and divide a society. In such contexts, sectarianism is actively produced and consumed by the political individuals whose objective is to remain in power (Al-Hindawi, Kadhim 2021). In the case of Lebanon, the power of religious leaders is institutionalised within the political system, granting them power over religious affairs and societal functions, such as education and other public services. These religious leaders, who have been elected by elite institutions and not democratically appointed, help perpetuate a sectarian system that inhibits social integration, and increases the divide between groups of Muslims and Christians (Henley 2016).

Since that moment, he became increasingly aware of the deliberate construction of narratives within political discourse, of how religion was made into a weapon, and how hate speech was used as an effective tool to support the people in power.

Representing Lebanese youth in politics

Mohamad's interest in politics and the function of society inspired him to pursue a bachelor's degree in law, which he attained in 2021. He has been a participant of the United Nations Development Program Youth Leadership Program (UNDP YLP) and was elected Youth Member of Parliament in October 2020. He is also engaged in the soon-to-be-launched initiative Advocacy Force for Development and Anti-corruption in Lebanon (AFDAL), initiated by a group of youth who, with the support of the UNDP, advocate for the implementation of an anti-corruption strategy.

Working in different roles, he has observed how political sectarianism plays a significant role in upholding the structural exclusion of youth from the political arena. A change in the system requires transformation from within, and Mohamad aims to contribute to this change together with other youths. He is invested in promoting political awareness among youth in his country and regularly hosts community talks for groups of youth. During these talks, the aim is to increase political awareness among youth of different backgrounds, to prevent that new generations inherit the trauma of discrimination and sectarianism of today's political leaders. Mohamad's ambition with participating in the GPH is to get better equipped with new skills and an extended network, which he will be able to use in contributing to a peaceful Lebanon, free of corruption and sectarianism.

Youth as change makers

Mohamad is worried that the structural discrimination based on religion – sometimes tangible, but often subtle in its function – might hinder his own high ambitions to contribute to a bright political future. Mohamad would like to see a future Lebanon where all citizens collaborate peacefully for a prosperous and sustainable society.

There are opportunities in politically empowering youth, and power in acknowledging their potential as change makers. Youth are undeniably the future of all societies, which means there is massive potential in including them in the decision-making arena of today. If given a chance, they can implement fresh ways to communicate and interact between themselves, overcoming hindering and discriminatory structures upheld by older generations.



Interview and text by: Maria Kalingas Ruin

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Chapter 5, Nino Gabadze, Georgia

Growing up in Close Proximity to Conflict, and the Art of Peacebuilding



Nino Gabadze grew up in the conflict-affected country Georgia. She became interested in peacebuilding already as a teenager. Today, she is hosting workshops and trains other youths in topics related to peacebuilding. She is also working with activism – a way to combine art with activism. Through activism, she is hoping to reach out to a broader public and strengthen the narrative of similarities between the different groups in her country – as a way to discourage conflict.

Nino is a 26-year-old peacebuilder from Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. She grew up in a diverse neighbourhood, with a mix of different ethnicities and religions, and it was common to celebrate all holidays, not just the ones associated with one's own religion. Nino expresses that growing up in such a diverse and friendly context allowed her to develop an understanding early on, that there are different ways of being, which should all be accepted.

At the age of 17, Nino attended a play about the region of Abkhazia, which has been a disputed region for many years. Up until then, she had never been in direct contact with people from there and had not heard their side of the story. During the play, Nino realised that the story told was different from the one she knew. In this version, her own country was not as innocent as its constructed narrative suggested. At that time, Nino understood that lines between good and bad are blurred. The early exposure to diversity, and the eye-opening experience at the theatre, led to her pursuing an academic career in peacebuilding and diplomacy.



The Disputed Territory of Abkhazia

Abkhazia borders Georgia and Russia, with a coastline on the Black Sea. Between 1992 and 1993, Abkhazia won a war against Georgia and seceded, and formally declared independence in 1999. After the war between Georgia and Russia in 2008, Russia recognised Abkhazia as an independent state, which led to Georgia declaring the region "occupied" by Russia. In 2014, Russia and Abkhazia signed a "strategic partnership" agreement, which led to Georgia accusing Russia of trying to annex the region (BBC News, 2020). Note that there are many accounts of the territorial dispute of Abkhazia. This summary is simplified and does not reflect the opinions or perspectives of different groups. For further reading, Nino recommends texts written by Abkhazian and Georgian authors.

Academic background and engagement in peacebuilding

Nino grew up in an economically disadvantaged family and her parents did everything they could for Nino and her brother. They put all the money they could spare into their education. When Nino graduated with a bachelor's degree in International Relations from the International Black Sea University, she was the first to ever graduate in her family. Alongside her studies, she became active in various organisations working with diversity, and already then, she acquired practical experience in peacebuilding.

Currently, Nino is active within several organisations. One of them is the Youth Peace Ambassador Network – which consists of young people who give workshops on topics like conflict-transformation and peacebuilding processes. Nino highlights that this is an important way to empower youth, but that the influential power of youth remains limited. Young people are important for peacebuilding – they have good ideas and new ways of thinking. Nino's own work with activism is an example of this. Her art is a way to visually highlight similarities between different ethnic groups in the Caucasus region, through a lens of conflict and history. The goal is to strengthen the narrative of a common identity, and to blur the lines of imagined differences between the groups. The project has also helped her form her thoughts and express herself with even more clarity.

Activism

The word activism is a combination of art and activism. Artistic Activism as a practice combines activism, defined as the activity of challenging and changing power relations, with art. While the goal of activism is to create an effect of some kind, art is not as likely to have an explicit target group nor strategy. The purpose with art is often to stimulate a feeling, to encourage reflection, and to show new perspectives. Combining the two means to have a strategy for a desired outcome, while using art to stir emotions. The intention is to get more people emotionally engaged, which will ultimately improve chances of the desired social change (Duncome, Lambert 2018).

A future where youth is included at the table of decision-making

Nino hopes that future generations will be more inclusive, empathetic, and accepting of people from different backgrounds. Listening to the ideas of youth is an important part in achieving this, and Nino does not consider this to be the case today. Politicians must allow the voice of youth to be heard by offering them a seat at the decision-making table.

She considers the GPH a great way for her and the other participants to support and learn from each other. She thinks the global exchange can improve her critical thinking, as well as deepen her empathy and understanding. She works with inclusion and diversity, and would like to contribute with these and other skills to her GPH peers. Working towards the goal of increased youth inclusion, and for a more peaceful future, is a great motivator for Nino to continue creating activism and to continue her work in peacebuilding.

You can find Nino's art on Instagram under her username: [@CollageGenerator](#). More of her artwork is available on [Behance](#).

The Caucasus region

The Caucasus region is situated in south-eastern Europe and includes the countries of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and part of southern Russia (Merriam-Webster 2022).



Interview by: Samira Issa

Samira is a member of FUF's Editorial Group.
Text by Maria Kalingas Ruin and Samira Issa.



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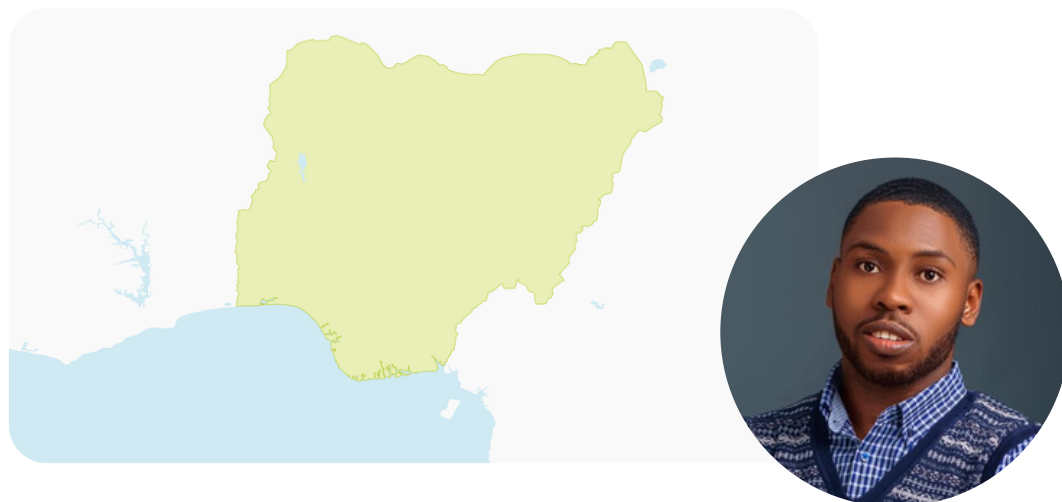
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Chapter 6, Moses Ekwere, Nigeria

The Importance of Investing in Youth for a Sustainable Future in Nigeria



Creating a sustainable future for youth in Nigeria is increasingly challenging, especially if young people continue to be marginalised, denied decent employment opportunities, and are excluded from the political arena – despite being the future of the country. According to Moses Ekwere, a young peacebuilder from Nigeria, it is crucial to engage youth in politics and social matters. Youth inclusion, as well as investing in education, employment and access to health and services, is essential for achieving development and a prosperous future.

My name is Moses Ekwere, and I grew up in Akwa Ibom State in the South-South region of Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State is one of the largest producers of petroleum in Nigeria, and is also famous for its rich cultural heritage, hospitality, and delicious delicacies, such as the Atama and Edikang-Ikong soups. Akwa Ibom was traditionally considered the symbol of national peace and security. At a point when kidnappings and acts of terrorism started occurring in other Nigerian states, Akwa Ibom was considered a haven, where people could go to bed, sleep, and wake up calmly without having to worry about crime knocking on their doors.

In recent times, the security situation of Akwa Ibom State has changed, and corrupt practices in governance structures have increased. In addition, mismanagement of publicly allocated funds is a reason behind youth unemployment, increased poverty, and other economic vices (Simon, 2021). This is also fuelling armed conflict, kidnappings, armed robbery, and other violent crimes in the state, and in Nigeria as a whole. If the unwholesome trends of corruption and social unrest is not addressed, it will likely threaten the prevailing peace in the country, especially as Nigeria is approaching the 2023 general elections (Udeme Utip, 2021). I adore

Nigeria, but it is a tough love tinged with despair and uncertainty, as the politicians make promises that they do not seem to want or be able to fulfil.

The Benefits and Possibilities of Investing in Nigerian Youth

Today, we see a rise in unemployment, mortality rates, security concerns and poverty levels in Nigeria (Akinyetun, 2021, p.V). Although the state has launched youth empowerment programs, they have proved to be ineffective and unsustainable. This appears to be due to the politicisation of these programs, which seem to be geared at embezzling publicly allocated funds (Tanko 2021, Bamidele 2021).

The consequences of poor political administration have been dramatically manifested in insurgencies of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, Niger Delta militants, and the Biafra movement (Okoro, 2014). There has been an increase in human rights violations that is particularly directed at young people, for example by the Nigerian government Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The increased violence led to the EndSARS demonstrations that started in October 2020, during which youth protested the actions of SARS (Okoi, Iwara, 2021). During the EndSARS demonstrations, Nigerian youth were assaulted, harassed, and some were killed by the Nigerian SARS-officers (Amnesty International, 2020). On the evening of October 20 2020, a significant number of peaceful youth protesters at the Lekki toll gate, an upscale district in Lagos, were massacred. Officers of the Nigerian army shot, injured, and killed several unarmed and defenceless protesters without any justification or provocation, despite the fact that they were singing the National Anthem and waving the Nigerian flag. This police brutality and human rights violation lead to the loss of several lives (Eromo Egbejule, 2021).

The EndSARS protests revealed that the so-called democracy, which is meant to be for the people, seems to work against what is best for the people. Indeed, there is a dire need for a transparency pledge and comprehensive policy reform in Nigeria. The policy reform should be preceded by addressing questions like youth inclusion, respect of human rights, improved economic management, and decreasing unemployment, poverty, and inequality.

Nigeria's Youth as the Country's Demographic Dividend

Nigeria is sometimes portrayed as having a demographic dividend in the form of a remarkably young generation. Still, whether the country will be able to reap the potential economic benefits of this remains uncertain. The effects of political corruption are disastrous. Older government leaders do not allow youth to lead despite the introduction of the parliament act "Not Too Young To Run", which was a campaign to reduce the age limit for running for elective office, signed in 2018 (Chinedu Asadu, 2019).

I urge for increased youth involvement in the decision-making process and the opportunity for more youths to serve on the Federal Executive Council – the highest policy-making body of government in Nigeria. Furthermore, I encourage the Nigerian government to prioritise youth matters, so that young people can develop and strengthen their confidence in a way that will ultimately equip them to be productive citizens.

Concurrently, attention should be paid to high population growth, poor education, health challenges, and security concerns. If these challenges are adequately addressed, empowering young people can reduce unemployment and poverty in Nigeria. An important step to create a more sustainable future is to empower the youth of today. If the youth of today feels hope for the future, the future looks brighter for the youth of tomorrow.



About the author Moses Ekwere

Moses Ekwere is an Environmental Ambassador for the Greenway International Foundation (GIF), a youth-led environmental protection organisation, dedicated to achieving a carbon-free world and a plastic-free ocean. He recently completed a course on Business Ethics at the European Business University of Luxembourg and is in his final year of a bachelor's degree in business administration at Westend University College, Ghana.

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This report collects some stories from a few members of the Global Peace Hub network during the implementation phase of this project. Their stories reflect both struggle and hope when it comes to bringing about positive change in their communities. They also highlight the importance of being able to interact and exchange ideas with other young people working to make their societies more just, peaceful and sustainable. The network is funded by Folke Bernadotte Academy the Swedish agency for peace, security and development.

The Global Peace Hub is part of the Swedish Development Forum (FUF, Föreningen för utvecklingsfrågor) a members' organisation headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden. FUF was formally founded in 1972 and has since then been working to improve the conditions for building a more just, sustainable and peaceful world, primarily through knowledge exchange and capacity training for young people passionate about global issues.

Would you like to learn more about the Global Peace Hub and the Swedish Development Forum? Check out www.fuf.se/en

