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Strengthening youth engagement in post-Jasmine Revolution Tunisia

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With the aim to identify challenges that restrain youth engagement in peace processes and strategies to overcome these obstacles, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation is exploring experiences of youth in peacebuilding in Myanmar, Liberia and Tunisia. The work builds on the Foundation's Development Dialogue no. 63 on Inclusive Peacebuilding: Recognised but not Realised, which identifies young people as a key stakeholder group in the process of building sustainable peace. This paper presents some preliminary findings from the Tunisia case study and from a consultation workshop on this theme organised by the Foundation in May 2016 in Uppsala, Sweden, with youth from a variety of backgrounds.

Introduction

While youth contribute to an ever-growing demographic bulge, the positive role that youth can play in creating more peaceful and inclusive societies has only recently received serious recognition in the international policy arena.

The first formal recognition on a global scale that youth participation is vital for sustainable peace came in December 2015 with Security Council Resolution (SCR) 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security. A result of joint initiatives over several years by youth organisations, the United Nations (UN) Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), SCR 2250 highlights the inclusion of youth in peace and decision making processes as a priority area for the UN. Parallel resolutions passed in the UN Security Council (SCR 2282) and the General Assembly (A/RES/70/262) in April 2016 on the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (PBA) further underscore the importance of youth participation, reaffirming the role of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) to strengthen youth engagement in peacebuilding efforts. The resolutions also highlight the need for education, skills training and employment to increase the inclusion of youth in decision making processes. Yet, there is a lack of systematic evidence of how youth have been and are engaged in various peacebuilding contexts and how their participation can be broadened and deepened.

Despite this acknowledgement, youth—defined here as 18 to 29 year olds¹—continue to face challenges in making their voices heard in local, national and international political processes. More evidence for how young people are contributing to formal and informal peace initiatives is needed. To continue its inclusivity work and in recognition of the importance of understanding local experiences and contexts in promoting inclusive peacebuilding, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation aims to highlight local and youth perspectives on and approaches to engaging youth in the implementation of SCR 2250 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Country case studies on Tunisia, Myanmar, and Liberia will further examine the experience of youth in building peace, a key stakeholder group identified in the Foundation's Development Dialogue no. 63. Myanmar² and Liberia were chosen to build on the Foundation's established relationships with local partners who have been exploring questions of inclusivity. Tunisia was selected due to its role as a pilot country for the implementation of the SDGs and because it demonstrates the potential of peacebuilding in preventing the eruption of violent conflict.

The Tunisian context

The Jasmine Revolution, sparked by the self-immolation of street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi in December 2010, led to the end of the 23-year authoritarian regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali a few weeks later in January 2011. The significant participation of youth ages 15 to 29, about 24.5% of the population³, in the Revolution demonstrated a deep commitment to improving society through civic engagement and political activism.

Following the Revolution, the country entered into a phase of fragile democratic transition, and the first genuinely free elections were organized in October 2011 to elect the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), charged with drafting a new constitution and forming an interim government. The winning moderate Islamist party Ennahda was required to form an uneasy coalition with the Congress for the Republic party and Ettakatol party, both secularist.

Under the tripartite government, the NCA faced considerable challenges in its attempts to draft a new constitution, including major disagreements on the role of religion and the political structure. The assassinations of secular opposition leaders Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi further threatened Tunisia's fragile transition process and its security situation, prompting the NCA to suspend its activities and Tunisia to enter a phase of increasing polarisation and mounting political violence. Following dialogue initiated and facilitated by the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, a new Constitution was adopted on 27 January 2014. Legislative and presidential elections followed in October and November 2014, respectively, both with wins for the secularist Nidaa Tounes party.

While Tunisian youth started and were actively involved throughout the Revolution, the inclusion of youth following its end has been limited. Growing disenchantment and disillusionment among youth needs to be addressed in order to ensure an inclusive society in which youth feel they have ownership in peace and decision making processes.

Key considerations for engaging youth

Early findings from the Tunisian case study present considerations for engaging youth in building peaceful societies that are also relevant in other contexts. These findings, briefly elaborated here, include the importance of youth having opportunities to set the narrative about their experiences; the key role civil society, educational institutions and the private sector play in engaging youth; the critical element of dialogue and trust building between youth and security forces and civil servants; and the need for better coherence between peacebuilding and efforts aimed at countering violent extremism.

1 *Youth, including marginalised youth, should be given the opportunity to tell their own stories, to express their concerns and their aspirations and to set their own narratives.*

Mainstream media often portrays youth as perpetrators or victims of violence, which only increases youth's marginalisation and fuels feelings of disenchantment. Tunisian youth in the rural and interior areas and urban lower-income neighbourhoods, often depicted as prone to participation in criminal and terrorist activities, are particularly marginalised and face enormous challenges such as a lack of access to basic needs and services. Young women face additional marginalisation due to traditional social norms. Efforts by international and national government and peace and development organisations to implement sustainable development projects intended to reach these marginalised groups are insufficient. As a result, many youth express frustration about being unable to make their voices heard, feel alienated from the transition process and are cynical about post-Revolution Tunisia.

Helping to transform the narrative to one in which youth are agents of peace is key to ensuring that they have active roles in building resilient and inclusive communities. Creative methods to engage youth, through film, radio, and sport, can open up opportunities that allow youth to take ownership in peace processes. Projects in Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen, two suburbs of Tunis, are attempting to change the narrative by providing young people from these neighbourhoods with the chance to share their experiences and perspectives. Through the use of technology and communications platforms youth can articulate their concerns, connect with local authorities and participate in local governance.⁴

2 *Strengthening civil society's role in peace processes is vital to creating greater inclusivity and sustainability and increasing youth participation in decision-making processes.*

The contribution of youth to peace processes and implementation of the SDGs in Tunisia and elsewhere often occurs through their involvement in civil society. In the aftermath of the Tunisian Revolution, youth have become more actively involved in civil society, launching their own initiatives and advocating for and campaigning on issues such as human rights and corruption. Still, despite the existence of many creative ideas, youth initiatives in Tunisia are undermined by poor coordination and continue to lack the resources and support needed to ensure sustainability. Peace and development organisations should develop and support the results of participatory mapping initiatives of youth-led projects and organisations to promote greater awareness of how youth are already involved in peace processes and how this engagement can be strengthened.

3 *Initiatives to engage youth in peace and development processes should be designed and implemented in coherence with efforts to address violent extremism.*

Efforts to counter or prevent violent extremism are impeded by a lack of understanding of the processes that contribute to its spread and appeal among young people. While there is no simple explanation for the rise of violent extremism, socio-economic grievances, marginalisation and feelings of disenchantment with political and legislative structures are often identified as its main drivers.⁵ Extremist movements typically exploit young peoples' feelings of exclusion and provide incentives, in the form of money and other benefits, that entice youth to join.

The involvement of Tunisian youth in terrorist organisations in Tunisia, Syria and Libya is perceived as a significant threat to peace in the region, with as many as 6000 Tunisians suspected of having joined Islamist groups in recent years to fight in Syria.⁶ There are, however, many Tunisian youths actively involved in efforts to counter or prevent the rise of violent extremism and deeply committed to spreading a culture of dialogue and peace. Their actions alone will not be enough to stem the rise of violent extremism unless other actors—including government, educational, and religious leaders at the local, national, and international levels—lend greater support to their efforts. National youth policies, backed by dedicated resources, that recognise and engage young men and women as citizens, partners and stakeholders in efforts to institutionalise inclusivity and tolerance are needed.

4 *Engaging youth in peace and development processes requires a concerted effort to build partnerships and dialogue with security forces and civil servants.*

Inclusive societies require efforts to nurture trust, facilitate dialogue and enable cooperation between youth and officials, including policy makers and police. There is widespread mistrust of the police and security sector among Tunisians in general and youth in particular. Violence instigated by the police led to the deaths of 300 people and injured 700 – most of them youth – during the first month of the Revolution.⁷ Many acts of torture and human rights abuses have been reported and denounced by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.⁸ A parliamentary oversight committee on the security sector was created in October 2011 under the NCA to document police misconduct, but disintegrated after only a few months due to cited unresponsiveness by the Ministry of Interior.⁹ In 2012 the Young Lawyers Association in Tunisia submitted proposals to strengthen the rule of law and prosecution procedures, but changing legislative and political structures has proved difficult.¹⁰ To build trust between youth and security forces, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) has been supporting training initiatives for police on rule of law

and efforts to counter violent extremism by facilitating dialogue between security forces and communities.¹¹ Greater efforts are needed to improve perception of and confidence in the security sector.

While youth in Tunisia are very active in civil society, their participation in politics and decision making processes remains very limited. Studies show that Tunisian youth tend to perceive existing political structures as corrupt.¹² In an attempt to build trust between youth and officials, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) helped establish Youth Leaders Councils in 13 out of Tunisia's 24 governorates to strengthen the participation of youth in decision making and connect them with local authorities. The Youth Council in Sidi Bouzid, named I-Lead, focuses on the importance of grassroots action for addressing social problems, and on communicating youth recommendations to local authorities.¹³ The inclusion of youth in politics, emphasising active citizenship, is key to building confidence in public institutions and addressing marginalisation and social exclusion.

5 *Universities and schools should incorporate peace education programmes within their curricula to promote inclusive initiatives, attitudes and behaviours.*

Findings from the Tunisia case study underscored the positive impact that education, and particularly peace education curricula, can have on building more peaceful and inclusive societies. The education sector can serve as a key channel for dialogue and promote reconciliation between groups at schools and universities, a process that is often continued when students go home to their communities. Sawtouna Tunisia is one example of a local organisation advocating for the incorporation of peace education in Tunisian schools by training teachers to integrate the principles of peace and dialogue in their day-to-day exchanges with students.¹⁴ The Alliance of Tunisian Facilitators, a group of civil society leaders, lawyers and journalists trained by USIP to mediate conflicts in their communities, are also actively engaging student union leaders to resolve conflicts on university campuses through dialogue.¹⁵ Increasing youth's access to higher education that provides the skills and knowledge needed in the local job market is also critical.

6 *Youth need employment opportunities in line with their knowledge and skills to feel that they have a greater voice in society.*

The rate of unemployment among young people in Tunisia aged 15 to 24 was as high as 38% in 2012.¹⁶ Those employed are often stuck in poor quality and badly paid jobs, with limited or no social protection. Young women are more likely than young men to be unemployed (41.8% compared to 37.7 % in 2012), largely due to conservative social norms, as are those in the

south and the interior. Youth with tertiary education also experience high rates of unemployment (62.3 %), due to the low demand for highly skilled labour. Youth with advanced degrees are often stuck in jobs for which they are overqualified, further fueling feelings of frustration and marginalisation.

7 *Greater cooperation on youth engagement is needed between governments and private sector, particularly through initiatives that lead to employment opportunities.*

Given their engagement in many of the areas that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to improve, the private sector has an important role to play in strengthening the participation of youth in these efforts. According to an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on strengthening youth employability in Tunisia, nearly 65% of Tunisian youth aged between 15 and 29 would like to work for the government, which is perceived as a guarantor of stability, social benefits and steady income, while a mere 22% expressed their interest in working in the private sector.¹⁷ Local and national governments should ensure that education programmes for youth provide the skills-training needed to work in the private sector, adequately address issues of corruption and nepotism and stimulate the creation of more private sector jobs that offer better wages, stability and access to welfare. The private sector should become more engaged in dialogue on reforming the education system so it starts delivering the skills needed for future employment in Tunisia.

Private sector enterprises should support and invest in youth, engaging them as stakeholders and partners when designing business strategies. Employment and training opportunities in areas where companies are facing skill shortages benefit the companies and build youth's capacities. International Youth Foundation (IYF)'s *Tunisia Works* programme is connecting youth with actors from public sector, the business community, and civil society with a view to improve youth employment prospects and help them implement their business ideas. Several youth have through the programme started their own micro-enterprises throughout the country and some of them, such as *Création et Créativité pour le Développement et l'Embauche-Bizerte* (CCDE), have even been able to create employment opportunities for other youth.¹⁸

Tunisians celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Arab Spring, Thursday, Jan. 14, 2016 in Tunis. Tunisian teachers, activists and political parties have joined to celebrate five years since protesters drove out their autocratic president and ushered in a democratic era. The crowd at Thursday's rally included families of those killed in weeks of protests against President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, who fled on Jan. 14, 2011. (AP Photo/Riadh Dridi)



The way forward: strategies for engaging youth

The international community still has much to learn when it comes to identifying effective strategies and mechanisms for engaging youth and implementing the recommendations presented in SCR 2250. To identify how youth are engaged in peace processes and contributing to sustainable development, as well as methods for strengthening this engagement at the local, national and international levels, SCR 2250 mandated the UN Secretary-General to submit a Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. The Progress Study, led by the Inter-agency Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding, will be finalised by the end of 2017 and will consist of thematic papers and country case studies and will rely heavily on consultations with youth. To feed into the Progress Study, the findings presented in this paper, as well as findings from the Foundation's other case studies, will be collated into a synthesis report presenting observations and strategies for how the PBC can fulfil its mandate to ensure the inclusion of youth in peacebuilding. This will also complement the Foundation's efforts to support implementation of the PBA review, in which inclusive national ownership and youth engagement in particular are identified as critical for sustainable peace.

A preliminary exploration of these issues in Tunisia and a consultation on youth engagement confirm the importance of understanding local context and using structures already in place to engage youth. Peace education strategies need to consider and adapt to local contexts and capacities, including informal processes for peace using a variety of methodologies and changing strategies as needed. There is a need to strengthen platforms that allow youth to raise their voices and set their own narratives, including through film, radio and art, giving youth a greater sense of ownership in peace

processes. Increased cooperation and collaboration between various actors and stakeholders, including civil society, security forces and education and private sectors, as well as local, national and international governmental institutions is needed to ensure that these voices are actively included in decision making processes at all levels.

While the UN and international community have increasingly engaged in efforts to include youth in building peace, more is needed to strengthen and institutionalise this engagement, particularly within decision making processes. In implementing SCR 2250, it is imperative that the PBSO, the PBC and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) continue to support outreach initiatives geared towards youth carried out by NGOs, governments and other UN agencies, as well as platforms for youth to set their own narratives and agendas regarding peace processes. Initiatives such as the Amman Youth Summit in August 2015 and the Global Youth Summit Against Violent Extremism in September 2015 should be built upon, ensuring that youth from more marginalised sectors of society are included. UN Peacebuilding institutions should also provide direct technical and financial support to youth-led organisations involved in peace efforts and efforts to counter or prevent violent extremism and should ensure that these organisations receive leadership and skills training to effectively run projects. The PBF Youth Promotion Initiative, launched in May 2016, demonstrates a commitment to the inclusion of youth by providing the opportunity for direct financing of NGOs working on youth empowerment and participation, but could go even further by focusing on funding initiatives that are led by youth. Finally, the UN can play a role in creating more sustainable cooperation between government actors and the private sector in achieving peaceful and inclusive societies.

End Notes

¹The Foundation has adopted the definition used in SCR 2250, which defines youth as persons between the ages of 18–29 years old. In line with the resolution, the Foundation recognises that the definition of youth varies across national and international organisations, including within the United Nations itself. The definition of youth also depends on social, cultural and political factors in a given country.

²The military regime changed the name of the country from Burma to Myanmar in 1989. The name is still contested and the use of one or the other can be seen as a political statement. In its case studies the Foundation uses Myanmar as that is the name used by its local partner.

³Institut National de la Statistique,
<http://www.ins.nat.tn/indexfr.php>

⁴For more information on these projects see
<http://www.international-alert.org/what-we-do/where-we-work/middle-east-and-north-africa/tunisia/projects/13591>

⁵Collected from key informant interviews conducted by the Foundation, April and May 2016. These drivers have been explored by UNDP's Africa Bureau. See
<http://www.africa.undp.org/content/rba/en/home/library/reports/preventing-and-responding-to-violent-extremism-in-africa--a-deve/>

⁶According to a report by the Soufan Group first published in 2014 and updated in 2015.
www.soufangroup.com

⁷<http://jurist.org/paperchase/2011/05/un-rights-expert-300-died-during-tunisia-uprising.php>

⁸For more information see
<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2012/country-chapters/tunisia> and
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/01/tunisia-evidence-of-torture-and-deaths-in-custody/>

⁹For more information on SSR in Tunisia see
<https://www.ciaonet.org/attachments/26613/uploads/and>
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/161-reform-and-security-strategy-in-tunisia.aspx>

¹⁰<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR304.pdf>

¹¹For more information on USIP supported programming in Tunisia see
http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/The-Current-Situation-in-Tunisia_1.pdf

¹²See http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Tunisia_PoliticsOnTheMargins_EN_2016.pdf

¹³For more information on the Youth Leaders Council see
<https://www.sfcg.org/youth-leaders-councils/>

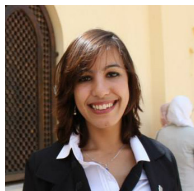
¹⁴Interview Sawtouna, May 2016; for more information on Sawtouna see
<https://www.facebook.com/Sawtounatunisia-456372264389384/>

¹⁵For more information see
<http://www.usip.org/publications/the-current-situation-in-tunisia>

¹⁶For these and other statistics on youth unemployment in Tunisia see
<http://www.oecd.org/els/investing-in-youth-tunisia-9789264226470-en.htm>

¹⁷For the full report see <http://www.oecd.org/els/investing-in-youth-tunisia-9789264226470-en.htm>

¹⁸For more information on the International Youth Foundation's Tunisia Works programme and other initiatives see
<http://www.iyfnet.org/country/tunisia> and
<http://www.iyfnet.org/blog/iyf-announces-first-grant-recipients-tunisia>



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