

Youth & Conflict



A TOOLKIT FOR INTERVENTION

Key Issues

Lessons Learned

Program Options

Resources



US Agency for International Development (USAID)
Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation



Conflict can be an inherent and legitimate part of social and political life, but in many places the costs and consequences of conflict, crisis, and state failure have become unacceptably high. Violent conflict dramatically disrupts traditional development, and it can spill over borders and reduce growth and prosperity across entire regions. Although development and humanitarian assistance programs are increasingly implemented in situations of open or latent violence, unfortunately, most still do not explicitly incorporate a sensitivity

F r o m t h e D i r e c t o r

The Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) in the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was established to provide technical leadership on conflict to USAID Missions and our Washington-based regional and pillar bureaus. The vast majority of our field missions and staff are currently working in areas that are either in conflict, coming out of conflict, or are at high-risk for violence. A central objective of the office is to integrate or “mainstream” best practices in conflict management and mitigation into more traditional development sectors such as agriculture, economic growth, democracy, education, and health. Where appropriate, CMM will be an advocate for stable change.

As Director of CMM, I am pleased to introduce this document on youth and conflict. I hope that readers will find the information contained herein thoughtful, innovative, and useful. CMM will release additional toolkits in the near future, and I trust that each one will bring its own unique value to discussions about development and conflict. We consider these toolkits to be “living documents” and would welcome your comments and observations to help us improve future iterations.

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Steering Youth from Violent Conflict: A Toolkit for Programming

This toolkit is part of a series that explores how development assistance can address key risk factors associated with conflict. One area that is receiving increasing attention is the relationship between young people and violence. Recent studies have found a significant correlation between large youth cohorts and political instability and violence. A large pool of young people does not need to be destabilizing, however if young people - particularly young men - are uprooted, intolerant, jobless, and with few opportunities for positive engagement, they represent a ready pool of recruits for ethnic, religious, and political extremists seeking to mobilize violence.

This document: 1) examines key issues related to youth participation in violence; 2) discusses lessons learned in developing programs for at-risk youth; 3) presents a range of program options; and 4) identifies relevant USAID mechanisms and implementing partners. Monitoring and evaluation tools for youth/conflict programs are being developed. Together, the elements of this toolkit are designed to help raise awareness about the linkages between young people, development aid, and conflict; and to assist officers integrate a conflict perspective into their development programming.

The toolkits in this series explore individual risk factors in depth. They do not identify all relevant factors linked to violence. As such, they are designed to serve as companion pieces to conflict assessments. Conflict assessments provide a broad overview of destabilizing patterns and trends in a society. They sift through the many potential causes of conflict that exist and zero in on those that are most likely to lead to violence (or renewed violence) in a particular context. While they provide recommendations about how to make development and humanitarian assistance more responsive to conflict dynamics, they do not provide detailed guidance on how to design specific activities. The toolkits in this series are intended to fill that gap by moving from a diagnosis of the problem to a more detailed discussion of potential interventions. Together, the assessment framework and toolkits are designed to help Missions gain a deeper understanding of the forces driving violence and to develop more strategic and focused interventions.

This document was initially authored by Jack Goldstone, Professor of Public Policy at George Mason University. It was subsequently revised with substantial input from officers in USAID Missions, experts on youth, and members of the NGO community. Comments, questions, and requests for additional information should be directed to the Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation.

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Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance
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Key Issues



Photo: Panos/Voeten

When young people are uprooted, jobless, intolerant, alienated, and with few opportunities for positive engagement, they represent a ready pool of recruits for groups seeking to mobilize violence.

In many developing countries, young people are coming of age in societies that lack stable government, economic growth, or basic material and physical security. In such circumstances, youth often turn away from the authority and ideology of older generations and seek to mobilize their own generation in search of solutions.

This can be extremely positive—in many places young people have been a powerful force for constructive change. In Serbia, young people played a key role in toppling Milosevic. However, the challenge posed by youth can be tremendously destructive when they are exploited by proponents of violent ideologies or seek to improve their situation by dominating others.

Although a large pool of young people is not inherently destabilizing, there is a

strong correlation between large youth cohorts and political violence. When young people—particularly young men—are uprooted, jobless, intolerant, alienated, and with few opportunities for positive engagement, they represent a ready pool of recruits for groups seeking to mobilize violence.

Whether or not they participate directly in armed combat, youth are victimized by widespread violence. The attention of the international community has tended

to focus on child soldiers. However, adolescents are far more likely than young children to be forcibly recruited into militias and to suffer the attendant problems of trauma, sexual abuse, and a loss of educational and economic opportunities.

To create stable societies, we need to counter the traumatizing and destructive experiences that war-affected youth have undergone. More broadly, we need to create conditions for positive and constructive roles for youth in developing countries, so they will not turn to violence in an attempt to satisfy their needs. An important way to avoid future conflict is to draw on the energy and capacities of youth as the leaders of tomorrow's societies.

Defining Youth

All youth are not the same, nor is their experience, and the concept of youth is itself debated: Some favor biological markers, in which youth is the period between puberty and parenthood, while others define youth in terms of cultural markers—a distinct social status with specific roles, rituals, and relationships.

For the purposes of this study, youth are defined as having reached the stage in life where they are physically capable of assuming adult roles (i.e., have passed puberty) but would generally not be expected to make decisions or provide support for others. That is, they have left behind childhood but have not yet assumed the responsibilities of adulthood. In terms of age, this is usually between 15 and 24, although some societies frame this differently. Indeed, in societies subject to crisis or upheaval, the concept of youth may radically alter as boys and girls are forced to take on adult responsibilities at a very young age. Definitions may also vary for men and women.

Youth Cohorts and Demographic Bulges

Several studies have found that a disproportionately large youth cohort relative to the rest of the population—a trend that leads to a 'bulge' in a country's demographic structure—is linked to the potential for violence (Goldstone 1991,

Fuller and Pitts 1990). There are several reasons why this can be the case. First, there is strength in numbers. An exceptionally large youth cohort is often conscious of itself as a larger force than its elders. Second, a large, youthful population may place heavy strains on schools, health care, housing, and other public services—strains that can overwhelm fragile institutions and erode support for government authorities. Third, youth cohorts who are not given the opportunity to integrate into community and social structures are less able to acquire the skills they need for peaceful and constructive adult lives. A deprived, frustrated, or traumatized youth cohort, if left without help, can continue to foment violent conflict for decades.

The presence of a demographic bulge is neither a necessary or sufficient condition for violence. A large number of young people can be a tremendous asset to developing societies. However if young people find that opportunities for employment are absent or blocked, that families cannot offer support, that authorities cannot protect them or offer justice, and that hard work and education offer no rewards, some may turn to extremist groups or rebel leaders who promise a brighter future or immediate rewards.

Youth Education and Unemployment

The great European revolutions of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries were all preceded by a vast expansion in secondary and higher education that far exceeded employment opportunities (Goldstone 1991; Gillis 1974; Jaraus 1974). More recently, unemployed university graduates, often educated abroad, have been at the forefront of armed or extremist movements, from anti-colonial struggles in Africa, to anti-authoritarian movements in the former Soviet Union, to radical ethnic and religious movements in Asia.

These examples demonstrate an important point: education per se is not always a force for stability. In many countries, the failure of the government to provide adequate education has led students to turn to ethnic or religious

Why Do Young People Participate in Violence

Economic incentives can be a strong motivator for participation in violence. Young people often join militant groups because violence offers opportunities for economic gain through looting or banditry, because conflict promises to open up longer-term economic options, or quite simply because they are paid to do so. In places from Sierra Leone to Uzbekistan, young people often join militant groups because they are given cash or promised future financial gain, for example, through small mining concessions.

Few opportunities for constructive political engagement are open to young people in the developing world, particularly for those who lack personal connections. All too often, political parties and other social movements have used young people to intimidate rivals, destabilize opponents, and collect money for political campaigns. In Haiti, a broad range of political parties have relied on violent youth gangs to protect political turf and intimidate opponents.

Inadequate public services, especially education, also plays a role. Many groups espousing violent ideologies have reached out to young people by providing access to key services, such as education. More important, they have provided young people with a sense of community and purpose in a setting where these are scarce commodities. In places as diverse as Nigeria and Pakistan, failing school systems have allowed radical groups to reach poor, marginalized young people.



Youth who are never integrated into community and social structures, or who never acquire the skills needed for peaceful and constructive adult lives, are at high risk. A deprived, frustrated, or traumatized youth cohort, if left without help, can continue to foment conflict for decades.

alternatives—alternatives that often strengthen factionalism and intolerance and rarely provide the skills necessary to find jobs. Further education can fill time, but unless it leads to employment, the result can be frustration and alienation. Job availability is also critical. Even effective education may breed discontent and violence if students are being prepared for jobs that do not exist. Typically, youth unemployment is two to three times as high as adult unemployment and, in countries with stagnant economies, the proportion can be far higher (ILO 2002). For example, it is five times higher in Sri Lanka and seven in Egypt.

Unemployment is an important component of the risk that this age group can represent. Young people often participate in violence because membership in extremist organizations provides immediate economic benefits, because violence itself offers opportunities for economic gain through direct payment or looting, or because conflict promises to open up longer term economic options, for example, through patronage if “their” ethnic or religious group captures power. Several studies of the Balkans, for example, show that the chance to earn an income through theft, smuggling, and banditry was often

a more important motivation for the young men who joined militia groups than appeals to ethnic solidarity (Woodward, 1995; Mueller, 2000).

Thus, providing targeted job training and employment is a critical element in dampening incentives for young people to participate in violence. However, waiting for the broader economy to create appropriate jobs may not work. Youth should be encouraged to identify and create their own opportunities, for example, through entrepreneurship training plus small-scale credit. Whether through simple repair work, craft and construction, or trade, youth should be encouraged to think of themselves as work providers, rather than merely job seekers.

Preparation for work involves more than acquiring job-specific skills; discipline, teamwork, and feelings of pride and self-worth are needed. These can be obtained through community work, including infrastructure development (such as building or rehabilitating roads and schools) and service work (such as care for the ill and elderly). This work also helps to rebuild ties between young people and their communities—an important and constructive form of social engagement. Although not conventional employment, such activity meets real

needs for youth and community development.

Because personal contacts are so important, education and work programs should connect youth with the broader community, particularly adults who may want to employ them. Mechanisms include: mentoring, community service work, apprenticeships, internships, and visits to offices, factories, or other work-sites. Partnerships between youth programs and business associations can help provide pathways to employment and benefits to employers as well as youth.

Political Violence and Youth Participation

In many parts of the world, political parties and other social movements use young people to intimidate rivals, destabilize opponents, and fill campaign coffers. This is often the only form of political participation open to young people, particularly those with little education or few personal connections. The recent debate on youth participation in violence has tended to center on economic motivations. These are important, but it is critical to recognize that young people are drawn to militant movements for a very complex set of reasons.

Young people often recognize that they are a powerful force for political change. Yet most young people in the developing world are shut off from constructive political participation. Political parties are often dominated by powerful (older) personalities and are vehicles for the political and economic ambitions of party leaders and their close associates. Party leaders therefore have little incentive to open political structures to new entrants. In the absence of legitimate avenues for participation, young people may either opt out of political participation completely or be drawn to movements that operate outside of, and often seek to overthrow, traditional political structures.

Similarly, in many parts of the world, leaders use negative ethnic and religious stereotypes to mobilize political violence, stereotypes that are often reinforced in school, by family members,

and in the media. A number of programs, both inside and outside the formal school system, attempt to build tolerance and give young people the skills they need to manage conflict in a non-violent way.

Social Drivers for Youth Recruitment to Violence

Where youth cohorts face no major upheavals or are relatively small and thus have more interaction with adults, radical or violent youth mobilization seldom occurs. Under these conditions, youth focus on activities that prepare them for adult lives, including education and training or apprenticeship, competition in sport and other forms of achievement, and social events. They tend to be solidly rooted in institutions—the family, schools, religious organizations, sports teams, clubs—that guide them, reinforce their identity as members of a broader society, and shield them from recruitment to violent groups. Such activities provide the opportunity to develop leadership, social, and work skills that will prepare them for adult life, while also providing a sense of achievement and rewards for gaining these skills.

Social stresses—such as urbanization, factionalism, forced migrations, refugee crises, and unemployment—can cause the breakdown, ineffectiveness, or absence of such “shielding” institutions. Youth then seek other avenues for meeting their needs to gain skills, rewards, and identity within a group. Alternatives, such as gangs, criminal organizations, or even armed rebel groups, become attractive. Young women as well as young men take part or are abducted into ancillary activities, including smuggling and prostitution. These organizations provide a sense of empowerment, shared identity, and access to material and sexual rewards that youth find (or believe) are unavailable in more conventional institution activities.

Some conventional institutions can also represent a social order that young people reject as failing or unjust, making alternative social groups more appealing. For example, South African black youth in the 1980s left a working school system

When youth are shielded from social and economic stresses, and can participate in decisions that affect their lives, they are more likely to pursue peaceful change.

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identified with apartheid to join anti-apartheid groups—many of them violent—with the slogan “First liberation, then education.” Where ruling regimes are seen as corrupt, ineffective, betraying nationalist principles, or hostile to certain ethnic, religious, regional, or class groups, youth may seek alternatives that promise to usher in a new system of authority or rewards.

Urbanization and Youth

Urbanization concentrates precisely that demographic group most inclined to violence: unattached young males who have left their families behind and have come to the city seeking economic opportunities. The rapid growth of cities has frequently been a factor in popular mobilization for riots and protests and urban migration helped provide the manpower for revolutionary or armed movements in countries such as Lebanon and Iran (Gugler 1982; Farhi 1990).

In many developing countries, urban migration has often been fueled by people seeking shelter from violent conflicts or drought, while others are responding to economic opportunity or desire the relative freedom and modernity of city life. The urban world offers a different set of challenges, temptations, and opportunities than those found in rural communities, ranging from access to a more diverse population to opportunities for entrepreneurship and self-definition. This makes urban centers particularly attractive to young people.

The urban informal sector also provides economic opportunities to youth, especially where growth in the formal sector has been held back by poor policies. While some of this activity is criminal, involving petty smuggling, theft, prostitution, and extortion, much of the informal sector serves as a creative response to economic hardship and involves the provision of services, small manufacturing, repair work, and transportation.

Urban communities inevitably have more excitement and opportunities for youth, but whether the eventual result is stable socialization or violent behavior depends

on the institutions available to youth in urban settings. Where government or private enterprise provides housing, education, entertainment, and opportunities for advancement, youthful energies are generally channeled into productive outlets. However, where the urban economy (formal and informal) cannot absorb new entrants and where there are few other institutions that provide support, violence becomes more likely.

Urbanization has a powerful pull, and programs to address urban youth need to build on that appeal, not seek to counter it. The goal should be to help make cities, where youth are often concentrated, centers of opportunity for positive and constructive socialization, rather than arenas of unrestrained competition for survival.

Factionalism and Youth

One result of urban migration is ethnic and religious mixing. In some countries, such as Kenya, urban centers have become foci of cooperation among diverse ethnic groups (Kahl 1998). However this mixing also constitutes a risk. Often, in the absence of integrative institutions, youth turn to ethnically, religiously, or regionally exclusive communities. This does not automatically lead to conflict. However, if certain ethnic groups feel that political, economic, and social institutions are closed or hostile to them, youth may rebel against them or opt out, seeking to develop their own ethnically based organizations to meet their needs. Youth gangs and criminal organizations thus typically draw on minority ethnic groups—whether recent immigrants or long-resident groups—who have faced persistent discrimination and exclusion.

At the extreme, youth may be socialized by peer groups or their elders to perceive themselves as targets of attack, and therefore entitled to be aggressive in defense of their community. An education that stresses violations, threats, and dangers (as occurred in Hutu and Tutsi communities in Rwanda and Burundi or in many Islamist madrasas throughout the Islamic world) can predispose youth to mobilize for violent self-protection or



aggression. This may lead to glorification of violence and of attacks on enemies. The grooming of warriors is nothing new. However, if youth have few other outlets or institutions for solidarity, advancement, and achievement, the attractions of the warrior life can be so compelling as to preclude other options.

In general, the more hardened ethnic (or other) lines of division are in a society, the greater the attraction of confrontational organizations and violence as a means of assuring one's goals. Young people have proven to be particularly susceptible to recruitment into organizations that provide personal and ethnic pride by instilling confrontational ethnic hatreds. Where factionalism has been a major part of youth experience, special programs—such as “peace education”—may be an important counter to that experience (Sommers 2001).

Forced Migration, Refugee Crises, and Youth

Perhaps no place emphasizes feelings of powerlessness and exclusion more than refugee camps and camps for internally displaced populations (IDPs). By definition, these are places for people whose normal institutional anchors have been destroyed, and this

is particularly true for young people. In addition, where refugees have been created by conflict and discrimination, camps can become prime places for the brewing of ethnic or group hatreds. It is not surprising that refugee and IDP camps have proven to be fertile recruiting grounds for extremist or militant groups, with Afghanistan and Chechnya offering two compelling examples.

Like cities with high youth migration, refugee communities have especially acute needs in regard to youth services. Most activities tend to center on basic survival. However, few institutions exist that address the full range of youth needs, including basic education, recreation, structured social events, training for jobs and economic self-support, and training in leadership and self-governance. In addition youth may be concentrated and adults less numerous, particularly adult males, reducing resources for supervision and guidance of youth.

Youth Needs in Regions Emerging from Conflict

So far the discussion has focused on reasons why young people participate in violence. However, in addition, young people who have experienced violence have other needs that must be

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Photo: Panos/Adler

When youth demobilize from armed conflict, they need more than jobs, food, and medical care. Psychosocial needs—like gaining acceptance in their families and communities and treatment for trauma—are also critical.

addressed. Many conflict situations have particularly devastating effects on youth who have been subjected to forced labor, recruitment into militias, and child prostitution. Many more are displaced, separated from their families, or orphaned, and must undertake a long, painstaking process to rebuild their lives after war. Unless the special needs of war-affected youth are met during the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) process, they will likely fall back into street life, prostitution, and/or crime, or be recruited as mercenaries for the next conflict.

Adolescence by its very nature is a time of rapid transformation, involving some degree of confusion and risk-taking, as young people try on new roles and responsibilities. In the midst or aftermath of conflict, such confusion is multiplied. The social fabric is torn, expected pathways toward adult status are lost, and emergency needs take precedence. Children find themselves heading households, unemployment is rampant, and traditional livelihoods are disrupted. Young people who experience war often lose the time and support needed to be a child or youth: to attend school, feel part of a community, and grow into adult responsibilities gradually. In post-conflict situations, young people often feel that they want to roll back the clock and

make up for what they missed.

While young people often form a core part of fighting forces, youth's needs are rarely adequately met in the process of demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR). Sometimes they are prevented from accessing services if they are not associated with an adult. Youth often spontaneously demobilize and melt into the wider population, thereby missing out on needed services. Youth, especially female youth, are more vulnerable to being stigmatized and rejected by their home communities than adult combatants. In addition to these challenges, questions concerning youth's culpability in wartime atrocities are very complex. Similarly, a continuing concern in the post-conflict period is the potential for the re-recruitment of youth into militia groups. Because problems faced by young people in post-conflict situations are so pressing, a youth rights advocacy perspective is required alongside program development efforts.

Minimally, youth require a DDR process that not only meets their nutritional and health needs, but also their psychosocial needs, including the need to re-establish self-acceptance and acceptance in their families and communities. Not surprisingly, a high percentage of child soldiers have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse as well as

ideological indoctrination, as in Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka. Many young people have become separated from their families or have witnessed the killing or injury of family members. The need for trauma counseling is critical. However, Western psychological models have not always been entirely successful in many developing countries, since they are sometimes perceived locally as “admitting craziness.” Western models may need to be adapted or supplemented with indigenous forms of healing and community reconciliation.

Increasingly, practitioners are recognizing the need for structured education, training, and recreation as part of the DDR process. Overwhelmingly, youth in post-conflict situations identify both security and education as their top two priority needs. Education enables youth to recover some degree of normalcy, psychologically, as well as begin to help them rebuild their lives economically. There are many challenges, including the fact that many war-affected youth have been out of school for a long period of time and many have responsibility for supporting family members. Nonetheless informal and/or accelerated schooling should be provided.

Virtually all youth displaced by war will need to work to support themselves and their families, and DDR programs need to help youth develop viable livelihoods. Many past DDR operations have been criticized for failing to train ex-combatants for the actual range of employment opportunities available, and this is especially true for young people. Microfinance programs typically serve young people (age 18–24) if they have had some prior business experience, even marketplace hawking. Youth without experience may be better served by entrepreneurial skills training in conjunction with microfinance.

As peace becomes a possibility in regions experiencing violence, planning for the needs of youth should begin immediately. While the needs of youth associated with the fighting forces—both male and female—should be addressed, to the extent possible they should not be segregated from other young people. If former combatants are offered services and educational opportunities that are denied other young people, a perverse economy of entitlement may be set up in which participation in war is rewarded. For this reason, the emphasis should be on social integration and meeting the needs of all youth, since, in fact, the effects of conflict spare none.

Key Issues

Overwhelmingly, youth in post-conflict situations identify security and education as their top two priority needs.

Lessons Learned



Photo: Search for Common Ground

Program goals must include integrating at-risk youth into society and not merely aim at compensating youth for current disadvantages.

Excellent programs address a wide range of youth issues in both developing and developed countries. The following lessons for building effective youth programs are based on practitioner experience and academic findings.

1 Identify, but do not isolate, at-risk youth

Allocating resources efficiently requires identifying concentrations of at-risk youth. While this varies by country, good places to start are cities with large populations of new migrants, IDP or refugee camps, and areas where there is evidence of religious or ethnic extremism. It is vital to be aware of different challenges faced along gender, age, ethnic and religious line as they may vary substantially.

Once at-risk youth are identified, the

next step is to identify the mix of institutions and opportunities that are missing. Perhaps some have access to basic education, but others (women, certain ethnic groups, or the poor) do not. Some groups may have educational opportunities, but lack recreation or social outlets. By identifying what is missing from the full range of youth needs, programs can supplement or create institutions that can provide the missing elements. This goes far beyond the normal tendency to target those youth with services, such as employment training, which can have

the effect of further isolating at-risk young people. Such a narrow focus has even had the unintended consequence of rewarding participation in violence. For example, in the Niger Delta, the tendency of oil companies to provide resources to the most violent youth groups has reinforced the practice of turning to violence for economic gain.

Thus, program goals must include integrating at-risk youth into society, not merely compensating for current disadvantages. This may involve organizing programs that bring together youth from both inside and outside the target group. Where possible, training should embrace all youth who could benefit, not only the most at-risk or marginalized. At-risk youth should be encouraged to aspire to positions of community leadership. Such skills create a powerful resource for the future, and their cultivation is essential for communities to build the strength they need to meet future crises on their own. Good programming also creates viable outlets for youth to participate in community, regional, and national society - giving them true platforms for their voices and including them in significant decision making on issues that affect them. It is key to forge partnerships between youth-led organizations and adult leaders.

2 Build community-based programs

Precisely because so many of the needs of youth are group and social needs, community-based programs are critical. Youth service institutions need to provide group-based activities (sports, community service, education) that provide positive identity, group empowerment, and acquisition of leadership, teamwork, and self-governance skills under adult supervision. They need to provide safe and structured arenas for competition, for peer bonding, and male-female relationships. Meeting individual needs is important as well, though this is usually best accomplished in the context of positive relationships developed within the program and between the youth and the larger community.

3 Youth leadership and ownership

Most successful youth programs have built-in structures for youth leadership. When youth have a direct role in creating and maintaining their own programs, they participate more regularly and they develop critical leadership skills. Implementers need to plan for youth input into program design from the outset. Also, they will need to offer the necessary training for youth to be able to collaborate productively and meaningfully with adults. This training could include practical citizenship skills, such as public speaking, negotiation, advocacy, budgeting, and so forth.

4 Female youth

Gender must be kept in mind in working with youth for both program design and evaluation. While young men are more likely to participate in violence than young women, there are important exceptions in places like Nepal and Sri Lanka. Moreover, young men and young women often have quite different reasons for participating in violence.

In most developing countries, young women have the greatest burden in terms of meeting the daily subsistence needs of families and face significant obstacles to full participation. Consequently, young women are much less likely to participate in educational and occupational training programs, recreational programs, or political events; they are simply less available or are excluded on other grounds.

Program designers must be sensitive to this reality and design programs that are flexible (in terms of time, place, and content) to meet girls' needs. Program evaluations should also disaggregate by gender to capture the usefulness of the program for male and female participants.

5 Holistic programming

Youth have a wide range of needs as they prepare for adult roles. They need to develop skills for economic self-reliance. They need citizenship skills, such as teamwork, leadership,

If services only target demobilized or at-risk youth and neglect others, then youth are de facto rewarded for violence. The emphasis should be on social integration and meeting the needs of all youth, since the effects of conflict spare none.

discipline, communication, and social responsibility. They need arenas in which they can identify and test their talents and develop healthy relationships. Thus, programs that provide opportunities for growth in more than one area tend to be more useful. Programs should consider a mix of job training and job creation; political participation; sports and recreation; leadership; and health training. In high-risk regions, conflict resolution should be built into all of these activities.

6 Plan transitions for youth

Youth is a period of transition and preparation. Therefore, youth programs must go beyond serving immediate needs to readying youth for a healthy transition into adult roles. Ideally, programs should be designed as "feeders" into political, economic, and social institutions for adults. Cooperative relationships with larger institutions (such as schools, churches, mosques, and community service organizations) allow youth to interact with and learn from adults and to plan concrete options for their adult lives. Mentoring of youth by responsible adults in the community helps youth widen their horizons and build pathways toward the future.

Special attention must be paid to young women and youth leadership if programs are to be far-reaching and sustainable.

Want to know more?

Some demographic trends are destabilizing. In Bare Branches: the Security Implications of Asia's Surplus Male Population, Valerie Hudson and Andrea den Boer argue that disproportionately large, disenfranchised populations of young men are linked to domestic instability and inter-state war. In another take on the topic, the authors of "The Security Demographic: Population and Civil Conflict after the Cold War" show that high birth and death rates can be destabilizing whereas small, healthy families improve a state's prospects for long-term stability. www.populationaction.org

Youth unemployment has skyrocketed to all-time global highs, according to the International Labor Organization's Youth Employment Network. Young people who have no access to legitimate employment are more likely to be drawn into exploitative or illicit activities, including conflict. www.ilo.org

Over 300,000 children fight as soldiers in current conflicts. Under the Children's Rights Section, Human Rights Watch has a range of publications on where child soldiers are used, why they are so often preferred as recruits, and the consequences to both children and society. www.hrw.org Even more children (estimates are over ten million) have been psychologically scarred by the trauma of conflict through abduction, detention, sexual assault and the murder of family members. The Canadian Agency for International Development has made child protection one of its top social development priorities. www.acdi-cida.gc.ca and www.waraffectedchildren.gc.ca

Approximately half of the world's 35 million refugees and internally displaced persons are under the age of 18, according to the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. The Commission's study, "Untapped Potential: Adolescents Affected by Armed Conflict" outlines best practices in adolescent programming and underscores the importance of youth participation in program design. www.theirc.org/resources/index.cfm

For guidance on designing, implementing, and evaluating youth education and protection programs in crises, consult the many resources of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). www.ineesite.org

Many innovative youth programs in the US can be adapted to developing countries. Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) www.ppv.org is a national nonprofit organization that has done extensive work on mentoring, youth employment, community service, faith-based initiatives, and youth violence-prevention. Best practices in youth employment and development programs are recorded at PEPNet, a project of the National Youth Employment Coalition www.nyec.org/pepnet/index.html.

Mentoring of youth by responsible adults in the community helps youth widen their horizons and build pathways toward the future

Program Options



Photo: Panos/Telemans

The following programs are examples of innovative attempts to engage at-risk young people. The nexus between youth development programs and conflict is a new area, and tools are still being developed to measure their impact. However, many of these programs have shown promise in reaching out to young people who often are left behind in more traditional development efforts.

1 Job Training and Employment Programs for Youth

♦ In the **West Bank**, the IT4Youth program enhances education and employability for Palestinian youth in rural areas through information technology (IT) centers. A joint effort of USAID West Bank and Gaza, the

Welfare Association, and the International Youth Foundation, it features 14 state-of-the-art school computer labs and an IT center. It trains teachers, parents, and youth in Internet skills and improves interest in education and employability, increasing jobs and adding to regional stability.

www.it4youth.org

- ♦ A young man, George Onyango, who grew up in **Nairobi's** slums, in 1996 founded SIDAREC-Slums Information Development and Resources Centres. Its services for at-risk urban youth include recreational activities, computer training, HIV/AIDS-prevention training, basic business skills, and start-up loans for small enterprises. SIDAREC serves approximately 350 young people.
www.sidarec.or.ke

- ♦ In the **United States**, YouthBuild comprises 200 community-based programs that target unemployed and undereducated 16 to 24 year olds, who help build affordable housing-learning construction skills and working toward GEDs. The program emphasizes leadership, community service, and a positive community committed to success. Workshops and retreats teach decision-making, group facilitation, public speaking, and negotiating skills. Youthbuild participants share in the governance of their own program through an elected policy committee.
www.youthbuild.org

- ♦ In southern **Sri Lanka**, Jobsnet links unemployed youth with local businesses, curbing unemployment and fostering labor market transparency. By increasing the number of gainfully employed young people, Jobsnet reduces the likelihood that Sri Lanka's youth cohort will be drawn to anti-peace political constituencies.
www.jobsnet.lk

- ♦ In **Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**, an NGO, Viva Rio, organizes peace campaigns to overcome violence and social exclusion in urban slums. In addition to job training and employment placement, Viva Rio conducts voluntary weapons collection programs through churches, provides citizenship classes, and organizes social activities such as boxing, concerts, and mural creation. Free concerts feature artists whose music discourages involvement in criminal gangs and the use of guns.
www.vivario.org.br

2 Constructive Political Participation

- ♦ In **Sierra Leone**, urban youth, once mobilized by politicians as thugs to intimidate voters, were trained in voter registration and election monitoring, giving them a stake in the process. Search for Common Ground brought together youth (ages 16–35) to create a national youth network. While educating marginalized populations about voting, the youth also held events challenging politicians not to use youth as a destabilizing force.
www.sfcg.org

- ♦ Democracy Learning–Youth Participation program, building on the strength of young people's critical role in the pro-democracy movement that toppled **Serbia's** Milosevic, supports the work of youth NGOs by equipping them to engage in democratic participation. The program explicitly encourages tolerance for difference and is funded by Balkan Children and Youth Foundation (part of the International Youth Foundation).
www.iyfnet.org

- ♦ A project in **Yemen** promotes youth participation in decision making and civic responsibility. The AI-Mocha Youth Association in Taiz emphasizes the positive role that youth can play in the democratic process through publication of a newsletter that discusses youth issues and issues related to democracy, direct participation in elections for association leadership, and sporting and cultural events.

- ♦ In **Angola**, a project of USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF) provides training and education to young people so that they can actively take part in the national reconciliation process. Christian Children's Fund implements the Building Resilience in Angolan Children and Communities project for 160,000 beneficiaries. The target group includes university students, political and community youth groups, and internally displaced youth and returnees. The aim is to strengthen community systems of

Programs that provide opportunities for growth in more than one area tend to be more useful. Programs should consider a mix of job training and job creation; political participation; sports and recreation; leadership; and health training.



Photo: Panos/Tweedie

In response to Colombia's alarming rate of violence, USAID/Columbia and Children International have piloted a program, Hope for Columbia's Children, to train 100 youth in conflict resolution

solidarity and to promote reconciliation at the grassroots level.

www.usaid.gov

- ◆ World Education's youth leadership project in **Senegal's** Casamance region trains youth association members in leadership development, including disseminating information to their communities. After participatory training, youth collaborate on self-selected projects to benefit the community, utilizing their new leadership skills while promoting peaceful reconstruction of their villages.

www.worlded.org

3 Conflict Resolution and Community Dialogue

- ◆ The Youth Project of Search for Common Ground's intergenerational dialogue workshops in **Burundi** brought together young men—"the Guardians," armed by the military to protect their villages—into constructive dialogue with elders active in a traditional conflict resolution institution, bashingantahe. The Guardians learned how to draw upon traditional peacemaking methods, strengthening their skills to intervene without violence and help resolve conflicts. Workshops also facilitated participant discussions about their experiences in the war. These intergenerational relationships fosters resiliency among young people and gives them adult allies in preventing crises.

www.sfcg.org

- ◆ In **Macedonia**, Common Ground Productions developed a project called *Nashe Maalo* (Our Neighborhood). This groundbreaking television series for children (7–12) was created by an inter-ethnic team of television and conflict-resolution professionals. It promotes understanding, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution.

- ◆ In response to **Colombia's** alarming rate of violence, USAID/Columbia and Children International have piloted a program, *Hope for Columbia's Children*, to train 100 youth in multiple levels of conflict resolution: individual, family, and community conflict. They aim to produce a youth-oriented guide to conflict

resolution techniques, and to have youth train their peers in their communities.

www.children.org

4 Education and Tolerance Training

- ◆ In **Burundi**, young Hutu and Tutsi ex-combatants jointly developed a program that reaches out to school children to talk about the personal costs of violence. The Youth Project of Search for Common Ground and a local youth association (JAMAA) developed cartoon books that showed how elites recruit youth to engage in ethnically motivated violence. It is used by the Ministry of Education and is on national television. UNESCO awarded it an honorable mention (March 2003) for excellence in peace literature.

www.sfcg.org

- ◆ To help prevent conflict in refugee camps in **Kenya**, a UNHCR Peace Education Program (PEP) emphasizes developing locally meaningful resource materials, including posters, role-play scenarios, proverb cards, booklets of poetry, and stories that illustrate both challenging and hopeful issues for reflection and discussion. Program success led Kenyan police to call on a program graduate to facilitate an agreement between two disputing clans. A group of program graduates also formed a group to resolve daily conflicts in camp affairs.

www.unhcr.ch

- ◆ The Balkan Children and Youth Foundation (BCYF), founded at the height of the conflict under the auspices of the International Youth Foundation, aims to improve the conditions and prospects for young people throughout the region. Early projects focused on bringing young people together across ethnic divisions to participate in social activities such as drama, music, and films. Post-conflict initiatives have expanded to include discussions about globalization, unemployment, the media, the public school system, and civic engagement.

www.iyfnet.org

- ◆ In December 1999, youth in Bujumbura and Ngozi, **Burundi**

participated in the first soccer tournament in an ethnically divided district. The Youth Project of Search for Common Ground holds soccer camps, monthly roundtables on a video or event of interest, and peace camps with children of different ethnic compositions. These activities help build solidarity among youth across ethnic divides.

www.sfcg.org

5 Recovery of Youth Ex-Combatants and War-Affected Youth

◆ In **Sierra Leone**, USAID's OTI-funded Youth Reintegration Training and Education for Peace (YRTEP), a non-formal education network reached both ex- and non-combatant young adults, many of whom had not had schooling for ten years. Implementing partners were

WorldVision, MSI, and several Sierra Leonian NGOs. In two years, 46,480 young adults participated, developing skills in basic literacy and math, self-reliance, conflict resolution, agriculture, health, and civic participation. Follow-up programs added employment in public works projects, life skills training, and public dialogue to increase cooperation between ex-combatants and community members.

www.usaid.gov

◆ In **Liberia**, UNICEF's Support to War Affected Youth (SWAY) program helps youth change their lives through HIV/AIDS prevention and life skills training, peer-based education, and basic literacy and numeracy education. Participants include child soldiers, teenage mothers and their children, and children in conflict with the law.

www.unicef.org



Photo: Panos/Knoth

An innovative program in Liberia brought together child soldiers with other at-risk youth to develop positive life skills through HIV/AIDS prevention and peer-based education.

Resources



Photo: Panos/Cito

USAID Contracting Mechanisms for Youth and Conflict Programming

EQUIP3/Youth Trust Leader with Associates Award Mechanism (EGAT/ED)

This cooperative agreement helps to prepare out-of-school children and youth for their roles in work, civil society, and family life. The project engages out-of-school and disenfranchised youth as partners and resources in addressing the social service and economic development needs of their communities, while helping them acquire the skills needed for productive futures. Prime Recipient: Education Development Center. Sub-Recipients: International Youth Foundation; Academy for Educational Development; National Youth Employment Coalition. Associate Organizations: Catholic Relief Services; International Council on National Youth Policy; Opportunities Industrialization Centers, Inc.; Partners of the Americas; Plan International;

Sesame Workshop; StreetKids International; World Learning.

www.equip123.net

Democracy and Governance Civil Society Strengthening Cooperative Agreement (DCHA/DG)

This agreement may be used to implement programs targeting youth to increase their participation in political processes and civil society activities. The two lead agencies are: Academy for Educational Development (AED) and Pact, Inc. Under AED, affiliates with experience programming for youth are: Mercy Corps International and Search for Common Ground; and under Pact: The Center for Civic Education; Children's Resources International, and World Education.

www.inside.usaid.gov

Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) IQC (EGAT/ED)

BEPS provides assistance in improving the quality, access, equity, and efficiency of education, particularly basic education. "Education in Crisis Situations" is one area of expertise, as well as longer-term improvement of basic education through policy support and technical assistance. Creative Associates International is the primary agency, with sub-contractors: CARE, GroundWork, and The George Washington University.

www.beps.net

International Youth Foundation Cooperative Agreement (EGAT/PR/UP)

This cooperative agreement aims to increase the employability of youth through life skills, vocational, information and communications technology (ICT) and entrepreneurship training ("holistic employability training"). Youth also are provided with mentors, coaching and counseling, internships, and job placements in urban areas. Prime Recipient: International Youth Foundation Sub-Recipients: Alliance for African Youth, Lions Clubs International, Youth Development Trust of South Africa, and Nokia. Contact: Vicki Clark vclark@usaid.org.

US Government and Donor Contacts

USAID field staff may wish to consult with other USG Agencies and donors that support youth and conflict programming. Even though some of the contacts listed below focus primarily on children rather than youth, their work often encompasses youth and conflict as well. While the list below is not comprehensive, it does represent some of the most active donors.

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