A Global Report on Youth, Peace and Sustainability
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Foreword:
The Jobshadowing 2.0 Project
Over the last year, 14 youth leaders from organizations in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Spain, Estonia, Northern-Ireland, Hong Kong, Mexico, Argentina, Ghana, Cameroon, Burundi, Bangladesh, and Nepal have bundled their powers to realize a global exchange.

In this project, youth leaders paid one-week visits to project partner organizations to engage in research and local outreach activities that dealt with peacebuilding and environmental sustainability.

The United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY Peacebuilders) is a global network of 60 youth peace organizations active in the field of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. “Our vision is that of youth committed to jointly building a world in which peace, justice, solidarity, human dignity and respect for nature prevail.”

This project aims to reinforce UNOY’s vision by raising awareness and understanding among youth from various cultural and geographical backgrounds about the impact of environmental challenges and climate change on peacebuilding processes. Today - against the backdrop of climate change - intercultural dialogue on best practices to address the theme of sustainability linked with peacebuilding is something that young people have at heart.
At the 20th July 2011, the UN Security Council convened in a special meeting to consider “the greening of blue helmets,” discussing the possibility of effectuating a new environmental peacekeeping force that could intervene in conflicts caused by shrinking resources. Even though the green helmets force held off, the special meeting spearheaded the growing conviction that climate change has significant security implications and can even drive armed conflict. Given the environmental degradation that is scourging the world at this point in time, it seems wise - if not indispensable - to further analyse and investigate this relationship and to assess how such peacekeeping efforts can be truly “sustainable.”
Where a couple of decades ago not many saw the handwriting on the wall, recent times have brutally confronted us with the materialization of climate changes and the hazards they entail. Needless to say, they paint a grim picture for future generations. The statistics are staggering and allude that our most precious resources are running out. Currently, more than 430 million people face water scarcity\(^3\) and it has been predicted that, already by 2025, 40% of the world population will face significant water shortages\(^4\). Reduced agricultural activities and consequent food insecurity are very worrisome and likely to worsen: agricultural production could decline by about 50% in some regions in 2020\(^5\). Many of major causes of death\(^6\) are climate sensitive and therefore their incidence is only expected to increase as climate change unfolds\(^7\). The health implications are anything but negligible: it is anticipated that climate change will cause over 150,000 deaths each year, and will cause malnourishment of another 45 million people\(^8\). Finally, global warming has rendered many conscious of the fact that even land is a resource that is at stake: it is projected that by 2050, 150 million – one in every 45 people in the world – could become displaced by climate change related phenomena such as desertification, sea-level rise\(^9\), water scarcity, etc. The Marshall Islands and “sinking neighbors” Kiribati and Tuvalu poignantly exemplify that islands can be submerged by rising oceans if the sea-level continues to rise.

Estimates are that, by 2050, the number of climate refugees will be between 150-200 million, spanning up to 10% of the global population\(^10\). All in all, climate change is pervasive and poses significant security threats to our world today.

It is exactly because of the above-mentioned rationale that the United Network of Young Peacebuilders – a youth-led network
of 60 member organizations that focuses on the participation of youth in peacebuilding around the world - has designated the link between environmental sustainability and peace as their topic of focus for 2013. By means of the “Jobshadowing 2.0” project, that revolves around exchanges of youth leaders from organizations in 14 different countries, UNOY Peacebuilders has increased the awareness and capacity of network organizations to work on the links between peacebuilding and environmental sustainability. Since all organizations that are involved in the jobshadowing project are youth-led, experiences of the jobshadowers will enable a glimpse of the unique vantage point of youth on the link between sustainability, conflict, and peace. This report will build on experiences derived from this project to identify environmental conflicts and explore how youth based peacebuilding initiatives can be unified around a common environmental goal.

Different definitions are being used to cover “youth,” a fluid category encompassing a dynamic population with a variety of needs and abilities. When talking on behalf of and about youth, it is essential to recognize that youth is not a homogenous group. “Youth” includes young people with disabilities, young people living with HIV, indigenous young people, young people from minorities, young migrants, young people who are stateless, internally displaced, young refugees or those affected by humanitarian situations or armed conflicts.

It is well-known that young people take on a unique role in promoting environmental awareness, as – quite logically – they are the ones that will have to deal with the consequences longer than any of their elders. In the same token, young people have been at the frontlines of peacebuilding, taking on active roles and preventing violent outbreaks around the world. Youth are vehicles of information.
They tend to be more open to new ideas wherein youth worldwide have taken demonstrable interest in climate change. Many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia as well as the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA), have predominantly young populations.

Strikingly enough, these are areas where tensions over resources have become most pronounced. The instability caused by global warming is felt globally, but has a disproportionate impact on the living standards of the socio-economically disadvantaged in countries of the Global South. Most of the young people are thus coming of age in environments where resource challenges are part of their daily reality. Being a youth-led organization, UNOY Peacebuilders strives to include youth voices in policy decision making mechanisms, a mission that is equally important when talking about environmental sustainability.

Whereas numerous scholars have scrutinized the relation between either conflict and the environment; conflict and youth; and youth and the environment, the intersectionality of the three is left untouched. This approach is ineffective insofar as it does little to
consider peacebuilding, development, and the environment as interconnected holistic entities. Given the potential of youth to bring about change and the fact that they will – most regrettably – inherit today’s environmental catastrophes, it seems curious that writing on the climate-conflict issue has disregarded youth almost entirely.

As this report endeavors to provide a bird’s-eye view of the intersectionality, it will look at concepts as “the environment” and “conflict” in an interrelated way. Therefore, “the environment” will logically include issues such as climate change and environmental sustainability. Similarly, “peace” will not only refer to the absence of armed conflict, but can also signify – as Johan Galtung (1967) famously put it – “all other good things in the world community, particularly cooperation and integration between human groups, with less emphasis on the absence of violence.”

This report aims to provide a condensed literature review of the already-established links between

- a) conflict and climate change
- b) conflict and youth
- c) youth and sustainability

More importantly, it will ambitiously place itself at the intersection of these three topics, showing that these three notions are, in fact, mutually reinforcing. Finally, it will explore how youth has – in the past – and will be able to – in the future – contribute to sustainable peacebuilding.
Hitherto, efforts made to address climate change - such as the Kyoto protocols and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio +20, have taken only very reserved steps in the right direction. Actively championing youth participation and encouraging governments to consider future generations in planning, Rio+20 formalised strategies towards greater integration of social, economic and environmental concerns. Notwithstanding the fact that its outcome document “The Future We Want” provides a benchmark for integrated sustainable development around the world, Rio+20 failed to consider the delicate balance between poverty, sustainability and conflict. It is widely recognized that “long-term and comprehensive sustainability are a prerequisite for durable peace" , yet efforts to promote sustainable environmental development in peacebuilding processes are still to be mainstreamed. Environmental peacebuilding acknowledges that “natural resources and environmental issues can contribute to violent conflict (and thus) underscores their potential significance as pathways for cooperation, transformation and the consolidation of peace in war-torn societies.” World leaders’ apparent lack of ambition to effectively address climate change can potentially be attributed to the smokescreen of unclarities and lack of conclusive evidence that surround the issue of climate change.

In 2004, the then Director of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) claimed that “most conflicts have something to do with the climate [emphasis added].” The exact same year, a report by the United Nations Environmental Programme established that natural resources and environmental issues “can be implicated in all phases of the conflict cycle [emphasis added].”

While these statements exemplify the growing consensus about the conflict-inducing effects of climate change and stress its importance,
they also signal that the environment-conflict nexus is more complex and more encompassing than any simple causal relationship. This chapter will serve to clarify how climate change can induce conflict and obstruct peacebuilding and, conversely, how environmental sustainability can foster peacebuilding.

It must be stressed that the manifestation and the sources of environmental conflicts can be quite diverse (as will be clear by the examples provided in this report). Even if a conflict does not escalate, it must be acknowledged that its impact can be significant. Ignoring the cases in which environmental tensions get diffused would be sampling on the dependent variable. Therefore, this report maintains a low benchmark for conflicts, that can start at a simple incompatibility of interests.
1.1. The Conflict-Environment Nexus: Climate Change as a “Threat Multiplier?”

Most recently, the Darfur crisis has sparked international debate about the relation between climate change and conflict. A 2007 UNEP Report named climate change as a root cause of the escalating conflict. In fact, it claimed that the Darfur conflict would signify a beginning of an era of wars that was triggered by climate change. The “grim lessons” learned by Darfur should, however, have come as no surprise: throughout the second half of the 20th century, at least 40% of all intrastate conflicts had been linked to natural resources. In fact, the relatively short time frame of 1990-2007 already had seen at least 18 conflicts fuelled by the exploitation of natural resources.

A 2007 International Alert Report underscored UNEPs doomsday scenario pertaining the expected flare-up of conflicts related to climate change, stating that there are 46 countries, comprising some 2.7 billion people, where the effects of climate change in conjunction with economic, social, and political problems will create a high risk of violent conflict. Another 56 countries that comprise an approximate 1.2 billion people, face a risk of conflict on the longer term since their governmental institutions are hardly capable of taking up the challenge of climate change on top of the challenges. At present, the United Nations has identified an approximate 300 potential conflicts over water alone. Bearing in mind that resource depletion is only expected to worsen, this number is unlikely to decrease in the proximate future. As the Secretary-General voiced in 2009: “[e]ven with an ambitious agreement, the world is already set to experience some climate change over the coming century and beyond. Without such a deal, climate change and its impacts
are likely to be much further reaching and severe\textsuperscript{28}.”

A simple flashback in time is sufficient to prove that environmental conflicts are no novelty. Cattle rustling and conflicts over (grazing) land go back thousands of years. However, and as aforementioned, the interlink between conflict and climate change is not to be explained by a simple causal relationship. It can be observed that the two principles are mutually reinforcing, as the majority of countries projected to be worst affected by climate change are also plagued by violence and instability\textsuperscript{29}. However, a chicken-and-the-egg problem emerges because of their reciprocal nature: resource scarcity can be a driver for conflict and, vice versa, conflict can have devastating impacts on the environment.

Even though the link between climate and conflict remains contested in academic literature, the balance seems to weigh heavier towards the assertion that climate change has a negative impact on peace\textsuperscript{30}. The link between climate change and conflict rests mainly on tensions arising from “reduced economic security, increased resource scarcity, and the circumstances surrounding displacement\textsuperscript{31}.” Generally, interaction with certain socio-economic and political factors must be present for (violent) conflict to erupt\textsuperscript{32}.

Essentially, the strength and legitimacy of political institutions may be crucial in determining whether resource constraints will lead to conflict. In other words, whether a country can or cannot deal with the effects of climate change depends on its political stability and system of governance. Therefore, climate change may best be seen as a “threat multiplier which exacerbates trends, tensions and instability\textsuperscript{33}.” Even though this causal relationship remains contested, one cannot disregard that alleviating environmental stresses can only help to prevent the (re-)occurrence of conflict.
“Our debate about the situation in Cameroon lasted for three hours! One of the biggest problems Hilary and his colleagues mentioned was the bad state of a lot of roads and the government’s policy on the conservation of national parks and forest reserves.”

- Lorena Goana
Cameroon is commonly referred to as “Africa in miniature” mainly because whatever characteristic feature of nature spotted in Africa can easily be located in Cameroon. Despite these blessings of nature, regular social and economic insecurities still abound from region to region. Today especially within the forest communities, the government, in line with national and international prescriptions, has continued working towards the conservation of the environment, but striking a positive balance between environmental conservation and development in terms of livelihoods has remained a major problem. In this vein, youths across regions in Cameroon especially within socio-economically marginalized settings have not fully respected the conservation of nature simply because of the absence of alternative livelihoods which could shift their attentions away from illegal and indiscriminate forest as well as wildlife exploitation and trade. This situation has resulted to regular conflicts between forest guards and hunters leading to many legal actions and harsh sanctions. In one of CCREAD’s outreach campaigns in the Bakossi forest region, a young person reacted as following: “I wonder if the government values animals and trees more than the many unemployed youths who try to do hunting to earn a living”. Recently, CCREAD-Cameroon interviewed 100 young people within the South West Region on the rising water poisoning and use of bad nets for fishing and their preoccupation centered on the very high rate of unemployment which leaves them with no option than to indiscriminately harvest from nature despite any restrictions.

Recognizing these challenges, the Centre for Community Regeneration and Development (CCREAD-Cameroon) holds that the quest for sustainable development is not just a paper principle
but should focus on implementing participatory local actions which seek to strike a positive balance between nature conservation and socio-economic development if regular conflicts should be avoided. In this way, Our Rise for Nature Program, which is an integrated conservation and development program, was initiated. It implements activities such as:
• Advocacy on Benefit sharing for indigenous forest communities
• Environmental education through schools and forest regeneration
• Community wildlife management programming
• Sustainable beekeeping, organic gardening and vocational training for women and youth social and economic empowerment.
• Tourism promotion (ecotourism)
• Promoting dialogue between indigenous forest community members and conservationists
• Educating forest communities on the legal provisions of forest and wildlife laws of 1994

CCREAD-Cameroon working with public and private stakeholders understands the need to foster the relevance of conserving the threatened environment but also to accept the fact that more needs to be done to empower young Cameroonians. If many legislation and reforms continue without focusing on strengthening livelihoods, the quest for sustainable development, MDGs attainment will keep failing, social and economic insecurity will continue, youths will keep steering conflicts and peacebuilding will remain challenged.

Africa in Miniature
by Hilary Ngide (Centre for Community Regeneration and Development)
More information at www.ccreadcameroon.org
“There is little scientific dispute that if we do nothing, we will face more drought, more famine, more mass displacement – all of which will fuel more conflict for decades.”

- Barack Obama.
1.2. Peacebuilding through sustainability

As was alluded to in the introduction, there simply cannot be durable peace if natural resources, that are instrumental to sustain livelihoods and ecosystems, are damaged, degraded or destroyed\textsuperscript{34}. Climate change has not only affected natural resources as such, but has triggered other far-reaching phenomena such as mass migration and urbanization.

Whereas in 1950, only 30% of the people were living in cities, nowadays this number spans up to over half of the world population. At present, this number is only expected to rise. Urbanization has been perceived as both positive and negative; positive because it may cause for a drop in birth rates, thereby alleviating environmental stresses, and cuts down the use of destructive subsistence farming techniques\textsuperscript{35}; negative because it may entail difficulties to sustain food security and overburden complete sanitation or health care systems. It is crucial that such processes and their effects are closely monitored so that they are scientifically informed and can involve the people whose lives it will change. Hereby, the environment can be seen as a substantial component of the peacebuilding process.

If peace negotiations fail to take the environment into account, they not only miss the great opportunity to provoke processes of confidence-building between formerly conflicting parties, it can also fail to alleviate communities’ pressing environmental pressure, which would make relapse into conflict all the more plausible. In essence, introducing environmental management during peace negotiations is a security imperative\textsuperscript{36}. If not, peacebuilding activities are “rendered, at best, short-term and, at worst, harmful\textsuperscript{37}.”
Environmental problems can also effectively counteract peacebuilding. It seems almost ironic that, when conflicts associated with natural resources appeared twice as likely to relapse into conflict within the first five years\(^\text{38}\), only less than 25% of the peace processes of such conflicts mentioned resource management mechanisms\(^\text{39}\).

It is widely recognized that “long-term and comprehensive sustainability are a prerequisite for durable peace\(^\text{40}\)” The study of environmental peacebuilding acknowledges that “natural resources and environmental issues can contribute to violent conflict [and thus] underscores their potential significance as pathways for cooperation, transformation and the consolidation of peace in war-torn societies\(^\text{41}\)”

In fact, climate change can be a powerful catalyst for unity as it poses an external threat against which communities will wish to unite and cooperate. In this manner, it can generate a pragmatic unity. By managing shared natural resources, communication and interaction can be generated, which potentially can build confidence and explore shared interests\(^\text{42}\).
What else would you expect from a shopping in a usual supermarket except buying different bakery, meat, dairy products or prepared dishes? Nowadays supermarket shopping belongs to our daily routine. We tend to think that it is somehow society’s progress that a normal urban dweller doesn’t have to cultivate land for the growth of crops and vegetable production and can save his time by doing shopping direct in a city.

On the other hand, however, there are more people having concerns about product’s quality, more vegetarians or vegans, or those who prefer buying bio food, since it would not contain harmful substances. As a result those products are getting very expensive and are not available for low-income families. So why not turn a little bit back, learn from our past and grow these products ourselves?

This was the initial idea of the founders of one significant social gardening project in Berlin’s North District Wedding called „Himmelbeet”. The initiative arose on the 10,000 square meters roof of the uppermost parking level of a city shopping centre. The community gardening project brings together people from a wide variety of backgrounds - age, ethnic background, culture, social background – and offers further events such as different workshops on recycling or team-building, cultural and creative events or a social meeting point at the garden café opened daily.
The focus of the urban gardening project is not only the growing of old and regional varieties of vegetables and fruits or traditional crops otherwise unavailable to buy locally, but mostly community work: Himmelbeet connects people.
The district “Wedding” is known as one of the most ethnically diverse urban areas in Berlin. Around 50% of the inhabitants are migrants or people with migration background. Himmelbeet gives the chance to locals to interact with other gardeners from the district or simply with people coming to the Garden Café and thus increase cohesion and understanding within the community. Native Berliners gain a chance for cultural exchange with foreigners’ communities and can work side-by-side on common goals without having the same traditions or speaking the same language.

Last but not least we should mention the engagement of Himmelbeet into education for the younger generation too: the project promotes healthy lifestyle and urban ecology and allows young people to discover and experiment this theme by participating in diverse events. In the words of Miller (2007) “gardens promote stimulating educational environments for youth to learn important life skills explicated with positive youth development theories43.”

Although there is less surface area of cultivation of land available in big urban areas, there are more and more social gardening projects being developed in Berlin as a way to address two challenges at once: social cohesion and environmental matters.

Social cohesion in Berlin through gardening
by Lena Kukharets (European Intercultural Forum e. V.)
More information at http://himmelbeet.com/
Mirabs are traditionally the “water keepers” in Afghan society, and their regulation over this precious substance dates back centuries. More often than not, the uneven division of this scarce water led to tribal tensions. In addition to this, Afghan warlords who illegally appropriated water sabotaged the system, and contributed to the ruling political instability and rising tribal tensions.

In Afghanistan, important matters are generally discussed in a so-called Shura, meaning “consultation” or simply “council.” In an attempt to overcome the tribal tensions in Afghanistan, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized a water shura specifically to tackle the ongoing struggles pertaining to water management. They did so in cooperation with the local leaders (GIROA). The military, in turn, was responsible for the security of this event. Because of the involvement of all stakeholders, the support for this water shura was significant. Not only did this result in the recovery of a century-old water system that in principle was working efficiently, but it simultaneously safeguarded the reconstruction of water channels.

The water shura therefore used an environmental challenge to bring about peacebuilding that trickled down to different disciplines. Firstly, it contributed to governance since it emphasized the common interests of different parties and got mirabs to a round-table discussion with politicians, which is not so common in Afghanistan. Secondly, it positively contributed to health care, since harvest and incomes were maximized because of a better distribution of water. In addition, this improved distribution caused for less waste, a more even supply, and a greater variety of crops. By combining this project with a general reconstruction of the water system, jobs were
created. Last and perhaps most important, the shura managed to get people together that normally would not get together. Thereby the shura greatly contributed to safety and security. A very positive development was the decrease of harvesting of poppy (heroin). Since poppy requires approximately sixty percent less water than other crops, its cultivation was highly popular. After the water shura, poppy cultivation is likely to decrease and criminality rates will therefore go down.

In short, there is now more water to divide and the stability in Uruzgan increased.
“The costs of preventing dangerous climate change, while not trivial, are far outweighed by the eventual costs of unmitigated climate change. That result, moreover, does not take into account the difficult-to-measure but real costs of such “socially contingent” impacts of climate change as social and political instability, conflicts and involuntary migration, or the measures taken in response to these.”

- Ban Ki Moon

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1.3. Preliminary Conclusion

Essentially, the environment can both play into the occurrence and eruption of conflicts - acting as a “threat multiplier” - and can effectively act as a catalyst for unity. The environment as such is implicated in every phase of the conflict cycle. This entanglement of environmental aspects in the conflict cycle implies that the environment can and should not be disregarded during peacebuilding initiatives.

As the examples adduced in this chapter demonstrate, the environment can serve as the instrument par excellence to set aside rivalries and achieve cooperation among different actors. Since environmental problems tend not to manifest themselves within confined borders, their nature often stretches to different nations and communities. Both water shura’s and sustainable gardening manage to effectively utilize environmental strains to achieve cooperation among different tribes.
CHAPTER 2
CONFLICT AND YOUTH
2.1. Victim or perpetrator?

Armed conflict is one of the most critical challenges that young people are facing today. Young people in conflict and in post-conflict societies are crucial agents in peacebuilding and positive social change. Simultaneously young people suffer in unique ways from the consequences of violence and they are also particularly vulnerable to both voluntary and involuntary military recruitment. The portrayal of young people as either causal or recipient agents of conflict, however, goes by the fact that young people play crucial roles in facilitating peaceful transitions towards socially inclusive societies when they can meaningfully contribute at the political, social, and economic level.

In (post-) conflict settings, youth are often portrayed to be either causal or recipient agents to conflict. By focusing either on youth as passive victims or as catalysts for conflict, this discourse disregards the role of young people as peacebuilders and in promoting the stability of a nation.

Youth are uniquely vulnerable and thus often referred to as victims in war-torn societies. Today, grave violations are taking place against children and youth in over twenty war-affected countries. Young people experience many forms of suffering: they are killed, maimed, orphaned, abducted, deprived of education and health care, and left with deep emotional and physical scars. The collapse of the state and the social fabric can have damaging effects on youth as it often takes away the most basic services, such as health care and the educational system. Youth suffer from other consequences of conflict such as poverty, unemployment, poor governance and the disintegration of families and communities. The consequences
thereof can stretch way beyond the duration of the conflict. The structural exclusion and lack of opportunities faced by young people effectively block or prolong their transition to adulthood \(^46\). Furthermore, the changing nature of conflict directly impacts youth as war tactics include systemic attacks that are waged on schools. On a more personal level, conflict can generate a great sense of insecurity, instability and trauma that can be tangible throughout the lives of these youth, affecting their self-worth dignity, identity and productive capacity.

Youth has also be placed within the causes of conflict, as perpetrators, since they are highly vulnerable to involuntary military recruitment. "Young people with limited education and few employment opportunities often provide fertile recruiting ground for parties to a conflict. Their lack of hope for the future can fuel disaffection with society and make them susceptible to the blandishments of those who advocate armed conflict\(^47\)." Young people’s participation in conflict has serious implications for their physical and emotional well-being. In many countries, both girls and boys are used as soldiers; and girls are at particular risk of rape, sexual harassment
and abuse. Rehabilitation and reintegration is particularly critical for youth formerly associated with armed groups in order to break cycles of violence and to find a new existence after a life of conflict and distress. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes should build on individuals’ strengths, especially their resilience. Limited economic, social and political opportunities are strong contributing factors driving youth to become involved in conflicts. By leaving youth with no alternative sources of dignity and self-worth achieved by gaining respect from others, society often steers a minority group of young people towards violent roles in conflict. It has been claimed that youth have a destructive potential which can explode if this group is excluded or neglected by society. The fact that youth are often not economically and socially included in (post-conflict) societies can generate a group of alienated, frustrated and powerless youth. Specifically young people have proven to be sensitive for recruitment practices. In academic literature, this phenomenon has been defined as the “youth bulge.” Another result of the lack of opportunities and social and economic exclusion can be a wave of youth emigration, which can - in turn - lead to a brain drain in the country itself.
2.2. YOUTH AS AGENTS OF PEACE

However, it must be stressed that the majority of youth is not among these minority groups. Recent examples have shown young people non-violently changing the structures and institutions that are crippling the social, political and economic well being of people. Across the world, “young people have taken on active roles and created youth networks to try to build peace and prevent outbreaks of violence.” Being the “primary actors in grassroots community development work,” youth has been considered to be at the “frontlines of peacebuilding.”

The Youth Advocacy Team (YAT), consisting of eight young people from across the globe, aims to advocate, on behalf of UNOY Peacebuilders, for youth to play a meaningful role in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and conflict resolution; for youth and youth organizations in promoting peace and non-violence; and mobilizing youth for post-conflict reconstruction.

Located in what one can call the epicenter of international affairs, Manhattan, NY, the YAT is continuously lobbying for a United Nations Security Resolution. You can read the story of one of the members of the UNOY Youth Advocacy Team, that sketches a lively and inspiring story of youth working, hard to bundle their powers to fight for a better world.

In 2005, the UN evaluation of the World Program on Action for Youth (WPAY), revealed that young people desired respect for human rights and an active role in society. Specifically, youth populations across the globe voiced desire for participation in improving hunger and poverty, education, employment, political participation in
decision-making, environmental law, communication technology, intergenerational issues, health, and conflict. Contrary to the framework suggested by the “youth bulge,” youth have the potential to initiate and engage in positive social change. This theory disregards the role of young people as peacebuilders and in promoting the
stability of a nation. In fact, the majority of young people strives for peace and stability and a number of them are actively engaged in peacebuilding efforts. Undisputedly, youth are vulnerable to fall victim to violent acts, and the lack of future prospects and limited education can contribute to youth being prone recruits to rebel movements. When there are large concentrations of youth that face unstable governments, insecurity and a lack of opportunities, the likelihood of violence occurring rises. High levels of unemployment, social exclusion and growing discontent amongst youth are not only acute problems of social development, but may also trigger severe regional and global unrest.

It is exactly because of this reason that the Security Council, the body of the United Nations that is charged with the maintenance of global peace and security, should engage youth productively in ways that strengthen their livelihood opportunities with the aim to reduce their vulnerability to involvement in these activities which are destructive to them and their families.

There must be a pragmatic shift from distraction to interaction, from passive partnership to participatory partnership, from seeing youths as sources of conflict to seeing them as resources for peace and development, and from asking them to wait to asking them to lead the way. Youth must be given a chance to contribute towards resolving our development crisis.
Through active participation, young people are empowered to play a vital role in their own development as well as in that of their communities, helping them to learn vital life-skills, develop knowledge on human rights and citizenship and to promote positive civic action. Indeed, the core purpose of youth’s participation is to empower them as individuals and members of civil society (i.e. as social actors, partners and leaders) to exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities. It gives them the opportunity to influence the actions and decisions that affect their lives. Peace processes appear as a window of opportunity for promoting a higher degree of participation of youth.

To recall the 2012 Secretary General report, inclusivity and institution-building are “critical in preventing relapse into violent conflict”\(^53\). In fact, the report states that “exclusion is one of the most important factors that trigger a relapse into conflict”\(^54\). In this sense, the Secretary General is implicating that youth exclusion in the aftermath of conflict can cause for serious security issues and instability. This belief is reiterated by McEvoy-Levy (2001) who stressed that “[i]n the long-term, a peace agreement’s endurance depends on whether the next generations accept it or reject it, how they are socialized during the peace process, and their perceptions of what the peace process has achieved”\(^55\). The first two years after a conflict offer a window of opportunity to deliver peace dividends and member states should start youth participation timely to avoid having to solve youth issues retroactively. The immediate inclusion of youth, not only in decision making but also in society as a whole, is thus not only logical but essentially pivotal to sustain peaceful
and secure societies and, finally, international peace and security. Therefore, if the issue of effective youth inclusion is not met with affirmative action then a vicious circle may arise in which sustainable peace is unattainable.
I had always desired experience in advocacy work in relation to youth in peacebuilding when I stumbled upon a unique opportunity: UNOY was seeking for members of their network to apply for the next mission of their Youth Advocacy Team (YAT) at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York. This is how I started my journey in advocacy for youth and peacebuilding where I hope to stay engaged for a long while.

The main goal of the UNOY YAT is to advocate, to recognize and to strengthen the role of youth in peacebuilding processes. But what does that mean? Please allow me to highlight two important clarifications: (i) at UNOY we understand peacebuilding from a holistic approach which includes the promotion of the culture of peace, education for peace, conflict transformation, non-violence, intercultural dialogue, human rights and mindfulness among others and (ii) not only in a context of (post-) armed conflict but also in societies that are confronted to cultural and structural violence as can be huge rates of unemployment among youth or gender based violence.

After a thorough and intense preparation, beginning of October, the UNOY YAT traveled from the four corners of the world to meet in NY and implement our advocacy strategy. We only had 5 days to accomplish our mission: to convince UN Members States and UN bodies to include youth and peacebuilding in their agenda, or at least, to encourage them to recognize the positive role that youth is playing in peacebuilding.

To a certain extent, I would say we went crazy trying to attend as
many events as possible to increase our visibility, to schedule as many meetings as possible with Members States and UN staff to make them aware of our advocacy plan and have them on board in our mission, but also to launch two reports: the one on youth and peace in the post-2015 agenda and another on the UN agreed language on youth and peacebuilding.

But we did achieve great and concrete results: we attended UN side events, trainings; we launched the two reports at the UN premises; we met with more than 40 representatives from Permanent Missions, UN staff, Youth Delegates and Civil Society Organizations, but most important we managed to have on the draft version of the UN General Assembly Youth Resolution a paragraph on youth and peacebuilding: the seeds to see, with time, an entire resolution dedicated to youth and peacebuilding at the General Assembly and hopefully at the Security Council as well.

We are aware that this is only the beginning of a work that will be long and hard and that in the path to see the recognition of youth and peacebuilding we may encounter many obstacles, but we will not stop here because we believe in youth and in peace and because as Nelson Mandela would say “it always seems impossible until it is done”.

*The Youth Advocacy Team: “It always seems impossible until it’s done”* by Gracia Romeral Ortíz Quintilla (Fundacio Catalunya Voluntaria)

More information at www.unoy.org
Chapter 3
Youth and Sustainability
Notwithstanding the fact that climate change disproportionately affects the Global South, it must be acknowledged that climate change is, by and large, an intrinsically global problem. Problems such as global warming and ozone layer depletion are, in the end, of concern to everyone in the world. The fact that this problem is not to be isolated has not meant, regrettably, that everyone has been involved in the decision making processes pertaining to the environment. Whereas the world is home to 1.2 billion youth, of which more than half lives in developing countries, youth participation in this issue, on international, national, and local levels, has been “scarce and disarticulated.” However, youth participation in this area has mushroomed over the past decade: more youth than ever are nowadays present at United Nations and other international meetings to meaningfully contribute to discussions on their future. To what extent their voices are being heard, however, is questionable, and against the backdrop of a political climate that generally tends to exclude youth’s voices the questions lingers if the presence of youth at such meetings is not pure window-dressing. This chapter will shed a light on the relevance of youth participation in environmental issues, their comparative advantages and disadvantages, and will, finally, make some recommendations as to how to ameliorate youth’s leverage.
"Let us acknowledge and celebrate what youth can do to build a safer, more just world. Let us strengthen our efforts to include young people in policies, programmes and decision-making processes that benefit their futures and ours."

– Ban Ki Moon
3.1. Relevance

As alluded to in the introduction, youth have a special interest in environmental issues and should in fact be the main stakeholders simply because they will have to deal with the consequences longer than their elders. Decisions that are being taken hugely influence the lives of youth at present and in the future.

Yet, youth participation is not just a democratic imperative: it should in fact be seen as highly desirable and a true enrichment to add more young voices to public discourse on climate change. It appears that youth are charged with a double burden, as they have both a special concern and a special responsibility in relation to the environment. Plausibly exactly because of youth’s special interest in the environment they have proven to be particularly eager to participate in efforts to ameliorate the status quo. A poll that was conducted by the United Nations Environment Programme in 2008 revealed that nearly 90% of young people that were questioned worldwide shared the conviction that world leaders should do “whatever it takes” to tackle climate change. Youth proved to be extremely concerned about the environment. Four in five young people believe that they are able to make a difference in climate change; nonetheless, a majority of youth says that they need more information on how they can go about to become effective change makers. This poll signals that youth are extremely willing to contribute to a greener future, but that they need additional information and perhaps capacity building to reach their highest potential.
As aforementioned, youth suffer tremendously from the disproportionate environmental risks and hazards that affect them. An example of this can be the issue of unemployment, which is currently imposing an additional strain on young people and is affecting their livelihoods\(^3\). The 2010 UN World Youth Report optimistically utters the possibility of so-called green jobs\(^4\), but seems to go by the fact that not all youth have access to such jobs. In fact, national governments often do not hear youth’s voices calling for better opportunities. In a similar vein, education and health care increasingly suffer from environmental strains. Caught between child and adulthood, youth are possibly the most underserved and underrepresented on issues that concern them. Regrettably, youth’s valuable contributions often do not manage to meaningfully influence policy making because of political and systemic barriers\(^5\). Within youth, there is a gender distinction at play that must be mentioned: whereas boys are more likely to be sent into heavy fighting, girls provide domestic and agricultural labor, and are subjected to sexual and gender-based violations during armed conflict\(^6\). This can strongly discourage young people from taking actions, which in turn leads to a disenfranchised youth cohort and a democratic leadership that lacks representation. Other constraints to participation on the youth’s side that are mentioned in this report are being uncertain about their lack of knowledge; limited confidence that they can make a difference; insufficient financial resources; insufficient time; lack of encouragement from peers; lack of ownership; and a lack of political backing\(^7\).

Young people are known to have a special capacity to rally for change: in different era’s and different regions, they have been
initiators of social movements that have revolutionized cultural and social practices. Youth have the unique advantage that they tend to position themselves outside of domains where the routines and stereotypes of their elders determine the course of events, such as political alignment and tribal or ethnic borders. Therefore, they can bring unique perspectives to the table.
3.3. Preliminary Conclusion

The tone is set: young people are increasingly playing a role in mitigating climate change and are involved in large numbers in small non-governmental organizations and grassroots organizations that are playing a crucial role in this process. Even though this report welcomes such developments, it believes that the current impact of youth on the environment niche is unsatisfactory to say the least. However, in order to allow young people to effectively stem the tide of unsustainable development, their outreach must be bigger and efforts that are being made should be championed and disseminated to encourage other young people and to eliminate doubts on their capacities. To realize behavioural change, there is a need for both opportunities (availability of means) and abilities (access to means). Additionally, more effective environmental education for underprivileged youth could serve to take away the prevalent sentiment among youth that they need more information about how to engender environmental change.
Reflections on Bangladesh

Blog Entry - 25 November 2013

“During our meeting, Hasan and I discussed about many things. First, we talked about the environment. Hasan told me that, in Rajshahi, 85% of the people are dependent on agriculture. In combination with the rampant drought that can occur in the dry season, that is quite problematic. A local newspaper that I found in the lobby underpins this finding, as it describes how people who solely depend upon natural resources and crop are struggling due to human induced climate change. The Indian Farakka Barrage has only made the problem worse as it diverts water from the Ganges River to its Indian tributary, thereby reducing the flow of water in the Bangladeshi tributary. According to a report by International Alert, these problems affect about 35 million people! Some of CCD Bangladesh’ activities relating to this are awareness building programs on arsenic mitigation. In Rajshahi, CCD Bangladesh is helping to promote people’s health and combats, for instance, vector borne diseases. On the other hand, they focus on the role of communication media for socio-economic development, thereby elucidating how farmers can plant their seeds and maximize their harvest.”

Blog Entry - 26 November 2013

“After a nice promenade by Rajshahi’s riverside and some delicious Bengali lunch, we were off to the next activity: a health camp, organized by CCD Bangladesh’s Active Citizens. This so-called health camp entailed a gathering at a local primary school, where those without access to a regular doctor could get checked and
get prescriptions. It was truly stunning to see that – within no time – forty volunteers with matching T shirts were ready and fully equipped to help facilitate the health camp! And what help camp... Once again I was truly stunned by the outreach of the Active Citizens: throughout the afternoon, over 300 people from the neighborhood visited the health camp with various health complaints. Needless to say, the Active Citizens’ health camp addressed the needs of the local population. Most of the health complaints came from lack of sanitation and a general lack of hygiene, and the volunteers were more than happy to provide the patients with all the information they needed. After all of the patients had seen a certified doctor and had been provided with the needed prescriptions, a theater group performed a play with the aim of raising awareness about health issues.”

Blog Excerpts of the Job Shadowing Project Bangladesh
by Robin de Vogel (United Network of Young Peacebuilders)
More information at www.unoy.org
CHAPTER 4
INTERSECTION & CONCLUSION
Young people are the mirror of a given society, and – within due time – they will take the centre stage in bringing about political, economic, and social developments. It is due to this reason that one can establish, that without the engagement of the youngest generations, there can be neither truly sustainable peace nor economic sustainability.

Most regrettably, youth are often stigmatized in (post-) conflict settings, since they tend to be dichotomized as either victims or perpetrators. The same holds for environmental issues, where youth are often identified as victims – since climate change poses severe threats to youth development – or perpetrators – as can be exemplified by the case-study about Cameroon, where youth are highly involved in illegal hunting.

Interestingly enough, in settings where environmental conflicts arise, the underrepresented category of youth face an even heavier double burden: on the one hand, the factors that push youth into conflicts are only aggravated by climate change and young people are thus more likely to join armed groups⁷⁰; and on the other hand, the threats that climate change poses to the development of youth are only exacerbated by conflict⁷¹.
Essentially, environmental conflicts can deprive young people of their youth: it can take away the most basic services, cause for poverty and unemployment and result in military recruitment, not to mention the background against which these environmental conflicts unfold. Environmental conflicts can entail miscellaneous problems such as water scarcity, land degradation, desertification, vector-borne diseases, extreme weather events and sea-level rise. Therefore, youth are uniquely vulnerable to both conflict and environmental degradation, while at the same time they have appeared very competent in rallying for change and have been entailed in various innovative environmental peacebuilding efforts. The simple fact that 90% of young people have voiced the desire to do whatever it takes to tackle environmental challenges signals that they may well be the most enthusiastic to tackle environmental problems.

Throughout the job shadowing project, it has become clear that environmental problems plague almost every country, and cause for miscellaneous conflicts, albeit violent or nonviolent. The latter is no novelty, but still it can be observed that there is little to no attention for environmental factors in most peacebuilding efforts. The powerful examples of Dutch initiatives in Afghanistan and social gardening in Berlin offer inspiration and effectively convey that the environment can actually be deployed as a catalyst for unity.

Essentially, this report has touched upon a vicious cycle: peacebuilding can only be truly sustainable when it takes into account both the environment and youth, environmental problems cannot be truly addressed without addressing youth and potential existing conflicts, and the situation of youth cannot be truly ameliorated when there remains to be environmental problems or conflicts.
“Conflict is the product of human relations. Resource conflicts are due to the scarcity and multifunctional nature of resources. Therefore, prevention or effective resolution of conflict cannot be achieved without collective learning and concerted efforts by all actors involved.”

- Bishnu Upreti
CHAPTER 5
Recommendations
Although the job shadowing project has shown that environmental challenges and the way people deal with those challenges differs greatly per context, common efforts of fourteen youth leaders around the world have resulted in recommendations.
◊ Peacebuilding strategies should always take into account the environmental aspect
◊ The environment is implicated in every phase of the conflict cycle. Maintain an environmental lens in your project, even if the specific conflict you are targeting is not directly linked to environmental issues. Be aware of what effect your project may have on the environment, and try to see if and how the environment can be utilized to overcome this conflict.
◊ Involve all stakeholders
◊ As aforementioned, prevention or effective resolution of conflict cannot be achieved without collective learning and concerted efforts by all actors involved. Even though this report has focused on the category of “youth,” it is also important to involve the youngest generations from the inception.
◊ Spread your knowledge!
◊ The fact that an overwhelming percentage of youth seems keen to contribute to environmental peacebuilding but so little do, is related exactly to their lack of knowledge on how they can contribute to environmental peacebuilders. There is a clear need for opportunities and abilities, and if we provide youngsters with some sort of environmental education the likelihood they will take action increases.
◊ Example Bangladesh: if your population is not sensitized on the effects that climate change can have, the situation is hopeless.
◊ Dialogue
◊ “Policies and strategies for development, peacebuilding, and climate change are often disconnected and divergent.”

This means opportunities for synergy are lost. Information sharing between environmental, development, and peacebuilding organizations could promote understanding of the problem and lay the basis for mapping out adaptive strategies.
END NOTES

3. World Health Organization (November 2013). Climate Change and Health Fact Sheet.
6. Such as diarrhoeal diseases, malnutrition, malaria and dengue.
7. World Health Organization (November 2013). Climate Change and Health Fact Sheet.
11. For a more encompassing overview of definitions of “youth” see Annex 1.
18. Noone, K. in Nordås, R. & Gleditsch, N.P. (June 2005). Climate Conflict:
Common Sense or Nonsense?


27. United Nations Environment Programme (February 2009). From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment.


33. United Nations Environment Programme (February 2009). From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment.


Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment.


41. United Nations Environment Programme (February 2009). From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment.

42. International Alert (November 2007). A Climate of Conflict: The links between climate change, peace and war.


44. A/RES/64/350

45. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Armed Conflict Factsheet.


Settlement Peace Building.


62. Ibid.


64. i.e. “work in agricultural, manufacturing, research and development (R&D), administrative, and service activities that contribute(s) substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality. Specifically, but not exclusively, this includes jobs that help to protect ecosystems and biodiversity; reduce energy, materials, and water consumption through high efficiency strategies; de-carbonize the economy; and minimize or altogether avoid generation of all forms of waste and pollution.” (UNEP)


67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.


72. Ibid.


United Nations Environment Programme (June 2007). News Centre: Environmental Degradation


