

We are Agents of Peace: Youth Perspectives on Their Engagement in Peacebuilding

¹Mary Gyamfuaa-Abrefa, ²Vincent Adzahlie-Mensah, ³Vida
Amankwaah Kumah, ⁴Francis Nyantakyi

¹Assin North Senior High School, Ghana

^{2,3}University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

⁴St Joseph's College of Education, Ghana

Abstract: *In this paper, we followed the emerging thinking of youth as agents of peace to bring youth voices and experiences to the fore. We take a view that without recognizing youth as political actors, their trajectories in peacebuilding would likely be ignored, wasted and at best, under-utilized. We highlight the willingness of the youth to be seen as responsible and capable peacebuilders, and the roles youth can play in social change processes aimed at peace building. From the evidence discussed, we argued that youth have their vision of peaceful society; they promote peaceful coexistence and support development of their societies. Youth networks are the main vehicle through which youth engage in peacebuilding. They mobilise for peace and the development of their communities. They become emissaries of peace and can work tirelessly for peaceful co-existence. Unlike the usual characterisation of youth as violent, the discussions showed that youth are engaged as catalysts for peace, working for peace during conflict. When exposed to the mechanics of peacebuilding, youth peacebuilders create a society that is less violent and become more tolerant and increase peaceful cohabitation and support to vulnerable groups. Our argument is that, when youth are engaged as peacebuilders, they often became more aware and active citizens for peace. Youth can be engaged as agents of peace especially as peer educators and community peace-setters.*

Keywords: Youth, peacebuilding, peace, agents, security

I. Introduction

Youth is a contested notion worldwide especially when discussed in the arenas of peace security thinking. The United Nations defines 'youth', as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years (UNESCO, 2017). This definition is exclusively for statistical purposes and without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. Given the slippery nature and context specific definitions of youth, this research adopted Ghana's definition. The National Youth Policy of Ghana (2010), defines "youth as persons who are within the age bracket of fifteen (15) and thirty-five (35)". In tandem with the UN, the policy adds that youth is the period between childhood and adulthood or what the UN described as the "period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence." Thus, youth is not only age related but responsibility related transition period. The transition is from family dependent childhood to independent adulthood and integration in the society as a responsible citizen.

The peace and security literature presents youth variously as social construct (Issifu, 2015), as gender category (Gyamfuaa-Abrefa, 2019) and as an age group (UNESCO, 2017). McEvoy-Levy presents youth as social and political agents in post-settlement peacebuilding (McEvoy-Levy, 2014; 2013; 2012). Some discuss youth with the negative connotations of the 'youth bulge' or 'at risk youth' concepts. Much of contemporary thinking on

youth and conflict focuses on the dangers posed by disaffected youths (Ozerdem, 2016; Bolten, 2012; Peters, 2011; Barber, 2013). The majority of national and international policy pronouncements or security-related programmes in post-conflict and fragile contexts reflect a polarised discourse - vacillating between the two extremes of 'infantilizing' and 'demonizing' (Ozerdem, 2016). By infantilizing, we mean the presentation of youth as victims of conflict that are vulnerable, powerless and in need of protection (Berents, 2013). By demonizing, we mean the presentation of youth as agents of conflict that should be feared as dangerous, violent, apathetic and as threats to security (Bolten, 2012). The former ascribes incompetence to the youth while the latter ascribes images of being angry, drugged and violent (MacEvoy-Levey, 2009; Masten, 2014). Youth are presented as a threat (especially those who participated in armed conflict as combatants). They are seen as the fighting forces of rebels or described as child soldiers (Aidi, 2014; Taft, 2011). The negative perception dominates the literature with a number of dangerous assumptions about the role, position, and contribution of youths, which appear to plague thinking among national and international elites driving recovery efforts within societies in transition (Peters, 2011; Barber et al., 2012). In Africa, some works have described African youth as restless (Gavin, 2007). Over the years, the negative imageries ascribed to youth in the conflict, peace and security literature excluded them from being engaged as peace actors.

However, the narrative is changing – the negative connotations are being challenged by arguments that continue to recognize the positive contributions that youth can make to national and international development discourses. There are questions as to whether youth are only troublemakers or peacemakers as well? (McEvoy-Levy, 2006). The views are mixed as Schwartz (2010) described youth in post-conflict reconstruction as agents of change, the UNDP (2006) see a role for youth in violent conflicts where society and development are in crises, and questioning whether youth are a threat to security or a force for peace? Empirical evidence from a mixed methods research on youth engagement in conflict in Ghana (Agana, 2018) provided knowledge that youth and their socio-economic conditions are not the main sources of conflict. Daniel (2015) sees youth as tactical agents of peacebuilding. Eskandarpour (2014) documented the resilience of youth during conflict and its contribution to post-conflict stability. The Global Partnership for Children and Youth Peacebuilding (2015:11) conducted an evaluation of child and youth participation in peacebuilding in which it details that youth peacebuilders have contributed to impact in four key areas: creating more aware and active citizens for peace; increasing peaceful cohabitation and reducing discrimination; reducing violence; and increasing support to vulnerable groups. Also, the conflict literature emerging from Ghana is replete with arguments that youth can be agents of conflict resolution and of peacebuilding (Adzahlie-Mensah and Benson, 2019; Gyamfuaa-Abrefa, 2019; Agana, 2018; Adzahlie-Mensah, 2007). In his process model for the resolution of inter-ethnic conflict in Ghana, Adzahlie-Mensah (2007) illustrated the youth as crucial to conflict resolution. Agana's (2018) research on youth engagement found that youth can be a force for good while Gyamfuaa-Abrefa's (2018) work detailed different ways youth can be engaged as peacebuilders. This paper is an addition to the emerging literature on the ways in which youth can be engaged in peacebuilding initiatives.

II. Theorising youth as peacebuilders

Since the dawn of the 21st century, new thinking about youth continue to challenge theories of youth violence so poignantly discussed in the works Abdullahi, Seedat-Khan and Saheed (2016). There appears to be an emerging tradition that is deliberately seeking out and recognising the multiple, contested, and challenging ways youth involve themselves in spaces of everyday peace-building in response to the ongoing exclusion of their experiences in peace-building practices (Aladeokin, 2016; Ozerdem, 2016; McEvoy-Levy, 2013; Honwana, 2012). This new framing considers youth from an agency perspective, acknowledging the importance of making the connection between youth and peacebuilding (United Nation inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, 2016; Masten, 2014; Taylor et al., 2014; Betancourt, Bernnan, Rubin-Smith, Fitzmaurice & Gilman, 2010). It argues for transforming the predominantly negative discourse on the role of youths in peace (Aladeokin, 2016; Berents & McEvoy-Levy, 2015; Ozerdem, 2015). It is grounded within the concept of youth as 'agents of peace', where the 'politics of peace', is seen as critical engagements with individuals, communities and social

movements (Eskandarpour, 2014; McEvoy-Levy, 2014). The associated concept of ‘agents of peaceful change’ identifies youth as a peace constituency with the greatest potential for affecting systemic change.

The new framework theorises the youth as actors in international political economy and international security (Watson, 2009) while recognising the ‘everyday’ and ‘the local’ as important spaces where youth could act (Pruitt, 2013; Watson, 2009; Brocklehurst, 2006). It argues that the sustainability of the results generated by peace programmes must be grounded in incorporating youth into the programme. Discounting the youth is considered as failure to ensure a sustainable ‘exit’, which may lead to further violence after the phase-out of the project. Initiatives of civil society organisations which support attitudinal change and a culture of peace are only effective when they can reach a critically large number of the youth.

Within the conception of youth as agents of change, Ozerderm (2016) argued that five things are pertinent in the engagement of youth in peacebuilding. These were that:

- the youth mobilization and reintegration factors such as who they are, what they did before the conflict, how they were recruited, what specific fighting roles they undertook, what they experienced physically, socio-economically and psychologically, during the armed conflict, and what ‘home’ context they will be reintegrating into will all be critical for the youth’s trajectories in peacebuilding.
- the involvement of youth in non-violent politics, and from a wider perspective, the enablement of their political agency in a more positive and peace-oriented role in post-conflict environments, is likely to depend on how these trajectories are shaped by the overall political and governance context.
- the enablement of youth as an active agent in peacebuilding cannot be considered without considering such challenges they tend to face due to the armed conflict such as the loss of education, a lack of employable skills and the destruction of a stable family environment. The wider socio-economic needs of youths are often ignored in post-conflict contexts as they are not seen as a ‘vulnerable’ group.
- it is important to provide youths with training opportunities to take an active part in peacebuilding. With their youthful energy and capabilities, and ability of adaptation to new technological trends, for example, youths could act as mediators, community mobilisers, humanitarian workers and peace brokers. Like any particular conflict affected population group, the mobilisation of youths’ capacities requires a targeted and long-term approach.
- the engagement of youth in peacebuilding in a wider perspective can be ensured through the arts, culture, tourism, sports and education. The innovativeness and creativeness of young people in those areas could be mobilised effectively by connecting them with wider peacebuilding objectives such as building bridges between divided communities and ensuring a viable process of reconciliation.

Therefore, to recognize their agency as political actors in peacebuilding, there needs to be a comprehensive understanding of their conflict trajectories, and this is particularly important for those young people who have taken direct participation in an armed conflict as combatants. Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015) highlight three interrelated and overlapping spheres of inquiry. First, it makes the case for examining age-specific as well as gender, and other contextually-specific roles of youth as they relate to everyday peacebuilding. This draws attention to analysing from a recognition that the positioning of youth in society has a bearing on their leadership potential and their possible role in peacebuilding (Ozerdem, 2016). It challenges marginalization by considering the tension between young and old that has been one of the key features of inter-generational shifts pertaining to the control over power, resources and people. Second, attention to how everyday peace is narrated by or through youth. The analysis considers questions about what values, policies, and governmental structures are specifically being resisted and rejected, and how peace is conceptualised and/or hidden in the narratives of

youth. The third sphere concerns the nexus of global and local (including discursive and institutional) structures that facilitate, curtail, and curtail everyday peace (building) practices. The three spheres are considered as important to identify and evaluate for their impacts on the roles and ideas of youth.

Thus, the theoretical framework recognises the complex and multiple ways youth are engaged in the everyday peacebuilding. It asks how we can engage this recognition within knowledge and practices of everyday peacebuilding. Many works on youth peacebuilding provides evidence that young people can be important drivers and agents of change in the development of their societies (McEvoy-Levy, 2015). Aladeokin's (2016) research on Sierra Leone argued that if youth can be such a powerful force that can destroy a whole nation, they can be useful resources when working for peace. CARE International (2012) reports that engaging youth, peacebuilding projects could prevent future violent conflicts but argued that by targeting youth in general, projects failed to work with 'political youth' as key actors. In Ghana, an important work by Gyamfuaa-Abrefa (2019) presents evidence that youth are important agents of peacebuilding.

In this paper, we followed the emerging thinking to bring youth voices and experiences to the fore; explaining how these play out in the challenging fluidity of conflict environments, where the politics of war continue through different means (Ozerdem, 2016). We conceptualise the youth as agents of positive peace in terms of addressing not only the challenges of physical violence, but also the challenges of structural and cultural violence. We take a view that without recognizing youths as political actors, their trajectories in peacebuilding would likely be ignored, wasted and at best, under-utilized (Ozerdem, 2016). We discuss the social, political and economic 'navigational skills' as well as how youth speak to power dynamics in peacebuilding to carve a role for themselves. We discuss this by examining how the identities as youth are negotiated or re-negotiation within the societal norms, values and structures that give voice and place to people within the emergent structures of conflict environments. We examined the willingness of the youth to be seen as responsible and capable peacebuilders, and the structural barriers as well as enablers to their participation. We highlight the role of the youth in social change processes aimed at transforming violent, oppressive and hierarchical structures, as well as behaviour, relationships and attitudes into more participatory and inclusive ones.

III. Methodology

The research that informed this paper was a sequential mixed-methods research involving a convenient sample of 303 youth selected with a 0.05 (5%) margin of error. The survey participants were Level 300 students drawn from the Department of Social studies at the Ghana's University of Education, Winneba. They included 120 females and 183 males. Out of the 303, we noticed that 145 had some experience with conflict while 158 never experienced any active social conflict. In terms of involvement in hostilities, 26 were active fighters while 277 were never involved in conflict. The data were collected using questionnaires that returned an acceptable Cronbach α reliability score of 0.73. Follow up interviews were conducted with 15 students who were directly involved as fighters in active conflicts to learn from their experiences. The interviews were single face-to-face interviews. The qualitative data from the interviews were used to support the quantitative findings before conclusions were drawn. The data were analysed using descriptive and template analysis involving categorical aggregation, (clustering complex data into categories or classes to ease the search for meaning) and direct interpretation (researchers reach new meanings about cases).

IV. Forms of youth engagement in peacebuilding

This section discusses the ways in which the youth can be involved in peacebuilding. It examines the data from both likert scale items and interviews. The first part presents the views from females. This is followed by the data from male respondents.

Table 1: Perspective of females on forms of youth engagement in peacebuilding

How youth are engaged in peacebuilding	D	SD	NS	SA	A
Youth engage as peace actors	8 (7%)	36 (30%)	16(13%)	26(22%)	34(28%)
Youth are a catalyst for peace	2 (2%)	9 (8%)	11(9%)	68(57%)	30(25%)
Youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody	10(8%)	31(26%)	16(13%)	47(39%)	16(13%)
Youth work for peace during conflict	7 (6%)	15(13%)	23(19%)	41(34%)	34(28%)
Youth networks mobilise for peace	9 (8%)	23(19%)	44(37%)	34(28%)	10(8%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 1 presents the views of female participants related to the ways in which youth get involved in peacebuilding. From the analysis presented in the table, 50%, representing 60 out of 120 female participants, claimed that youth engage in conflict as peace actors. A significant portion of the participants, 16(13%) were not sure while 44 (37%) out of the 120 females involved in the work disagreed. This is corroborated by the result suggesting that 56 (47%) participants claimed youth work for peace during conflict. Although 41 (34%) disagreed and 23 (19%) were not sure, the results concur with the evidence from the literature that youth engage in conflict positively (Eskandarpour, 2014; McEvoy-Levy, 2014).

Most (82%) participants, representing 98 out of the 120 female participants, were in agreement that youth are a catalyst for peace. Eleven (9%) participants were not sure while another 11 (9%) participants disagreed. This presents a typical case where there is some agreement with the literature that youth are agents for peace practices (Aladeokin, 2016; Ozerdem, 2016; McEvoy-Levy, 2013; Honwana, 2012).

What is interesting is the results that 52% representing 63 out of the 120 claimed youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody. Further clarification is presented in the result suggesting that 44(37%) of participants were not sure youth work for peace during conflict. As the results indicate, 36% agreed while 32(27%) disagreed. This would suggest that most participants were not of the view that youth work for peace during conflicts. This contradicts the view that the youth are more active as combatants that peace makers. This evidence was also presented in Agana's (2018) research which showed significant numbers of youth suggested that youth work for peace during conflict. This is supported by several research indicating that there are collectives and individual youth who play different roles for peace during conflict (Masten, 2014; Taylor et al., 2014; Betancourt et al., 2010).

Table 2 presents the results of the analyses of views of male participants related to the ways in which youth get involved in conflict. It shows that 52%, representing 96 out of 183 male participants agreed that youth engage as peace actors. Another 35%, representing 65 out of the 183 males involved in the work disagreed that that youth engage as peace actors. From the data presented, 22 (13%) participants were not sure that that youth engage as peace actors.

Like the females, most (87%) participants, representing 159 out of the 183 male participants, were in agreement that youth are a catalyst for peace. Six percent, representing 10 participants were not sure. Only seven percent, representing 14 participants disagreed. This presents a typical case where there is some agreement with the literature that youth are perceived as violent group during conflict.

Table 2: Perspectives of male on forms of youth engagement in peacebuilding

How youth are engaged in peacebuilding	D	SD	NS	SA	A
Youth engage as peace actors	15(8%)	50(27%)	22(13%)	50(27%)	46(25%)
Youth are a catalyst for peace	8(4%)	6(3%)	10(6%)	79(43%)	80(44%)
Youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody	42(23%)	27(15%)	24(13%)	38(21%)	52(28%)
Youth work for peace during conflict	23(13%)	47(26%)	28(15%)	52(28%)	33(18%)
Youth networks mobilise for peace	26(14%)	49(27%)	49(27%)	48(26%)	11(6%)

Source: Field data, 2018

From the table, 90 (49%) participants agreed that youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody. Twenty-four (13%) were not sure. This contradicts view within the literature that youth are usually violent (Ochogwu, 2010). However, 46% (85) disagreed that youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody while 70 (39%) disagreed and 28 (15%) were not sure. The variations reflect the view of Shaik (2017) that there are three types of youth in society.

Table 3: Perspectives of employed youth on forms of youth engagement peacebuilding

How youth are engaged in peacebuilding	D	SD	NS	SA	A
Youth engage as peace actors	4(9%)	6(14%)	9(21%)	13(30%)	11(26%)
Youth are a catalyst for peace	2(4%)	2(4%)	2(4%)	22(53%)	15(35%)
Youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody	7 (16%)	4(9%)	4(9%)	13(31%)	15(35%)
Youth work for peace during conflict	5(11%)	8(19%)	5(11%)	14 (33%)	11(26%)
Youth networks mobilise for peace	5(11%)	2 (4%)	8 (19%)	14(33%)	14(33%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 3 presents the views of employed youth participants related to the ways in which youth get involved in peacebuilding. From the analysis presented in the table, 56%, representing 23 out of 43 employed participants, claimed that youth engage as peace actors. A significant portion (nine out of 43) of the participants (21%) were not sure that youth engage as peace actors. Another 23%, representing 10 out of the 43 employed youth

disagreed that youth engage as peace actors. Most (88%) participants, representing 37 out of the 43 employed participants, were in agreement that youth are a catalyst for peace. Two participants, (four percent) were not sure while another four (eight percent) participants disagreed. This presents a typical case where there is some agreement with the literature that youth are perceived as violent group during conflict. What is interesting is the results that 28 (66%) out of the 43 participants agreed that youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody. This would suggest that a significant proportion of employed youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody. However, 11(25%) disagreed and four (9%) were not sure. Further clarification is presented in the data suggesting 25 (59%) agreed youth work for peace during conflict and five (19%) were not sure, while 13(30%) disagreed. This would suggest that most participants were not of the view that youth work for peace during conflicts. This again confirms the view that youth work for peace instead of perpetrating conflicts (Aladeokin, 2016; Berents and McEvoy-Levy, 2015; Ozerdem, 2015). It supports the views of believers in youth peace building work who suggest that youth work for peace (Ozerderm, 2016; Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015). As the results showed, youth networks were seen as important mechanisms that mobilise for peace. From the results, 28(66%) of the participants agreed that youth networks mobilise for peace whereas only seven (15%) disagreed. Eight (19%) were not sure.

Table 4: Perspectives of unemployed youth on forms of youth engagement in peacebuilding

How youth are engaged in peacebuilding	D	SD	NS	SA	A
Youth engage as peace actors	19(7%)	39(15%)	56(22%)	71(27%)	75(29%)
Youth are a catalyst for peace	8(3%)	13(5%)	19(7%)	125(48%)	95(37%)
Youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody	41(16%)	39(15%)	36(14%)	76(29%)	68(26%)
Youth work for peace during conflict	25(10%)	37(14%)	46(18%)	79(30%)	73(28%)
Youth networks mobilise for peace	30(12%)	58(22%)	19(7%)	68(7%)	85(33%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 4 presents the views of unemployed participants related to the ways in which youth get involved in conflict. From the analysis presented in the table, 56%, representing 146 out of 260 unemployed youth participants, claimed that youth engage as peace actors. A minority of the participants (22% representing 58 out of 260) were not sure that youth engage as peace actors. Another 56(22%) were not sure that youth engage as peace actors. In terms of youth being a catalyst for peace, 220(75%), out of the 260 unemployed youth agreed. Only 21(8%) disagreed. Most (55%) participants, representing 145 out of the 260 unemployed youth participants, were in agreement that youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody. Seven percent (19) participants were not sure while another 21 (eight percent) participants disagreed. From the data 44% representing 115 out of the 260 unemployed youth agreed that youth are the most vulnerable during conflict. The views on the index of youth working for peace during conflict, the data shows that 152(58%) of participants agreed. As the data indicates, 62(24%) disagreed while 46(18%) were not sure. This would suggest that most of the unemployed youth participants were of the view that youth work for peace during conflicts. Regarding youth networks mobilising for peace, 153(60%) agreed while 88(34%) disagreed and 19 (7%) were not sure.

Table 5: Perspectives of youth who experienced conflict on youth engagement in peacebuilding

How youth are engaged in peacebuilding	D	SD	NS	SA	A
Youth engage as peace actors	11 (8%)	28(19%)	18(12%)	50(35%)	38(26%)
Youth are a catalyst for peace	3(2%)	5(4%)	7(5%)	73(50%)	57(39%)
Youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody	27(19%)	26(18%)	15(10%)	39(27%)	38(26%)
Youth work for peace during conflict	17(12%)	25(17%)	19(13%)	48(33%)	36(25%)
Youth networks mobilise for peace	18(12%)	30(21%)	8(6%)	37(25%)	52(36%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 5 presents the views of youth who have experienced conflict in their community. The table shows that the participants' views related to the ways in which youth get involved in peacebuilding. From the analysis presented in the table, 88(51%), agreed that youth engage as peace actors. A significant portion of the participants (12%) were not sure that youth engage as peace actors. Another 39(27%), participants who have experienced conflict in their communities disagreed that youth are the main causes of conflict. In terms of the view that youth are a catalyst for peace, 130 (89%) participants, were in agreement. Eight participants representing six percent disagreed while another seven were not sure. This presents a typical case where there is some agreement within the literature that youth are a catalyst for peace. From the results, 54% representing 77 out of the 145 of the youth who have experienced conflict in their communities agreed that youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody. Another 53 (37%) disagreed while 15(10%) were not sure. It can be argued that youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody. This contradicts the literature presenting youth as fundamentally violent. Further clarification is presented in the results showing that 74(58%) of participants agreed that youth work for peace during conflict. As the data indicates, 42(29%) of participants disagreed while 19(13%) were not sure. This would suggest that most participants were of the view that youth work for peace during conflicts. It presents insights that there are individuals who believe that youth have a role for peace during conflict.

Table 6: Perspectives of youth who never experienced conflict within their communities

How youth are engaged in peacebuilding	D	SD	NS	SA	A
Youth engage as peace actors	12(7%)	48(30%)	30(19%)	34(22%)	34(22%)
Youth are a catalyst for peace	7(4%)	10(6%)	14(9%)	74(47%)	53(34%)
Youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody	21(13%)	45(28%)	25(16%)	50(32%)	17 (11%)
Youth work for peace during conflict	13(8%)	45(29%)	32(20%)	45(29%)	23(14%)
Youth networks mobilise for peace	17(10%)	42(27%)	41(26%)	45(29%)	13(8%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 6 presents the views of youth who have not experienced conflict in their community. The table shows that, 48 (30%), of the participants strongly agreed that youth engage in conflict as peace actors while 34(22%) agreed. This will suggest that 52% of all participants were in agreement whereas 34 (22%) were not sure and 42(26%) disagreed. This shows that majority are in agreement, but a significant proportion did not agree. Out of the of the 158 participants who have never experienced conflict, 81%, representing 127, were in agreement that youth are a catalyst for peace. Seventeen (10%) participants disagreed while 14(9%) were not sure. This presents a typical case where there is some agreement within the literature that youth are perceived as catalyst for peace. From the data that, 67 (43%) out of the 158 youth who have not experienced conflict in their communities agreed that youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody. Another 66 (41%) disagreed while 25(16%) were not sure. This spread again suggests that it is difficult to conclude on the argument that youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody. However, 68 (43%) participants agreed that youth work for peace during conflict while 58 (37%) disagreed and 32 (20%) were not sure. In terms of views related to the item regarding that youth networks mobilise for peace, 58 (37%) of participants agreed. As the data indicates, 59 (37%) participants disagreed and 41(26%) were not sure. This shows a split that makes it difficult to establish the role of youth in peacebuilding during conflicts. However, it provides important insights that there are individuals who believe that youth can work for peace during conflict.

Table 7: Perspectives of youth who were never involved in conflict

How youth are engaged in peacebuilding	D	SD	NS	SA	A
Youth engage as peace actors	20(7%)	79(29%)	45(16%)	76(27%)	57(21%)
Youth are a catalyst for peace	9(3%)	14(5%)	20(7%)	132(48%)	102(37%)
Youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody	45(16%)	35(13%)	37(13%)	84(30%)	76(28%)
Youth work for peace during conflict	27(10%)	46(16%)	45(16%)	82(30%)	77(28%)
Youth networks mobilise for peace	30(11%)	66(24%)	17(6%)	75(27%)	89(32%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 7 presents the views of youth who have not been actively involved in conflict. From the analysis presented in the table, 133(48 %) out of the 277 participants, agreed that youth engage as peace actors. From the data, 99(36%) disagreed that youth engage as peace actors. Another 45 (16%), were not sure. This spread suggests that the views about youth engagement in peacebuilding are perspectival and fluid. What is significant is the data is that 234 (85%) were in agreement that youth are a catalyst for peace. Only 23(8%) disagreed while 20(7%) were not sure. Again, this corroborates earlier views where majority of the participants were in agreement with the literature that youth are a catalyst for peace. In terms of youth thinking there should be peaceful life for everybody, 160(58%) agreed that. As the data showed, 80(29%) disagreed while 37 (13%) were not sure. Similarly, only 159 (58%) out of 277 participants agreed youth work for peace during conflict while 73 (26%) disagreed and 45 (16%) were not sure. What is more interesting is the data suggesting only 164(60%) of those youth who were never involved in conflict agreed youth networks mobilise for peace. As the data indicates, 89 (32%) were not sure while 96(35%) disagreed that youth networks mobilise for peace.

Table 8: Perspectives of youth who were involved in conflict

How youth are engaged in peacebuilding	D	SD	NS	SA	A
Youth engage as peace actors	3(12%)	5(19%)	3(12%)	8(30%)	7(27%)
Youth are a catalyst for peace	1(4%)	1(4%)	1(4%)	15(58%)	8(30%)
Youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody	3(12%)	5(19%)	3(12%)	7(27%)	8(30%)
Youth work for peace during conflict	3(12%)	4(15%)	2(8%)	11(42%)	6(23%)
Youth networks mobilise for peace	5(19%)	4(15%)	4(15%)	7(27%)	6(24%)

Source: Field data, 2018

Table 8 presents the views of participants who have been actively involved in conflict. It can be observed that 23 (88%) were in agreement that youth are a catalyst for peace. This corroborates earlier views where majority of the participants were in agreement with the literature that youth are a catalyst for peace. From the analysis presented in the table, 15(57%), out of the 26 participants, agreed that youth engage as peace actors. Also, three (12%) were not sure that youth engage as peace actors. Another eight (30%), disagreed that youth engage as peace actors. Given that all these were active participants during conflict their views negate the violent image ascribed to youth in relation to conflict. What is interesting is the results that 15(57%) agreed that youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody. From the results, eight (31%) disagreed while three (12%) were not sure. Also, 17 (65%) participants agreed youth work for peace during conflict while seven (27%) disagreed and six (23%) were not sure. In terms of youth networks mobilising for peace 13(51%) of participants agreed youth networks mobilise for peace. The results showed that, four (15%) were not sure while nine (34%) disagreed. Therefore, it can be argued that youth work for peace before, during and after conflict. This presents possibilities for policy and practice as it gives pointers that youth who actively engage as part of the fighting force in conflict think that youth are agents of peace. Overall, the evidence shows that all categories of youth are of the view that youth engage in peacebuilding positively. What is interesting is the idea that youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody. The support for views that youth engage as peace actors and agents for peace support the literature that youth work for peace during conflict. This presents a fundamental challenge to the propositions within the literature that youth are the main sources of conflict. As previous research (Agana, 2018) argued, there is no clear evidence to support this claim.

From the interviews, several comments emerged. Some typical comments about youth peacebuilding included the following:

I think we should be thinking of how to use the youth as positive peace agents than this false label of youth as agents of conflict. In my community, we the youth are those who are mobilising to ensure there is no conflict. ... It hurts me when people say youth are the violent group. It is never true. It is adults who try to mobilise the youth to foment trouble.

Everyone who worked with youth will know that youth are trained to get violent. By whom? The adults! ... I come from a conflict community. It is the adult that try to indoctrinate us right from childhood. We youth are those opposing their violence now.... For me youth should be seen as agents for peace.

It's a mistake to see youth in a negative light when it comes to conflict. Youth are agents of peace. Madam, who wants to die? You think I want to fight? Yes, some youth had to fight to defend themselves and their communities... It's true that today I will protect myself, my family and my community from attackers. Everyone will do that. It doesn't mean that we are violent. Self-defence is a natural rule. I can bet that any conflict is not started by youth. It's adults that start it and enlist youth to fight for them.

I want a peaceful life. I don't want to cut my life short by fighting in any conflict. Youth should be seen as agents of peace than of conflict. This label of youth as violent is so wrong.

Please can I ask a question? How many youth fight? Of the youth population, has anyone calculated how many youth are engaged in wars and conflicts? The youth are peaceful people. Adults force youth to fight or they engage in conflict to defend their families and communities.

In Ghana, I don't think we can say that 50% of the youth are engaged in conflict. So how do you come to say that youth are violent. We are not. When they say youth are violent they have boys in mind. What of the girls who do not fight? We are peace agents and we stand for peace. It is adults that buy the guns; they recruit and train youth sometimes by force to fight.

From the comments, youth primarily see themselves as agents of peace than as conflict agents. This rejection of a violent status cuts across all the comments and seems to be a reality that peacebuilding policy and practice need to account for. As the first comment indicated, society should be thinking of how to use youth as positive peace agents than as agents for conflict. In particular, the comment that 'We are peace agents and we stand for peace' can be argued as a fundamental reflection of the youth mind-set and desire. From the comments, youth argue that it is a mistake to consider youth as conflict-causing agents. In their view, the youth want peaceful life. The comments provide empirical support to findings from various literature suggesting that youth can be agents of peace than of conflict (Aladeokin, 2016; Orzderem, 2016; Barber et al., 2012). They show that youth can engage as mediators and peacebuilders, contradicting views that youth are violent. The evidence supports Ochogwu's (2010) propositions that the youth constituency in any country can be active peace agents. It supports the views of CARE International (2012) that youth can play a role as peacebuilders during conflict. As CARE International argued, by engaging with youth, peacebuilding projects could prevent future violent conflicts. The comments correspond with the majority views from the tables that during conflicts, youth engage as peace actors, acting as catalysts for peace. The idea that youth think there should be peaceful life for everybody is argued together with the view that it is adult members of the society that trains youth to engage in conflict. When vectored with the majority view that youth networks mobilise for peace during conflicts, fundamental blame was put on the adult population as the group that socialises youth into conflict. As the majority view in the tables show, the interview comments agree with the results from the descriptive analysis in the tables that youth work for peace during conflict. They see themselves as agents for peace with a positive mind-set. They can mobilise through youth networks to contribute to peacebuilding efforts. The conceptions illustrated in the comments represents a positive reality that peacebuilding initiatives can engage youth in peace programming activities. Our argument is that peacebuilding activities need to place youth at the centre and conceptualise them as agents for peace than of conflict. This requires fundamental rethinking and the need to change the frame of thinking about youth and their roles in peacebuilding activities and peace programming in general. Also, the comments raise an important issue – slighting the adult population. As may be observed from the comments, one thread connecting all the points made by the participants is the suggestion that youth are led to conflict by adult actors.

V. Concluding comments

The arguments developed in this paper present evidence that youth see themselves as agents of peace and a force for good in peacebuilding. Unlike the usual characterisation of youth as violent, the discussions showed that youth work for peace during conflict. There are several reasons for this claim. The first factor is the youth mind-set they think there should be peaceful life for everybody. In this sense, there is the potential to engage them within the context of their own vision of peaceful society. Second, youth see themselves engaged as catalysts for peace. During conflict, youth become emissaries of peace and can work tirelessly for peaceful co-existence. Third, they see youth networks as the main vehicle through which youth engage in peacebuilding. Youth networks are a positive tool that can mobilise youth to participate in peacebuilding activities and programming. They mobilise for peace and the development of their communities. Fourth, when youth are exposed to the mechanics of peacebuilding, they become more tolerant and increase peaceful cohabitation and reduced discrimination. Youth peacebuilders create a society that is less violent and young peacebuilders increased support to vulnerable groups. As such, they promote peaceful coexistence and support development of their societies. Our argument is that, when discussing peace and security, youth should be considered from a positive mind-set. Youth should be engaged as peacebuilders and supported to play key roles within peace programming initiatives. As youth want a peaceful society for everyone, their vision of the world should play an important part in constructing peacebuilding activities. This requires that youth are supported to develop peacebuilding skills that enable them to invest themselves into peace programming. Community education for youth on the ways they can contribute to peace programmes may be fundamental in supporting youth to develop the knowledge and the skills they need to lead in peace and security initiatives. Supporting youth in this area may build their capacities to become more aware and active citizens and agents for peace. The cascading effects may be the emergent of a generation of youth that can be engaged as agents of peace especially as peer educators and community peace-setters.

References

- [1.] Abdullahi, A. A., Seedat-Khan, M., & Saheed, O. A. (2016). A Review of Youth Violence Theories: Developing Interventions to Promote Sustainable Peace in Ilorin, Nigeria. *African Sociological Review / Revue Africaine de Sociologie*, 20(2), pp.40-60.
- [2.] Adzahlie-Mensah, V. (2007). *Conflict resolution in the Nkonya-Alavanyo area*. MPhil Dissertation, University of Education, Winneba.
- [3.] Adzahlie-Mensah, V. & Benson, G. H. (2018). Conflicts and Rights to Education in Africa. *African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*; Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 1-12.
- [4.] Agana, M. (2018). *Youth engagement in conflict*. MPhil Thesis, Centre for Conflicts, Human Rights and Peace Studies. UEW
- [5.] Aidi, H. (2014). *Rebel Music: Race, Empire, and the New Muslim Youth Culture*. New York: Pantheon.
- [6.] Aladeokin, T. A. (2016). *Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Youth Participation in Sierra Leone*. Master's Thesis in Peace and Conflict Transformation Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education UIT, The Arctic: University of Norway.
- [7.] Barber, B. K. (2009). *Adolescents and war: How youth deal with political violence*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [8.] Barber, B. K. (2013). Annual research review: The experience of youth with political conflict — Challenging notions of resilience and encouraging research refinement. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54(4): 461-473.
- [9.] Barber, B. K., McNeely, C. & Spellings, C. (2012). Role of political factors in wellbeing and quality of life during long-term constraints and conflict. *The Lancet*, 380, S17.

- [10.] Berents, H. (2013). *From the Margins: Conflict-Affected Young People, Social Exclusion, and an Embodied Everyday Peace in Colombia*. PhD diss., University of Queensland: Brisbane, Australia.
- [11.] Berents, H., & McEvoy-Levy, S. (2015) Theorising youth and everyday peace (building). *Peacebuilding*, 3(2):115-125.
- [12.] Betancourt, T.S., Brennan, R.T., Rubin-Smith, J., Fitzmaurice, G.M., & Gilman, S.E. (2010). Sierra Leone's former child soldiers: A longitudinal study of risk, protective factors and mental health. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 49, 606–615.
- [13.] Bolten, C. (2012). "We Have Been Sensitized": Ex-Combatants, Marginalization, and Youth in Postwar Sierra Leone. *American Anthropologist*, 114 (3)
- [14.] Brocklehurst, H. (2006). *Who's Afraid of Children? Children, Conflict and International Relations*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- [15.] CARE International (2012). *Peacebuilding with Impact: Defining Theories of Change*. London: CARE
- [16.] Daniel, E., A. (2015). Youth as Tactical Agents of Peacebuilding and Development in Sahel: *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, 10(3),
- [17.] Eskandarpour, A. (2014). "The resilience of children and youth during conflict and its contribution to post-conflict stability: The case of Northern Uganda and "night commuting"", in A. Schnabel & A. Tabyshalieva eds., *Escaping Victimhood: Children, Youth and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*. Tokyo, New York, Paris: United Nations Press.
- [18.] Gavin, M. D. (2007). Africa's restless youth. *Current History*, pp: 220–226.
- [19.] Global Partnership for Children and Youth Peacebuilding (2015). *Evaluation of Child and Youth Participation in Peacebuilding*. New York: UNICEF
- [20.] Gyamfuaa-Abrefa, M (2019). *Student perspectives on youth engagement in peacebuilding*. MPhil Thesis, Centre for Conflicts, Human Rights and Peace Studies. UEW
- [21.] Honwana, A. (2012). *The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change and Politics in Africa*. Sterling VA: Kumarian
- [22.] Masten, A.S. (2014). Global Perspectives on Resilience in Children and Youth. *Child Development*, 85(1), 6-20.
- [23.] McEvoy-Levy, S. (2006). *Troublemakers or Peacemakers? Youth and Post-Accord Peace building*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press.
- [24.] McEvoy-Levy, S. (2012). Youth spaces in haunted places: Placemaking for peacebuilding in theory and practice. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 17,2, pp.1-32.
- [25.] McEvoy-Levy, S. (2013) 'Youth', in R. M. Ginty, ed. *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*. London: Routledge, 296– 307
- [26.] McEvoy-Levy, S. (2014). Stuck in Circulation: Children, "Waithood" and the Conflict Narratives of Israelis and Palestinians, *Children's Geographies*, 12(3): 312– 326.
- [27.] National Youth Policy of Ghana. (2010). *Towards an Empowered Youth, Impacting Positively on National Development*. Accra: Ministry of Youth and Sports.
- [28.] Ochogwu, J. (2010). Youth and Conflict in Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities for Peacebuilding. *Africa Peace and Conflict Journal*, 35-48.
- [29.] Ozerdem, A. (2016). The role of youth in peacebuilding: challenges and opportunities. *Youth, Peace and Sustainable Security*. Retrieved from <https://sustainablesecurity.org/2016/10/26/the-role-of-youth-in-peacebuilding-challenges-and-opportunities/>
- [30.] Peters, K. (2011). *War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [31.] Pruitt, L. (2013). *Youth Peacebuilding: Music, Gender and Change*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- [32.] Schwartz, S. (2010). *Youth in Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Agents of Change*. Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- [33.] Shaik, A. (2017). *What is the role of youths in peace and conflict resolutions?* Retrieved December 2018, from <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-role-of-youths-in-peace-and-conflict-resolutions>

- [34.] Smith, A. & Ellison, C. S. (2012). *Youth, Education and Peacebuilding*. UNESCO Centre, University of Ulster.
- [35.] Taft, J. (2011). *Rebel Girls. Youth Activism and Social Change across the Americas*. New York: New York University Press.
- [36.] Taylor, L. K., Merrilees, C. E., Goeke-Morey, M. C., Shirlow, P., Cairns, E., & Cummings, E. M. (2014). Political violence and adolescent outgroup attitudes and prosocial behaviors: Implications for positive intergroup relations. *Social Development*, 23(4), 840-859.
- [37.] UNDP (2006). *Youth and violent conflict: Society and Development in Crisis?* . New York: UNDP.
- [38.] UNDP (2007). *The youth of Africa: A Threat to Security or a Force for Peace?* New York: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- [39.] UNESCO (2017). *What do we mean by "youth"?* Retrieved on May 20, 2018 from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/youth/youth-definition/>
- [40.] United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (2016). *Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding*. New York: Youth, Peace and Security.
- [41.] Watson, A. M. S. (2009). *The Child in International Political Economy: A Place at the Table*. London: Routledge.