YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES PROMOTING PEACE IN KENYA
“Youth-led initiatives promoting peace in Kenya” is part of the "Let Peace Win Campaign", launched by the UWIANO Platform, with the support of UNDP Kenya, to foster greater commitment to peaceful elections and increase youth participation in the 2022 General Elections and beyond.

To ensure Kenya meets its immediate, medium, and long-term development aspirations, the Campaign aims at mobilizing youth's participation to construct steady and peaceful societies and to develop policies to achieve SDG 16 of the 2030 Agenda, ‘Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.’

This Focus Note presents a selection of articles highlighting various youth-led initiatives promoting peace in Kenya, especially ahead of the elections in 2022.

We hope they will be great conversation starters that will encourage engagement of the youth in democratic processes.

Disclaimer:
All necessary efforts have been taken to make sure that the information contained in this publication is correct and not misleading. However, the possibility of errors or unintentional omissions cannot be excluded.

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In almost every electioneering year, violence rocks our country. Campaigns and the voting process attract conflict not only among individuals but also among groups. Chaos arise in the party primaries and even after the voting exercise. The presidential post is the most tensed, with people reacting differently to the results: those whose candidate has won rejoice, while in some cases those whose candidate has lost claim rigging has taken place. Panic and confusion take a toll with electorates being uncertain of their safety and future. More often than usual, the violence witnessed paralyses important functions like learning, health, and businesses among others. Therefore, it is paramount that modalities are sought to ensure that peace reigns during and after the electioneering period.
Advocacy for peace during the electioneering period

About the Project

On witnessing the violence in 2007, 2013 and 2017, the Peace Ambassadors in Shimo la Tewa decided to come up with a project to sensitize masses on the importance of upholding peace. Individuals recounted the horrible experiences of internal displacement (IDP), destruction of property and loss of innocent lives. The sad death of baby Samantha Pendo, who died because of a stray bullet, really moved us.

As Peace Ambassadors we sensitize other students to live harmoniously through religious forums at school. We encourage them to be tolerant of each other during church and mosque services, other than preparing songs and skits with the messages of peace and the need for us to live as one.

During the Monday and Friday assemblies, the Peace Ambassadors are given a chance to sensitize other students. We present poems, songs and skits geared towards promoting peace, such as the 'Amani, twaomba amani', written by our peace patron that has really sent a message of peace, love, and unity. The song continues to be sang by many students who continue to promote peace.

In every class, the Peace Club has established a peace corner aimed at promoting peace among classmates. These corners are graced with quotes from famous writers and motivational speakers like Martin Luther King Jr, Barrack Obama, and Susan Rouse among others. Examples of such quotes are "Peace begins with me," "Kenya is bigger than all of us," "Before you speak, think and be smart, you can never mend a wrecked heart." These corners are regularly cleaned and updated by hanging new quotes every week. Whenever there are any arguments in class, students refer those arguing to the peace corner and ask them to maintain peace. There is a time one student referred those arguing to a quote that said, "There’s power in silence, sometimes losing an argument pays.” This calmed the situation and everything went back to normal.
On Wednesdays we have dorm meetings and as peace crusaders we always encourage students to live in peace. We ask them to treat one another with love and concern, and we ask everyone treat others the way they would expect to be treated. In promoting individual peace, through the Guidance and Counselling Department we have set up a kitty to help the needy students. With this aim, we collect personal effects from willing students and give to members who can’t afford them in every dorm. This has reduced instances of theft as everyone is comfortable. Moreover, we even contribute funds for those who have huge fees balances with the help of our beloved teachers.

As Peace Ambassadors we are always encouraged to preach peace in and out of school. During the recent holidays we were advised to visit the chiefs and religious leaders in our locations and ask them to provide platforms for championing peace. We are glad to report that when we went out there, we were accepted, and we spread the message of peace. The chiefs allowed us to go with them to their barazas and gave us a chance to talk while religious leaders helped us to present songs, skits, poems, and messages to their followers. In the same context, we also organised debates promoting peace. In one of the churches, we organised a peace walk chanting peaceful slogans, “We want peace, We hate violence”. This sent a message to many people including various aspirants, with the hope that everyone will desist from All these activities have reached where they are because of the support of our Peace Patron, Madam Juliet, our Chief Principal, Mr. Mutiso, the local leaders and religious leaders.

We hope these activities will make our Country peaceful during this electioneering period and will set precedence for all the other elections ahead. In conclusion, as the late Professor George Saitoti, once said “Kenya is Bigger than all of us,” we urge everyone to embrace peace violence.

“Kenya is Bigger than all of us”

Professor George Saitoti
BUILDING INTERFAITH BRIDGES

NAME OF AUTHOR: Caroline W. Maina
ORGANIZATION: Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK)
PROJECT NAME: Building Interfaith Bridges
Disclaimer: “Building Interfaith Bridges” is not a youth-led project, but an institutional initiative engaging the youth.

Background

The Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK) is a national coalition of all major faith communities in Kenya that works together to deepen interfaith dialogue and collaboration among members for a common endeavour: to mobilize the unique moral and social resources of religious people and address shared concerns. The organization has a vision of ensuring communities live in peace, united in socio-economic action. The mission of IRCK is to promote tolerance and understanding among faith communities in Kenya through mobilizing joint actions for socio-economic development.

IRCK works in three thematic areas, namely

1. Peace and Governance;
2. Health and Social well-being;
3. Environment and Climate Change.

These areas provide the best avenues for achievement of the organization's mission and vision. IRCK comprises of 9 Religious Coordinating Bodies (RCBs), including: Evangelical Alliance of Kenya (EAK), Hindu Council of Kenya (HCK), Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), National Muslim Leaders Forum (NAMLEEF), Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA), Shia Ithnasharia Muslim Association Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) and Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC-Kenya). IRCK also comprises 38 Local Interfaith Networks (LIFNs) across different counties in Kenya, as well as Kenya Women of Faith Network (KWFN) and Kenya Interfaith Youth Network (KIYN). The RCBs, KIYN and KWFN have national coverage with structures that reach out to grassroots levels at the counties.

About the Project

Though the ‘Peace and Governance’ programme, from 2019 to 2021 IRCK implemented a project dubbed as the ‘Building InterFaith Bridges’, born as a partnership project between RCK, the implementing partner, and US Marafiki, the funding partner, in Nairobi and Mombasa Counties, aimed at increasing respect and protection for religious minorities by strengthening, sensitizing, educating as well as connecting duty bearers to claim holders at county and national levels.
IRCK organized a ‘Welcoming the other’ activity, which was held at Jamia Mosque, Nairobi. 30 interfaith youth participated in the event from across the County, joined by two representatives from the US Embassy. The activity aimed at demystifying practices and traditions among faith groups and at promoting inter-religious tolerance, harmony, and relations among distinct faith groups.

The ‘Welcoming the other’ event played a key role in demystifying some beliefs towards the Islam religion. This changed the perception of the youth from other faith communities on how they perceive the Islam religion, while the Islam participants were also advised not to view the non-Muslims as ‘Kafirs’, since we all believe in one God.

Further to this, the ‘Welcoming the other’ engagement played a key role in strengthening interfaith relations while promoting interfaith tolerance and cohesion.

The Constitution of Kenya provides that all citizens have a right of freedom of religion. Currently, in Kenya the predominant religion is Christianity, standing at 85.52%, while the Islam is the second largest, estimated at 10.91%.

The counties that lie especially within the Coastal and North-Eastern region of the Country have a high dominance of the Islam communities.

The ‘Building Inter-Faith Bridges’ well aligns itself to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. Indeed, SDG 16 endeavors to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all. Peace is a core integral part in the society. Violent extremism and radicalization is often stirred by interfaith intolerance, especially towards the Islam community, most of the time associated with terrorism.

Interfaith dialogues with members from other faith communities represent a crucial way of strengthening interfaith relations and tolerance. This, in turn, plays a key role in shaping how members from other faiths perceive Muslims, therefore, having a direct impact on peace.
Many previously unemployed youths have taken advantage of poor road networks and lack of vehicles in rural and urban areas to earn a living by transporting people and goods on the motorbikes, turning it into an economic driver. But behind this booming enterprise lurks a dark monster that is steadily destroying lives.

Commonly known as ‘Boda Boda’ (motorbike riders), the riders have been accused of all manner of crime, including gangs for hire, hit men and abduction. They have also been accused of mob justice and rape and have on many occasions killed innocent people suspected to be thieves, without verification. The business has also been blamed for partly contributing to the declining education standards and rising school dropout in the coast region, which are some factors leading to violent extremism. The nature and patterns of violent extremism have changed from a threat primarily emanating from Somalia to a home-grown trend now shifting to the ‘Boda Boda’ operators.

The ‘Boda Boda’ individuals are the best individuals to be community policy members or the ‘Nyumba kumi’ champions since they transport people in and out of their community, which makes them understand who comes in and out of their homesteads.

It is with this background that the Stretchers Youth Organization, with the support of the EU, has implemented a project named ‘EBBY’ (Engaging the ‘Boda Boda’ Youth Leaders), running from 2019 until the end of 2021, with the aim to enhance the capacity of the ‘Boda Boda’ youths and leaders through building resilience in promoting peace and countering violent conflict in Mombasa County. This, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 16, emphasizing on promoting a peaceful, just, and inclusive society.
The project goal was to build the capacity of the ‘Boda Boda’ Youth leaders in promoting peace and countering violent extremism in Mombasa County. This was implemented to equip youths in the ‘Boda Boda’ sector with knowledge and skills to reject radicalization narratives, to promote counter narratives based on human rights, tolerance, and democracy, and to create linkages between communities and authorities in the fight against violent extremism.

The entire project directly reached a total of 1,024 youths (940 males and 84 females), all Boda Boda riders, throughout its implementation period. The beneficiaries were reached through various activities conducted, such as the ‘Boda Boda Youth Inception Meeting’, the ‘Boda Boda Stage Talks’, the ‘Police and Boda Boda Youth Integration Meetings’, and the ‘Moot Court and Mombasa County Boda Boda Youth Convention’.

It’s evident that the collaboration between the police and the ‘Boda Boda’ youth has borne fruits as the number of reported cases of crimes has dropped immensely. The cooperation between the police and key ‘Boda Boda’ leaders has also resulted in the absorption of key ‘Boda Boda’ leaders in sub-county peace committees within Mombasa County. These meetings also created an opportunity for the ‘Boda Boda’ youths to address the needs and challenges they have been facing after the emergence of COVID-19 to the relevant actors. As a result, ‘Boda Boda’ youth’s role in promoting peace and security is slow taking cognizance across Mombasa County.
In the recent past, election periods in Kenya have always come with some tension attached – 2007 being the most affected. As #PeaceMtaani we seek to change the narrative by preaching peace before, during and after the elections through civic education. Being artists and lovers of art, we have incorporated the matatu culture as our main mode of communication.

JOK Jaro has been diverse in terms of his music, fusing hip hop, dancehall, and other music genres to come up with a unique sound. He fell in love with music at a very young age drawing inspiration from his mother who used to have a collection of diverse music from different musicians. The first time he recorded a song was immediately after high school. During his college life, he got heavily involved in drugs and drug abuse.

After graduating, he moved to Nairobi pipeline where he was affected by drug addiction until one of his closest friends got shot dead by the police for allegedly being a gang member. Having escaped that ordeal, he fled to Thika where he got born again, joined church, and transformed completely to become the Gospel minister he is.

XLVI K is the first Gospel Drill artist in Kenya. Having started his career in 2022 with his debut single ‘Afande Ati?’ which highlights the plight of Kenyan citizens undergoing police brutality especially in the slum areas of Nairobi City. With his second single ‘Wisdom’ hitting more than a thousand streams on Spotify on the first day of release, he is set to take the industry by storm. His latest single, ‘46 Barz’ is doing very well on streaming platforms. Thrilling, unapologetic and Christ-centered best describes this showstopper performer.
It’s election time again. This specific election is highly contested, and the political space is highly divided. Recent research from the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) has zoned out six counties likely to experience pre and post-election violence, with Nairobi topping the list followed by Nakuru and Kericho. Most of the time the youths are the ones who are used to orchestrate violence. Having identified this, we as the youth have decided to be part of the solution and not the problem through the #PeaceMtaani initiative.

The matatu culture is famous among the young people and is the most preferred means of transport in Kenya: this makes it an ideal means of spreading and promoting peace. For this reason and to promote peace in Kenya, we organise Matatu Tours across different Nairobi estates every Sunday preaching peace. This is possible since every week a network of youth from different estates in Nairobi board different matatus and take at least 15 minutes to make their journeys. During this time passengers are told on the importance of peace. The aim is to reach as many people as possible in the shortest time possible.

#PeaceMtaani was founded by JOK Jaro (a street gospel artist) and XLVI K (a drill gospel artist) in May 2022. Since then, the team has grown to over 50 young MPs (Ministers of Peace). The team has partnered with several people – some formally and others informally. Matatu drivers, touts, owners, and passengers are part of the informal partnerships. PPP TV and Christian Geng record label are some of the companies that have partnered formally with the team.

#PeaceMtaani initiative is divided into three main stages: the pre-election, that focuses on sensitization and election civic education, mainly in Nairobi. This sensitization is expected to culminate into a peace concert in the Central Business District (CBD) of Nairobi. During the election period the project is focused more on online peace sensitization, by promoting online advertisements and doing a virtual concert. In the post-election period, it will be focused on peace sensitization, cohesion, integration and civic education in Kenya.

We are working to traversing all counties preaching the gospel of peace. Through these three stages we work with creatives from different aspects of art, ranging from music and poetry to comedy and sports.

The outcomes of the project so far include 150 people reached on Sunday Matatu Tours and 50,000 people reached through matatu, social media and music sensitization, with 1 million target number of people to be reached by December 2022.
YOUNG WOMEN DIALOGUE NEGOTIATION AND MEDIATION LEARNING HUB

NAME OF AUTHOR: Wendy Akoth
ORGANIZATION: Women Volunteers for Peace
PROJECT NAME: Young Women Dialogue Negotiation and Mediation Learning Hub

Background

Women Volunteers for Peace (WOVOP) is a young women-led and registered community-based organization that seeks to support and promote peaceful coexistence among young women and girls through peace education, advocacy and volunteering within the Lake Region of Western Kenya.

Kisumu is an ethnically homogeneous region that is mostly peaceful. However, a shift came in during the electoral period following the 2007 post-election violence that presented the dire need for peace actors to elevate the peacebuilding work to instil a peaceful culture in Kisumu County.

In countries where the political conditions fail to ensure peaceful co-existence, they divide rather than unite. Improvements in peace and security do not occur spontaneously, with peace being still a complex concept even for adults. Our peace initiatives seek to increase sensitization on the concept and incorporation of children in the peace education programmes to build a society that is centered on the peace agenda.

With this aim, WOVOP looks at the foundation of prevention and mitigation of possible electoral instigated violence by ensuring the community members from grassroots areas understand key drivers of conflict, depicting the threats that exist in the different areas as well as strategies to manage conflict, especially those coming from electoral violence.

About the Project

WOVOP implements an annual intellectual learning discourse, the ‘Young Women Dialogue Negotiation and Mediation Learning Hub’, that hosts between 15-30 young women aged 15-25 selected from diverse backgrounds of visionary peace actors in Kisumu County. This presents an exchanging platform for grassroots conversations on dialogue, negotiation and mediation Learning to push for transformative and lasting peace for generations to come.

The training programme introduces the young women to the peace and security agenda, dialogue negotiation and mediation and builds their capacities on conflict resolution. This project is supported by the International Center for Peace, Human Rights and Development in Africa (IPHRD-AFRICA) and the Norwegian Church Aid.
The Dialogue, Negotiation and Mediation (DNM) Learning Hub cuts across SDGs 5, Gender Equality, and 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions; it looks to increase the representation of women in peace leadership spaces, and it also addresses peace justice and strong institutions all in efforts to increase meaningful participation of young women at the grassroots level. The DNM Learning Hub stems from the idea that young women need to take ownership of issues that affect them for sustainable, transformative, and long-lasting peace in Kisumu West, Kisumu East, Kisumu Central, Muhoroni, Nyakach, Nyando and Seme.

Young people make up most of the population in Kisumu, where their participation in peace processes becomes a vital need. WOVOP runs the ‘Peace Up Kisumu Hive’ project supported by Peace First, which targets seven young people of ages between 13-25 years living in Kisumu County by addressing various peace challenges in their community through compassion, courage, and collaborative leadership.

The call brought together young people from the seven sub-counties for the Peace Up $250 mini grant for the different project ideas: voter bribery, ethnic profiling harassment, hate speech, defamation and Election violence, border conflicts & intolerance as well as manipulation of young people to cause tension during election period. All projects present creativity, relevance, and compassion on leadership. We supported these young people lead projects that addressed root causes of election conflicts and violence in their communities with an aim of ensuring conflict management and peace promotion in Kisumu County. The contribution of these young people will ensure their meaningful engagement by having them at the forefront of advocating for peace from the onset.

The ‘Peace Talks’ programme runs in the seven sub-counties of Kisumu and facilitates dialogue amongst the young people, especially young women, in identifying challenges and risks that undermine peace and security in their communities. This, by placing them at the apex in playing a critical role in identifying, mitigating and responding to conflicts in the community as well as uplifting their voices to be active participants in the prevention and peacebuilding in Kisumu County.
The contradictory assumption that specific areas are referred to as hotspots for electoral instigated violence shapes the attitude and perception of community members from the areas in question.

In Kisumu County the famous hotspot is Kondele roundabout, an area WOVOP focuses on in peacebuilding work. The ‘Peace Talks’ programme is a monthly programme coordinated both in the physical environment and online space targeting young people who are thirsty for community transformation.

Mainstream media has gradually grown to be a widespread platform for transmission of information and knowledge. WOVOP uses the radio to converse on peace and security issues. The ‘Radio Peace Talk Show’ programme runs twice every month in partnership with Peace FM Kenya, providing the opportunity for young people to have candid conversations on peacebuilding strategies and commitments.

WOVOP has brought rise a network of peace actors in diverse societies committed to ensuring peaceful coexistence. These peace programmes comparatively bring forth improvements in peace and security sector and recognition of the fact that peace situations can not only be achieved through community-lead initiatives but also through good governance. The programmes have built a generation that has a voice concern on matters peace, young individuals who use soft skills to sustain their co-existence in the society and have slowly created a ripple effect in their communities within Kisumu County. This will enhance their knowledge on peacebuilding which is critical for everyone. The programmes are process goals that adds up to our purpose on building resilient women living in a peaceful society. WOVOP team envisions powerful disruptive peace agents in the community from the ongoing programmes.
Uamuzi is a social networking platform advocating for youth participation in governance. It opens a virtual and secure space to bridge the gap between decision makers and the youth, to hold discussions on their needs and concerns and identify joint solutions through a meaningful engagement process. Uamuzi is a Swahili word that translates to “decision” in English.

The platform ensures active participation through the ‘Tubonge feature – Chat room’ which engages them from every level of governance, i.e., the ward, constituency, county and national level. Tubonge is a slang that means “let’s talk”. Uamuzi ensures that all voices including those of the less privileged and most vulnerable are heard and considered in decision making. One of our key goals is to become a more diverse and inclusive platform, offering a safe space for the youth to participate.

The platform was established to facilitate an all-inclusive youth engagement and access to information on governance and peacebuilding in Kenya, Africa, and the world at large. Its main objectives are:

- The creation of a secure medium for the youth to be part of decision-making process by engaging them; the empowerment of women on governance issues, by enhancing their knowledge and access to information, fundamental for their growth and impact
- To encourage diverse opinions and participation from youth of different backgrounds, communities, tribes, religion, age, abilities, gender and political party affiliation;
- To create an environment that encourages youth advocacy in public policy formulation, planning and implementation
- To improve knowledge and decision support capabilities at every level of governance and effectively inform and engage the youth on environmental related subject
- To promote transparency and accountability through effective and efficient access to information
- To implement continuous civic education programs that employs youth-friendly tactics and reach the grassroots.
Youth participation in governance and peace building creating a culture where everyone matters

About the Project

Uamuzi is also a people-driven peacebuilding platform aimed at empowering young people to take part in preventing violence and promoting peaceful coexistence among communities in Kenya. Through our special feature ‘Mulika’, a Swahili word that translates to ‘gleam/light up’, the youth will be able to report on violence and other incidents which may occur before, during or after elections in real time. Our intent is to not only deliver an early warning about a specific, geographically constrained violence risk, but primarily to empower people to act and to initiate mitigation measures before a catastrophic event occurs.

Upon accessing the feature, the youth will be required to provide the exact incident being faced, the location where it’s happening, and the level of threat being witnessed. This allows for quick response from stakeholders thus promoting peaceful coexistence in Kenya.

The data collected uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) to analyze it and categorize them based on age, gender, and region. This information helps during mapping of the affected regions, gain a better understanding of the roots causes and dynamics, detect threat narratives and disinformation campaigns while understanding the main topics of discussions. The analytics are used for counter-measure tactics, monitoring, and early warning programmes formulation.

Through the ‘Tubonge’ feature, the youth can connect in peacebuilding activities such as supervising victims, exchanging perspectives, documenting experiences, and even serving as a vehicle for collective coping. With its special potential in areas where personal meetings are logistically, legally, and politically impossible, the platform helps to maintain channels of communication and support a mediation process. Through the platform youth have an equal opportunity to access information and give their opinions and feedback on different issues for consideration.

Using the analytics derived from the collected data, the platform uses it to conduct civic education programmes that employ youth-friendly and easy to understand tactics that reach the grassroots levels, including rural and remote locations. In collaboration with like-minded stakeholders, awareness creation is disseminated through posters, video, audios, customized messaging, and blogging.

They are disseminated as direct messages or as sponsored posts and have priority over the regular posts, thus reaching the youth over a period of time. Educating them on the same thing severally helps to ensure that they not only get the information, but they retain it. Those who didn’t completely catch the information the first time will be subjected to it several more times to clarify what is expected. This exercise is carried out using a continuous and targeted methodology.
The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. Uamuzi incorporates the SDGs to its works by:

- **Goal 5, Gender Equality**: by ensuring women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic, and public life.

- **Goal 9, Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure**: by significantly increasing access to information and communication and providing affordable and equal access to technology for everyone.

- **Goal 13, Climate Action**: by conducting civic education and raising awareness among the youth on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning. In this context, the platform will promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change related planning and management including focusing on marginalized communities.

- **Goal 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions**: by ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative of marginalized groups in decision-making at all levels of governance. Indeed, considering how developing effective, accountable, and transparent institutions will substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all forms, the platform will promote the rule of law at the local, national, and international levels and ensure equity and equality for all.

- **SDG 17, Partnership for the Goals**: also plays a crucial role for Uamuzi, which promotes the development, transfer, dissemination, and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies on favorable terms.
For enquiries, Contact:

United Nations Development Programme, Kenya
UN Office in Nairobi
(UNON) UN Gigiri Complex, Block N, LEVEL 3
P.O. Box 30218-00100, Nairobi, Kenya

T: +254 20 762 4307
E: registry.ke@undp.org
www.ke.undp.org

UNDPKenya  UNDPinKenya  undpkenya