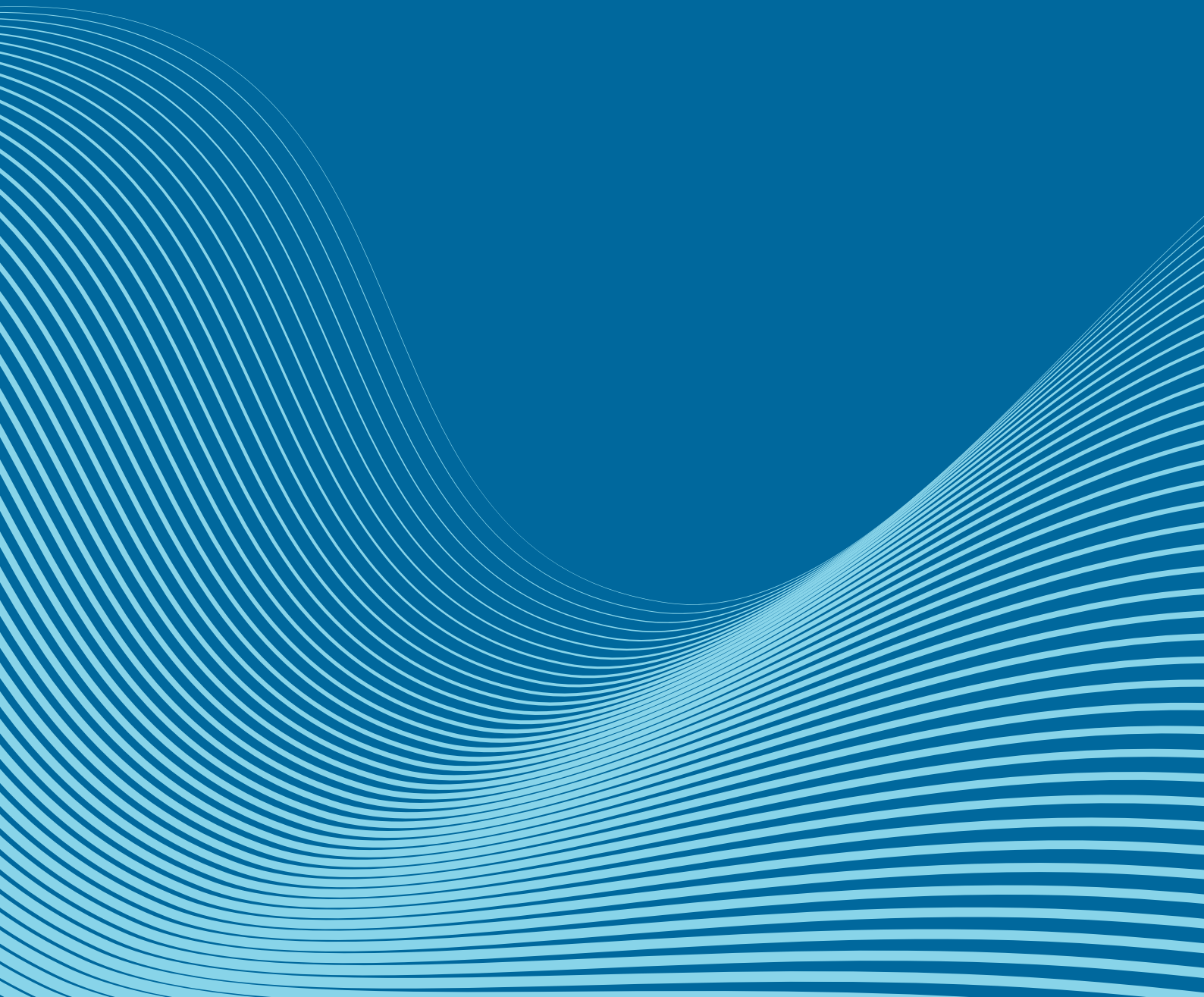




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F.D.R.E Ministry of Women and Social Affairs



Policy Oriented Assessment on the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda in Ethiopia



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June 2025

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AU	African Union
ACSOT	Alliance of Civil Society Organizations in Tigray
BoWSA	Bureaus of Women and Social Affairs
COND	Consortium for Networking and Development
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
ENDC	Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission
ETV	Ethiopian Television
EC	Ethiopian Calendar
ECA	Ethiopian Communication Authority
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GLAD	Green Love Appreciative Development
GPPAC	Global Partnership for Prevention of Armed Conflict
IGAD	Inter-governmental Authority on Development
MoCS	Ministry of Culture and Sports
MinT	Ministry of Innovation and Technology
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoP	Ministry of Peace
MoWSA	Ministry of Women and Social Affairs
MoLS	Ministry of Labor and Skills
MSMEs	Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises
NAP	National Action Plan
NEBE	National Election Board of Ethiopia
NRC	National Rehabilitation Commission
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
TYA	Tigray Youth Association
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security

Executive summary

Introduction

The Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda has gained greater emphasis than ever before in the light of the challenges facing the youth along socioeconomic and political dimensions and the need to involve the youth in peacebuilding by ensuring their participation in decision-making at all levels of governance. The United Nations has developed a framework, UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) (2250, 2419 and 2535), to be recognized, adopted and to guide the development and implementation of the YPS agenda by members states through perfecting their context specific National Action Plan (NAP). The African Union has also endorsed the Continental Framework for YPS and set a timeframe (during the 10th anniversary of its adoption or mid-term review of the adoption and implementation of UNSCR2250 in 2025) for its member states to identify the YPS agenda and develop the NAP based on the country's context.

Ethiopian youth have been facing a number of socioeconomic and political challenges due to structural factors causing their exclusion from decision-making and governance processes resulting in grievances and their participation in violent conflicts, affecting peace and stability of the country. Ethiopian government has become aware of the multiple and complex challenges faced by the youth and is undertaking political and economic reforms to respond to them. A more rigorous and systematic assessment of the youth needs, challenges, feelings, and existing initiatives and opportunities to support the youth to influence processes and contribute to national development is required for the government to reverse the trends and address concerns of the youth. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in partnership with Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA) has realized this demand and supported the assessment of the YPS agenda in Ethiopia with the following objectives:

- ▶ assess the policy, legal, institutional frameworks, and practices in the youth, peace and security agenda along with analysis of the major causes of conflict with their implication on the youth Ethiopia;
- ▶ identify needs, aspirations and challenges of young men and women, pinpointing the significance of promoting their participation and empowerment in the peace and security agenda of the country, and;
- ▶ identify and recommend workable immediate actions for advocacy, medium to long-term programmatic entry points and partnerships towards promoting the youth, peace and security framework in Ethiopia.

Guiding framework for the assessment

The assessment has been conducted using the UN/AU framework for engaging the youth in peace and security, providing five pillars reflected in UNSCR that were adopted over the course of various years to recognize and support the role of youth in peace and security. The five pillars can be described as follows. **Participation** refers to representation of the youth at all levels of decision-making in conflict prevention, resolution, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction, peace processes and in the implementation of peace agreements. **Protection** considers ensuring the safety and security of civilians, refugees and the youth during conflicts along the existing international law and the conventions against violation of human rights. **Prevention** includes various actions such as recognition of the youth with various backgrounds to receive adequate support to implement violence prevention activities and support social cohesion by using different instruments: increasing job opportunities, investing in their entrepreneurship and education, promoting a culture of peace and tolerance, and engaging them in political processes. **Partnerships** involve mobilization of different kinds of support (technical, financial, and logistical) towards youth participation in peacebuilding efforts by various UN agencies and finding ways to engage them meaningfully in the aftermath of armed conflict. **Disengagement and reintegration** as a critical pillar (priority area) signifies giving due consideration to the needs of the youth who participated in the conflict, which means offering employment opportunities, building their capabilities and skills, and securing support from the youth-led peacebuilding organizations as partners in youth employment and entrepreneurship.

Scope and methodology

The assessment has been conducted using the defined scope of work provided by the client and methodology described under section 4. Data were collected from a variety of key informants (the youth, CSOs, relevant federal and regional institutions, such as ministries, and university researchers) from Amhara, Oromia, Tigray, Sidama, Benishangul-Gumuz, Somali and Addis Ababa city administration utilizing guiding checklists for each category of respondents. In addition, a review of secondary sources (reports, publications, and policy documents) and reviews of social media messages were made to fill any possible gap left by the primary data and to undertake triangulation by sources and methods. The data analysis involved content analysis, discourse analysis, analytic narratives and stakeholder mapping as the data were of qualitative nature. The content analysis considered the examination of the contents of policy documents and legal frameworks as linked to youth participation in peace processes and development activities. The discourse analysis emphasized evaluation of the perspectives held by different actors directly or indirectly engaged in YPS agenda and whose actions can influence the implementation of the agenda. Analytic narratives were used to look into the strategic interaction between the youth and government to get insights into conditions that can reinvigorate collaboration between the two by indicating the kinds of guarantees sought by the youth. The stakeholder-mapping tool enabled identification and positioning of stakeholders based on interest, influence, and strength of their linkage in promoting and implementing YPS agenda.

Key findings

The findings of the assessment covered a wide range of issues starting with a brief *historical analysis of conflicts* in the country and analyzing regional situations. While Ethiopia had both internal conflicts and conflicts with neighboring countries, the former in the longer term are more relevant in the implementation of the YPS agenda as they are more influential in shaping peace and stability of the country in which the youth are found to be engaged. The *regional situation analysis* captures essential elements of state and non-state-based interventions to respond to the complex challenges faced by the youth including economic, social, and political. The degree of responses varies across regions depending on context while all regions covered in this assessment underline the limited nature of resources to address these challenges.

Youth participation in conflict resolution, how they benefit from existing capacity building programs of regional governments and CSOs, job creation and engagement in different income generating activities were identified in this assessment although the extent of implementation varies. In conflict-affected regions, where the youth lost their basic assets held prior to the conflict, coordination of responses was perceived to be instrumental, allowing questions posed by the youth to be accommodated into the post-war reintegration and recovery plan of the government. The needs and aspirations of the youth have been assessed. They can be clustered as (1) recognizing youth diversity and ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities, (2) peace and stability as essential factors to pursue their academic and career growth, and (3) youth influence on peace and security-related policies and programs. There are some barriers preventing the fulfilment of the aspirations, for which strong institutional responses are required including investing in the youth and involving them in peace and reconciliation activities.

Youth frustration, grievances, hopes, and ambitions reflected in this assessment are reflected in the YPS agenda. Failure to address them will transform them into being key *drivers of youth participation in violent conflicts*. The assessment reveals that the underlying youth grievances as inhibiting factors to ensure peace, when coupled with delays in responding to them, are feared to create an opportunity for those social media activists to promote societal divide instead of social cohesions. On the other hand, the presence of partnerships, commitment, youth organizations, investment in capacity building and working towards youth empowerment (as enabling factors), create a pathway towards peace. To ensure youth contribution to peacebuilding through conflict transformation, the importance of working in favor of enabling factors and against inhibiting factors is critical (Figure 1). The national and regional *impacts of the violent conflicts* in terms of psychosocial (mental health and displacement, migration) and economic dimensions (Growth Domestic Product (GDP), inflation, trade and supply chain) have far-reaching consequences for the youth who could be affected by loss of infrastructure and limited opportunities to access financial resources.

Assessment of the *legal, policy and institutional frameworks* of the country shows the presence of a general provision in the national constitution for the youth to participate in any affairs affecting their lives, one of which could be peacebuilding activities. However, the absence of specific youth-focused policy

with respect to their engagement in peace-related activities leaves them disempowered in situations where they do not have a clear role in influencing peacebuilding processes. Such policy could have provided space for the youth to contribute to exercising democratic governance that secures them the rights to pursue their agenda. The efforts being made by the specific ministries to invest resources in youth capacity building, establishing youth-specific desks within their structures and the existence of structures that connect the youth to the key ministries supporting their participation in youth-focused activities (Figure 1) are clear indicators in the existing institutional framework that space is given for the YPS agenda.

There are different forms of youth organizations. These include youth councils, youth forums, and youth associations and other youth groups (Youth Network Ethiopia, Young Ethiopian Leaders Initiative, and Hope Ethiopia) exchanging information digitally and having their own websites. This situation indicates the potential of the youth to play an active role in YPS advocacy. The draft peace policy addresses aspects of YPS agenda. For example, the policy emphasizes positive use of social media to ensure peace and the need to introduce laws, youth participation in leaderships, ensuring job creation and economic inclusion of the youth, participation in volunteerism, and creation of a forum to strengthen inter-regional relations. Eligibility of the youth to participate in elections as candidates to serve as parliament members as well as the presence of youth-focused segment of the MoWSA and the established framework of cooperation between ministries on issues of youth also serve as an indicator of the presence of legal and institutional frameworks dedicated to the implementation of the YPS agenda.

How youth perceive *social media* reflects on their role in influencing youth participation in violence as they tend to believe in what is posted. An assessment of views and news posted on social media indicates that they promote more polarized views than those supporting peaceful co-existence and mutual respect. They also present conflicting views over similar events as associated with their ethnic affiliations. On the other hand, it has been suggested that the absence of specific programs focusing on youth in peacebuilding within Ethiopian Television (ETV) is a weakness as it does not reduce the negative influence of social media on the youth ideology. Most ETV programs on youth emphasize youth economic empowerment rather than creating a platform for youth to discuss their role in peacebuilding and setting forth their political agenda. Insights from interviews with the CSOs and the youth strongly emphasize the absence of a platform to hear youth voices in some circumstances preceding conflicts.

The study assessed the YPS agenda along the five pillars of the framework. With respect to youth *participation*, their involvement in national dialogue, designing institutional mechanism to engage them in peace processes and the extent to which the existing principles guiding youth participation were considered. The results indicate a positive progress made with some limitations. In terms of *partnerships*, the existing cooperation and coordination of a number of activities among the ministries in establishing peace forums, support provided to youth volunteers, and partnerships in post-conflict reconstruction were found to be significant in providing opportunities for implementing the YPS agenda. There are also indicators of the existence of practices supporting the *prevention* pillar, including investing in peace education, development of youth volunteers, promoting positive use of social media and state efforts in job creation and support for entrepreneurship and investment in youth skill development. The weaknesses in terms of skills and job creation efforts are challenged by resource limitations.

The *protection* pillar is limited to investments in post-conflict reconstruction in areas affected by conflicts and the establishment of early warning information systems in relatively stable regions. The post-conflict reconstruction aiming at restoring youth livelihoods affected by the conflict did not show much progress due to resource limitations in some areas and sustained violent conflicts in other areas. In conflict-affected regions, youth participation in the provision of information for early warning purposes is often challenged by the risk of being 'stereotyped as supporters of either of the conflicting parties', prompting the youth not to provide any information. In such a context, the youth prefer not to provide any information to any security personnel. In principle, youth protection needs to involve the youth themselves.

The assessment along the *disengagement and reintegration* pillar indicates a number of challenges partly political and partly due to the limitation of funding. Divergence of perceptions exist on the actual reasons for the delay in implementation. Absence of clear guidelines and the need to include the youth in the process are found to be critical. What is clear so far in this case is the committed funding support from development partners. There is government preparedness and progress in estimating resources needed to undertake reintegration and in identifying 16 camps where rehabilitation will take place.

A number of advocacy and initiatives supporting youth participation in peacebuilding exists in Ethiopia. Most of these initiatives involve projects and programs undertaking capacity building, creation of networks supporting peacebuilding, development of training curriculum on peace, and implementing large-scale projects for post-conflict reconstruction. These initiatives will serve as a stepping-stone in the promotion and implementation of the YPS agenda. Finally, based on the existing evidence on the role of the state and non-state actors in implementing programs, projects and activities as related to YPS, stakeholders were identified and categorized as primary and secondary considering their expected level of influence, interest in the YPS agenda and their nature of linkages. Given their mandates and roles, these stakeholders are expected to promote and implement the YPS agenda. With respect to financing implementation of YPS, those non-state stakeholders supporting youth-focused and peace-related activities in Ethiopia can reinvigorate their actions. The state agencies, which have been allocating budget for implementing elements of YPS, can form a coalition (of stakeholders) to coordinate their actions and to utilize the available budget efficiently. The guideline for the preparation of the NAP and implementation of the YPS agenda recognizes this as a key step.

Key recommendations for actions

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are critical to ensure youth participation in peacebuilding and addressing the YPS agenda:

▶ **Integrating peace education into existing curricula at higher learning institutions**

This involves giving greater emphasis in integrating peace education in the university education curriculum and expanding the scope of operation of the peace forum beyond campuses to accommodate the surrounding youth; the key players to implement this will be the MoE and higher learning institutions with support from UN agencies and CSOs.

▶ **Reconfiguring partnerships to integrate support for the youth**

The actors supporting the youth in various forms do not often coordinate and integrate their actions but tend to follow an unsystematic approach. Reconfiguring such partnerships in a way that involves many actors to integrate their actions given their mandates is essential. The ministry (MoWSA) primarily responsible for the preparation of the NAP can set up mechanisms of coordination for such partnerships.

▶ **Investing in capacity building of the experts and officials for the preparation of the NAP**

UNDP and other UN agencies can provide technical and logistical support in building the capacity of experts and officials to be involved in the preparation of the NAP for the YPS agenda implementation. This can be an immediate action with proper identification of the key persons and institutions at the national and regional levels. The NAP preparation needs to follow a bottom-up approach.

▶ **Proper targeting of the youth in supporting job creation and entrepreneurship**

The youth differ in the nature of inputs they need to be engaged in specific economic activities. While support for the youth in job creation and entrepreneurship is critical to contribute to the attainment of prevention, the success of youth-led enterprises and supports provided is limited. Hence, MoLS as the responsible government body is required to differentiate its intervention in targeting and supporting the youth.

▶ **Speeding up the implementation of disengagement and reintegration**

Delay and inaction in disengagement and reintegration for various reasons tend to accumulate risks of eruption of violence in a post-conflict situation. It is also becoming a cause for more crises in areas with active conflicts. In the shorter term, the National Rehabilitation Commission should take quick measures in implementing disengagement and reintegration measures in cooperation with relevant regional stakeholders. The NAP preparation process should consider this as one of the components of the YPS agenda with specific focus on monitoring progress in livelihood activities of the ex-combatants.

▶ **Reviewing draft policy document to incorporate youth priorities**

The draft peace policy and implementation strategy document provide a lot of space for the YPS agenda. Youth participation in its review of the draft with the active facilitation of the MoP and MoWSA gives a great opportunity to include their views, needs and priorities.

► **Partnerships for enhancement of youth entrepreneurship**

Existing cooperation among stakeholders can be transformed into partnership for collective action. Partnership to invest in the enhancement of youth entrepreneurial skills will increase their chance to use available opportunities where MoLS should take up a coordinating role given its mandate and experience. Assessment of weaknesses in skills in different economic sectors should be an immediate action when designing a project.

► **Increasing youth participation in leadership**

An entry point to address the challenges faced by Ethiopian youth requires youth involvement in leadership in different ministries. Their involvement will increase trust, ensure fairness and transparency in the promotion and implementation of the YPS agenda. The MoWSA and the Federal Civil Service Commission can cooperate to find ways on how to promote youth leadership as part of the institutional reform agenda by designing a relevant project.

► **Establishing a center for peace and conflict studies**

The assessment shows that in response to intermittent conflicts, awareness creation meetings and trainings are often held in all regions on good governance and peacebuilding. The establishment of the center will help to design a more structured, pragmatic, practical, and tailor-made training where short courses of different durations will in the short-term produce local peacebuilders and in the long-term have a multiplier effects in producing agents of peace. MoE and MoP with the support from development partners, such as UNDP and UNESCO should establish the center.

► **Promoting positive use of social media and revising the existing media law**

Social media's role in peacebuilding has been perceived to be significant. As digital platforms receive special attention in influencing youth behavior, the need to introduce laws and promoting positive use of social media is of paramount importance. This will contribute to reverse the inherent threats associated with abuse of social media. The existing media law has its own limitations in sanctioning the abuses of social media. MoP and ETV should cooperate in designing a TV program content on proper use of social media and in advocating for the revision of the existing media law.

► **Prioritizing the YPS agenda according to the specificity of regions in experiencing diverse challenges**

Context matters in setting priorities for the YPS agenda. Regions differ in the nature of challenges they face in addressing youth issues although there are shared interests. Some prefer to focus on restoring relationships in post-conflict situations. Others consider restoring peace by disengaging the armed youth. Migration of active labor force has been a huge challenge in some localities within a region. This underlines the need to prioritize the YPS agenda in preparing the NAP.

► **Revising institutional mandates and eliminating mandate confusions to prepare the NAP**

Government agencies working on youth tend not to coordinate their actions resulting in confusions in their mandates and inefficient use of resources. The preparation of a NAP to implement YPS requires the revision of legally-defined institutional mandates that will reduce confusions and then eliminate overlaps.

► **Creating and harnessing youth-led discussion platforms to enhance youth contribution to the NAP**

Though there are platforms for youth to discuss peace and security issues through organizing conferences and conducting awareness creation trainings, there are no youth-led platforms for such purposes. Youth-led platforms for peace and security provide freedom to express views and concerns, and enable them identify their priority needs. This generates critical inputs for the preparation of NAP as the plan will reflect real feelings and practical needs of the youth.

1. Introduction and background

With more than 1.8 billion youth globally, among which 600 million live in conflict-affected areas increasing the need to take into account their experiences and perspectives in peacebuilding is critical (Ebenezer-Abiola, 2023). A study on the role and contribution of youth to peace and security in Africa shows that there are immense challenges facing the youth in relation to unemployment, political manipulation (as they can easily be recruited to commit violent action), organizational and capacity gaps, declining funding from development partners to support youth-led initiatives. Meanwhile, it indicates that peacebuilding activities promoting youth participation aim at resource mobilization and building their technical capacity with support from institutions within the continent. Development of capacity and inclusion of the youth in peace processes will be decisive to enable them to withstand the bottlenecks stifling their active participation in the peace processes and bridge the gap between them and the government system. This will eventually increase efficiency of their innovative peace and security initiatives (AU, 2020a).

Ethiopian government has introduced the youth policy nearly two decades ago. This policy underlines the potential contribution of the youth to building a democratic system, good governance, and national development. The policy represents a radical break from the conventional strategy for involving young people in the development of the country, which sees young people as passive recipients of ideas. Instead, it acknowledges them as innovative and resourceful stakeholders and hopes for their active involvement. Expansion of higher learning institutions, vocational training centers and the development of micro and small-scale enterprises and strategies created to increase the effectiveness of these initiatives indicate the commitment that the government has made to creating opportunities for the youth having an active role in economic transformation of the country. The youth policy underscores the provision of support to the youth already victimized 'by social evils' to be productive and lead a peaceful life (FDRE, 2004:32) and encourages their participation in all affairs affecting them.

About 71% of Ethiopian population is under the age of 30 (Megquier and Belohlav, 2014). The youth account for a large majority of the country's population. UNDP recognizes that an increase in complexity of the country's political landscape has made the pre-existing youth policy hardly responsive to the emerging challenges related to security and stability in the country. Although a number of institutional frameworks (ministries, youth forum and federations) were established towards organizing the youth and creating a condition through which their voice is heard, no significant progress has been made in their level of participation in policy decisions due to structural instability of government institutions. This assessment aims at identifying policy directions for the youth participation in the ongoing political reforms, with special attention to the empowerment of the youth to contribute to the peace and security of the country.

While the youth participate in violent conflicts triggered by different motives (Adeto, 2020; Sisay and Degwale, 2023), there is a growing consensus that interventions aiming at creating an enabling environment for the youth towards peacebuilding are giving more hopeful sign for Ethiopia. Although the existing institutional frameworks (involving the creation of different ministries) engage the youth in various social and economic activities, their level of performance in achieving the target is being questioned owing to inherent instability and frequent restructuring. The recently created MoP, and the MoWSA have a role to play in supporting the youth to take a role in peacebuilding processes in the country. The YPS agenda is of great interest for these and many other state institutions. The existing national peace infrastructures and institutions accountable to invest in peacebuilding could benefit from this assessment as the evidence generated would guide on how to strengthen participation of the youth in national peacebuilding strategies and seek to consolidate existing practices.

By taking into consideration the challenges associated with violent conflicts in which the youth remained active participants as well as the enabling international and national frameworks, the policy-oriented assessment intends to examine structural weaknesses undermining youth engagement in national and local peace and security agenda, which is sought to be of urgent priority for the country. The assessment started with exploring current situations, challenges, and opportunities. These are crucial in promoting the meaningful participation of the youth in all aspects of peace and security. The outcome of this

assessment will help to inform policy about how youth can be engaged not as passive participants but as leaders, key partners, and implementers of peace initiatives. This will eventually force a few of those participating in violence to refrain from it and it will be a strategic move to ensure sustainable peacebuilding in Ethiopia. Thus, the goal of the assessment is to identify and suggest policy directions on how the youth can contribute to the ongoing political and institutional reforms, particularly regarding their efforts to promote and ensure the empowerment and participation of the youth in peace and development initiatives in the country.

The specific objectives of the assessment are to:

- ▶ assess the policy, legal, institutional frameworks, and practices in the youth, peace and security agenda along with analysis of the major causes and impacts of conflict with their implication on the youth in Ethiopia;
- ▶ identify needs, aspirations and challenges of young men and women, pinpointing the significance of promoting their participation and empowerment in the peace and security agenda of the country, and;
- ▶ identify and recommend workable immediate actions for advocacy, medium to long-term programmatic entry points and partnerships towards promoting the youth, peace and security framework in Ethiopia;

2. The UN Security Council Resolutions and AU Continental Framework

2.1. The UN Resolutions (2250, 2419, and 2535)

There are three UNSCRs (2250, 2419 and 2535) adopted in various years¹ to recognize and support the role of youth in peace and security. This is considered as a global framework in this assessment. Adopted by the Security Council in its meeting held on 9 December 2015, the resolution 2250 expresses concern about the disruption of youth access to education and economic opportunities having a negative impact on peace and reconciliation while recognizing their contribution to the promotion of peace and security, and “lasting peace and economic prosperity if inclusive policies are in place”. The resolution 2250 emphasizes a concern over the use of communication technologies such as the internet to spread messages supporting violent actions. It also recognizes an emerging trend around the globe where previously radicalized youth began to take part in peacebuilding activities by encouraging their peers’ addressing grievances within communities. The key issue in this resolution is thus how to transform the youth from being active participant in violent conflicts to promoting peacebuilding. To enable countries to realize this, Resolution 2250 provides ‘World Programme of Action for the Youth’ to promote “young people’s participation and positive contribution to building peace in conflict and post-conflict situations”. Moreover, among the *nine guiding principles* of young people’s participation in peacebuilding, there are six principles, which are central. These include promoting a condition for youth participation; considering diversity and experiences; ownership, leadership, and accountability; enhancing their knowledge, skills and attitude in peacebuilding; introducing policies supporting their felt needs; and investing in partnerships among young communities².

The UNSCR 2250 also acknowledges the on-going efforts of national governments in engaging the youth in building and maintaining peace, and the role of inclusive development to ensure long-term peace and stability. It looks into the importance of collaboration among the civil society, governments, and the private sector in responding to and addressing the needs of the youth. It insists that addressing such needs and aspirations will contribute to sustainable peace at the local and international levels. Based on this provision, the consultant assessed efforts made by the federal and regional state structures of the government of Ethiopia in addressing the needs and aspirations of the youth to reorient them towards promoting peace and security. Moreover, the resolution identifies participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, disengagement and reintegration of the youth as essential pillars that need to be considered to realize long-term peacebuilding.

Participation refers to representation of the youth at all levels of decision-making in conflict prevention, resolution, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction, peace processes and in the implementation of peace agreements. *Protection* considers ensuring the safety and security of civilians, refugees and the youth during conflicts along the existing international law and the conventions against violation of human rights. *Prevention* includes various actions such as recognition of the youth with various backgrounds to receive adequate support to implement violence prevention activities and support social cohesion by using different instruments: increasing job opportunities, investing in their entrepreneurship and education, promoting a culture of peace and tolerance, and engaging them in political processes. *Partnerships* involve mobilization of different kinds of support (technical, financial, and logistical) towards youth participation in peacebuilding efforts by various UN agencies and finding ways to engage them meaningfully in the aftermath of armed conflict. *Disengagement and reintegration* as a critical pillar (priority area) indicates giving due consideration to the needs of the youth affected by the conflict including employment opportunities, building their capabilities and skills, and securing support from the youth-led peacebuilding organizations as partners in youth employment

1 UNSCRs passed: 2250 in 2015, 2419 in 2018, and 2535 in 2020.

2 Guiding Principles on Young People’s Participation in Peacebuilding. Available at <https://Guiding-Principles.pdf> (unoy.org)

and entrepreneurship (UN, 2015). As one can see from these descriptions of the pillars, there is an overlap in terms of instruments or required actions. For instance, prevention, and disengagement and reintegration involve capacity building and creation of employment opportunities.

Undertaking actions along these five pillars will support young people’s positive contribution to building peace in conflict and post-conflict situations (UN, 2015). In the post-conflict and widespread communal violence contexts of Ethiopia, how to translate these elements of the resolution into practice effectively will be central to this assessment. The role of the youth in conflict transformation needs to be recognized given the local sociocultural context supporting prevention from participation in violence. Recent reports on achievements regarding this point provide evidence on youth participation in peace processes in several countries (UN, 2022).

There are also other UN Security Council Resolutions that tend to capitalize on UNSCR 2250 in extending the role of the youth in peacebuilding. The UNSCR 2419 underlines the positive role young people can play in negotiating and implementing peace agreements and conflict prevention (UN, 2018). The UNSCR 2535 looks into the critical role of youth in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. This resolution indicates the need to include the youth while undertaking negotiations and making peace agreements, which is central to the enforcement and sustainability of the peace agreements (UN, 2020).

2.2 African Continental Framework

The African Union has also set up a Continental Framework for YPS. This framework was developed based on a number of country, regional and continental level initiatives that support youth participation in peace and security. For instance, the AU Peace and Security Council Protocol calls for member states to ‘develop national action plans and remove all structural barriers to youth participation in peace and security’ and undertake a study on youth emphasizing their role in promoting peace and security. Whatever the reason why it did not succeed, the initiative of silencing guns by 2020 as part of the 2063 agenda of the AU is critical to enhancing the role of young people in peace and security with the intention of ending all wars on the continent. Other relevant foundations for the framework include AU Theme on Youth in 2017, The African Governance Architecture Program, The Youth for Peace African Program, and the African Union Youth Envoy Action Plan 2019/2020, and national initiatives of member states in developing youth policy. The Regional Initiatives (Regional Economic Communities) mainstreaming youth engagement in peace and security, and the Global Initiatives emphasized in UN resolutions (such as the UNSCR 2250, 2419, and 2535) were used to develop the continental framework (AU, 2020b).

The key objective of the AU framework is to “facilitate meaningful engagement and participation of African youth in all spectrums of peace and security at national, regional and continental levels”. Specifically, the framework underscores the importance of recognition, appreciation of youth’s efforts, partnerships, and collaboration among different categories of youth, and member states focusing on development of youth-led strategic and national action plans. Despite a number of initiatives and commitments in Africa, the framework was required to address constraints faced by the youth and relevant stakeholders to ensure peace and security on the continent. These constraints are limited financial resources for youth initiatives, lack of coordination among stakeholders, weak organizational and technical capacities of youth groups, poor coordination and inclusivity among youth groups, limited awareness among the youth of their possibilities, and lack of evidence-based approach on how the youth formally contribute to peacebuilding (AU, 2020b).

The framework underlines that participation of the youth in violent conflict is attributed to unmet needs of the youth such as socioeconomic development, good governance, human rights, poor representation and participation in decision-making processes, justice, and reconciliation. To address these, it considers five priority areas (in line with the UNSCR 2250) that need to be addressed; including youth participation, prevention, protection, partnerships and coordination, and disengagement and reintegration. It also outlines 13 criteria and principles for effective programming on youth, peace and security as well as provides five enabling mechanisms (ranging from capacity building to knowledge management)³ to achieve the objectives (AU,2020b). This assessment of the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda in Ethiopia has recognized and considered the essential components of the global and continental frameworks (*priority areas and enabling mechanisms*), in an attempt to verify the extent to which they were put into practice, the challenges met in the process and the available opportunities.

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3 The enabling mechanisms include 1) capacity building, 2) inclusive approach to youth, 3) mainstreaming gender, 4) communication on the contribution of the youth to peace and security, and 5) knowledge management by sharing of information and use of data and evidence for policies on youth, peace and security.

3. Empirical review on Youth in Peace and Security

'Identity development' is becoming one of the key challenges to youth participation in peacebuilding processes. The youth can have multiple identities ascribed to age, sex, religion, ethnicity, occupational status, political support, citizenships, and so on. Their participation in peacebuilding is hampered when any form of identity interferes into elements of human rights (McKeown et al., 2020). Engaging idle and unemployed youth in peacebuilding process is even more challenging. Support for the youth employment and empowerment is thus critical to their engagement in conflict prevention and resolution activities. Addressing immediate needs of youth affected by a conflict is a pre-requisite for their engagement in the peace process with a holistic analysis of their living conditions and setting up of peacebuilding projects that support their recovery. Aware of the urgency for the member states to take action in ensuring inclusion of the youth in peacebuilding efforts as indicated in UN resolution 2535, it is fundamental to get their voice heard on matters affecting their lives (Ebenezer-Abiola, 2023). In line with this, the resolution underlines that participatory planning, organizing, and engaging the youth, and regular monitoring of their wellbeing will have a positive impact on their participation in peacebuilding (UN, 2020). Therefore, disengagement and reintegration of the youth involved in fighting will succeed in ensuring participation of the youth in peace processes when supports for the youth in their recovery aim at their long-term development (Ozerdem and Podder, 2015) implying for the government commitment to provide continued support to transform their socioeconomic conditions.

Understanding how peace is conceptualized in the narratives of the youth is critical to assess their efforts in everyday peacebuilding practices. As the youth tend to take up precarious (often poorly paying) jobs, be dissatisfied with their earnings, feel insecurity of jobs and experience limited progress in income growth, their contribution to peace is limited. Thus, decent employment is used as a means to increase participation of youth in peacebuilding, increasing the importance of recognizing and taking it as a policy agenda (Lizzi, 2020). Blaming the youth for cycles of violent conflict without examining their 'veiled belief' on felt needs and interests can only limit their progress towards peace (Berents and McEvoy-Levy, 2015). Taking stock of youth understandings of peace and engaging them in peace dialogues will reverse the risks of protracted violence and pave the way to the agency of youth in peacebuilding activities through advocacy and civic engagement (Akinyetun et al., 2023). This brief review demonstrates the importance of a situation analysis to understand the existing context for the purpose of empowerment and participation of the different categories of youth in setting peace and security agenda.

Though political inclusion and representation of the youth in decision-making in redefining the role of youth in peacebuilding is being increasingly recognized, the progress made in Africa is slow and uneven. Meanwhile, political, and economic marginalization of the youth compounded by stresses attributed to climate change will exacerbate youth participation in violent conflicts, crossing international borders in areas dominated by pastoral production systems. This makes consolidating sub-regional capacities with the focus on youth vital needs for sustainable peacebuilding (UNDP, 2023). Multi-sectoral and cross-cutting partnerships between young people and youth organizations, the private sector and religious institutions at the local and national levels are fundamental to implement UNSCR 2250 by the member states. Such partnerships support knowledge-sharing and information flows, as well as designing and implementing disengagement and reintegration processes (Simpson, 2018).

Despite all the efforts made, a global assessment reveals that the safety, security, and protection of young people did not improve due to shrinking civic spaces, the COVID Pandemic and armed conflicts, particularly for the young women, failing to increase inclusive partnerships of the youth as active and crucial peacebuilders (UN, 2022). In conflict contexts, young women are often restricted to their homes, narrowing their social networks, limiting their participation in public spheres, and undermining their agency in the formal peace process. This indicates the need to generate gender disaggregated data in assessing the YPS agenda (UN Women, 2018). A comparative study shows that young people have a positive outlook on life and future perspectives in conflict-affected areas. It indicates that though conflicts cause immense destruction, they are not always associated with negative outcomes among the youth. It suggests the need to identify roles of the youth in preventing conflicts and sustaining peace (Justino, 2023).

4. Scope of the work and methodology

4.1 Scope of the work

UNDP is currently implementing a project “Supporting Peacebuilding, Social Cohesion and Diversity Management in Ethiopia”. A review of the youth leadership in peacebuilding primarily reflects UNDP’s intention to strengthen its contribution for partners and stakeholders by generating updated knowledge on youth participation in peacebuilding. Likewise, one of the concerns of the government in Ethiopia is to transform the youth from becoming victims and/or agents of violence associated with ethnic competition to active agents in peacebuilding and ensuring peaceful co-existence of diverse societal groups in different regions (Adeto, 2020). One of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and build accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels which is consistent with the AU mission to achieve “silencing the guns by 2020” with the aim of “ending all wars, civil conflicts, gender-based violence, violent conflicts and preventing genocide on the continent”.

The key task in this assessment is to examine and relate the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 and the African Union Continental Framework to the experience in Ethiopia and find ways how to adapt them towards implementing the YPS agenda. To achieve the specific objectives of the assessment, the consultant undertook a number of other tasks. The key ones include consultation with various stakeholders at the initial stage, discussion on the inception report and incorporation of feedbacks from the advisory council, data collection and preparation of the assessment report and policy brief.

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Target and sampling for the assessment

The assessment targeted individuals in the national peace and security structures and experts from different ministries having a role to play in supporting the youth to participate in peace processes and to take up employment opportunities. At the regional level, representatives of different CSOs working on youth, and the regional administration and security bureaus were approached for interviews. Academic staff of universities, a journalist working on youth at ETV, and representatives of the youth council and leaders of youth associations provided detailed information for the assessment. To select the youth, different criteria were used including employment, participation in the state structure, place of residence, gender and participation in youth associations/councils. The reasons for these criteria are to accommodate diversity of views and priorities and to explore challenges and opportunities to support youth contribution in peacebuilding. The regions included in this assessment were Amhara, Oromia, Tigray, Sidama, Benishangul-Gumuz, Somali and Addis Ababa city administration. Consistent with the African Youth Charter, the young people selected were in the age range of 18 and 35.

4.2.2 Data collection

Data were collected using different methods for different purposes. These include (1) review of secondary sources (government plans, reports, publications from academic institutions and policy documents), (2) key informant interviews with selected key informants at national and regional levels with the use of a checklist (See Annex), and (3) review of media broadcasts, print media and social media. In addition to views of the consultant who conducted the assessment, insights gained from the discussions validation workshop engaging different stakeholders were also used as inputs to enrich this document.

4.2.3 Analytical approaches

There were two sets of qualitative data collected in this assessment: primary and secondary sources. The consultant used four analytical approaches/tools. The first is content analysis employed to analyze legal and policy documents related to peacebuilding and conflict prevention, specifically looking into exiting policy, legal and institutional frameworks. The second is discourse analysis used to analyze multiple understandings of the events by different individuals and groups, and assess points of convergence and critical divergence. Discourse analysis is often used in conflict studies and conflict resolution (Chiluwa, 2021). A number of studies in developing policy framework for peacebuilding in a post-conflict situation have used discourse analysis as analytical tools (Bhusal, 2014; Heathershaw, 2007).

The third is analytic narratives combining game theory and narratives. It was used to analyze the nature of the relationship between the youth and the government as principal actors in peacebuilding considering the situation after 2019. It is guided by assumptions on state support and youth participation in peace processes. This approach helps to analyze competition, conflict, and cooperation within the society or at a larger scale (Myersen, 1991; Luz et al., 2022). The fourth approach is stakeholder mapping which was used to identify potential partners for advocacy, programmatic activities and establish strategic partnerships for possible interventions. With the use of a chain map template, it assisted in mapping *positions, linkages, direction of influence* and *interests* to explore possibilities for partnerships and collaboration in implementing the YPS agenda (Rusen et al., 2021; GPPAC, 2017).

5. Findings of the assessment

5.1 Historical analysis of conflicts in Ethiopia

The nature of conflict in Ethiopia can be seen at two levels: internal conflicts and conflict with neighboring countries. The causes of the internal conflicts are dynamic where in some cases it occurs as a result of dispute over important resources such as grazing and water in lowland areas between herders of different identities and in other cases due to interest to control a specific territory (Beyene, 2013). Such conflicts are widespread and often resolved through the customary systems and with the support of the local state administration. In some cases, inter-communal violence can contribute to regional political instability, further ethnic tensions and perpetuation of localized conflicts all leading to temporary displacement that in turn require resources. This is a manifestation of the poor governance capacity at the local level (Yigzaw and Abitew, 2019). The scale of devastation is minimal when compared to large-scale full-blown war with neighboring countries. When the internal conflicts involved the government waging war against specific group due to political differences, the level of damage was high, and this occurred during the socialist military regime claiming hundreds of thousands of lives.

In the recent past as well, the conflict between the federal government and the Tigray regional government has caused significant damages to humans and infrastructure and left millions in deep poverty and mental illness particularly among those who lost their children in the war. On the part of the government, violations of the laws of the land, i.e. the national constitution is provided as a justification to control armed groups challenging the structure of formally elected government. The youth also participate in the government military forces and become victim of violent conflict but are perceived to play an important role in ensuring peace and security of the country. State media has been used to convince the public over the legitimacy of the state to protect its people from rebellions while such media are not exempt from political influence (Woldearegay, 2022). Displacement, food insecurity and other humanitarian catastrophes have resulted from the war that ended up in making peace agreement favoring cessation of hostilities and putting more efforts into undertaking measures to ensure sustainable peace.

Ethiopia has also fought with Somalia (1977 and 1978) over the Ogaden region of the current Somali regional state, and with Eritrea (1998-2000) over border disagreements following claims of land from inside Ethiopia where Eritrea initiated the war. Such internal and international border disputes have largely affected the young people who fought at the front and those who have suffered from the indirect negative impacts of war on economic slowdown, inflation and high level of unemployment. The youth become the participants and victims of violence. The economic transmission of the impacts of conflict may be visible in the next generation as the economy fails to provide opportunities for the upcoming generation. No one benefited from such internal conflicts and the war. Political leaders and activists are expected to learn from such series of historical mistakes as confrontations tend to continue from within. Shifting of resources to non-productive use, missed development opportunities, disrupted trade and supply chains, disruption of livelihood activities and loss of infrastructure are the major losses attributed to wars fought internally and with neighboring states all affecting the youth (Abay et al., 2023).

In the current system of governance as well, the youth are becoming victims of violence as internal conflicts emerge in the two populous regional states (Amhara and Oromia) having heavy impacts on the safety and security of the youth. The government tends to exercise a 'stick and carrot' approach where it opens its doors to negotiation and dialogue to resolve differences peacefully; if it is not possible, it intends to exercise its monopoly on violence to ensure peace and security using military intervention. While this assessment was going on, the government has expressed its intent to get out of the cycle of violence during the meetings held with the community representatives of the two populous regions where high-level state officials made a visit to the two regions in February 2024.

5.2 Regional situation analysis

5.2.1 Sidama Region

5.2.1.1 Platforms for the youth contribution to peace

Though the youth got involved in violent conflict in relation to self-governance and on communally-used natural resources, families' influence is significant in the region by advising their children not to take part in violence by increasing their awareness over the repercussions of their participation. There is no youth-led platform in the region as peace has not been a priority though it is perceived to be useful to increase youth understanding of peace. There is a representative of youth but the youth council has not been formally established. The youth council has been established nationally in 2015 E.C. but is not yet functional in Sidama.

Key informant interviews show that the youth participate in conflicts and in resolving them. For instance, they participated in the conflict that occurred between Guji and Sidama at a place called Edo/Mario which was resolved through the intervention of Abba Gadas of both groups. Traditionally, the youth do not have a chance to engage in resolving conflicts since elders and customary leaders play such roles. On the other hand, youth participation in conflict resolution has been effective as the recent experience shows in which they resolved the conflict occurred at Wondogenet between Sidama and Oromia due to border dispute. In Sidama, there is a tradition called *Afine* that helps in resolving conflict. The youth took an initiative by themselves and resolved the conflict without state intervention. The key informants indicated that involving the youth in conflict resolution would enable them to learn from elders. In terms of capacity building, training was conducted by the Regional Bureau of Women and Social Affairs (BoWSA) on entrepreneurship, life skills and peacebuilding where those who attended these trainings were expected to train others. A total of 78,000 youngsters were trained from rural and urban areas from the 36 woredas of the region.

The key limitations experienced in the region is absence of a forum or platform for the youth to exchange ideas on peace and security on a regular basis. As the region is peaceful, there is no agenda to discuss about it although the key informants believe that the means to sustain the actual peace need to be emphasized. Moreover, there is no youth participation in the local political system to express their concerns. The youth are not represented to influence any decision that affects them. But exception was when the National Dialogue Commission came to the region in which the youth were involved in agenda setting for the national dialogue. The youth key informants were not sure how far their views and concerns were recognized. In general, capacity building and awareness raising activities on peace and security for the youth in the region is very limited.

One of the conditions on the ground enabling the youth to participate in peace and security is for the Admin and Security Bureaus to embrace the youth and work closely with youth peace ambassadors. This has been successful in Sidama where the security personnel will mobilize regional peace ambassadors consisting of organized youth volunteers who provide a quick response. This response involved prevention of violent conflicts with the neighboring Oromia region bordering 98 kebeles of the Sidama region. A missing element in this exercise is the absence of effective training to build capacity of the youth with the support from the Ministry of Peace.

5.2.1.2 Job creation and entrepreneurship

Sidama is considered a peaceful region and the youth do not worry about peace but rather about challenges associated with unemployment. This is particularly the case for the urban youth who tended to emphasize job creation unlike the rural youth who still underlined peaceful coexistence with neighboring regions as most pressing. Among office holders at the local level, there is a shared view that young people are religious (mostly protestant) and hence their participation in violent activities is unlikely. Such view undermines the initiative to discuss about peace issues while grievance of the youth over unemployment is increasing over time. To respond to these, some youth groups organized their own enterprises producing vegetables and cereals as well as poultry production. They also created a marketing cooperative as an outlet to their produces. Emphasis was placed on organizing groups of university graduates to prepare them for entrepreneurship. Each group consists of four young men and one young woman who take loans from the government. Young women's participation is often limited in such activities. On the other hand, unemployed youth have grievances over the absence of such

state support that would allow them to take part in various economic activities instead of spending their time on social media.

Financial constraints are perceived as an obstacle to the success of the youth organized around different enterprises since the loan provided is inadequate to purchase the required inputs to run the businesses for the rural youth investing in agriculture. Similar problems exist for the urban youth where they obtain premises but without sufficient funds to undertake an investment. Youth key informants mentioned the absence of any partnership in working with the youth, as the youth themselves are not organized as an association. There are no NGOs working on the youth.

5.2.2 Benishangul Gumuz Region

5.2.2.1 Disengagement and reintegration

Youth participation in voluntary services is common in the region. As the youth have never participated in violent conflicts, issues of disengagement and reintegration are irrelevant while preventing them from taking part in violence is important to maintain the status quo. Most youngsters indicated that not much attention has been paid to the youth but general meetings are often held on peace among different community members. Currently, a relative peace is restored in the region after the violence that occurred between 2018 and 2022 while feelings of insecurity due to fear of abduction or killings are pervasive. The role of the youth at this time is to work closely with the security forces in supervising and providing information for early action. Violence is intermittent, but widespread, and is likely to occur at any time.

The regional Administration and Security Bureau is working on preventing the youth from taking part in violence as its key activity by providing regular tracking of youth activities and creating its own local structures up to the village level. The region has prepared its own manual on how to implement peace and security related activities. The manual provides rules and procedures for establishing a peace committee consisting of 10 to 15 depending on the size of a kebele, and for preparing training. It serves as a guide on how to resolve conflicts when they occur at the local level between and within communities and prevent them through collecting early warning information. In 2014 and 2015 E.C, Boro-Shinasha Development Association had organized a two-day regional-level training on peace values and conflict resolution in which 10 representatives of the youth participated. The region tries to work with trained youth representatives to influence others and support them to train others.

5.2.2.2 Job creation and entrepreneurship

Youth engagement in various economic activities was recognized as a means to prevent them from being involved in violent action. The support provided to the youth to participate in economic activities, though not adequate, is encouraging. There is divergence of views between employed and unemployed youth key informants. While those unemployed youth indicated that no support has been provided for the youth to be involved in any economic activities, most of the employed youth graduates spend their time on unproductive activities and drug abuse.

To counter the influence of drug addiction, the Green Love Appreciative Development (GLAD) has been providing training and conducting consultation with the youth and adolescent at high school and university levels. The establishment of personality development centers, provision of entrepreneurship training and formation of rehabilitation centers as some of the activities of GLAD has been instrumental in reversing the socioeconomic challenges faced by the youth in the region. It has been engaged in the promotion of agroecological farming practices among students and farmers, contributing to climate-resilient livelihoods and among the youth in Aburamo Woreda by providing Bajaj vehicles for local transportation, which is a scalable model for job creation. It believes that youth engagement in economic activities will serve as a strategic approach to prevent their involvement in violent behavior.

Drug abuse has been recognized as an important driver for youth participation in violence (such as kidnapping individuals to meet their daily cash needs). While youth unemployment is critical, there are cases where some employed youth drop their jobs due to addiction for which rehabilitation centers were created. However, the key challenges perceived in job creation for the youth include:

- ▶ Limited provision of infrastructure
- ▶ Limited national support (financial and technical) affecting the provision of quality training in entrepreneurship

- ▶ Limited training on entrepreneurship due to budget limitation; and
- ▶ Available training emphasizing peacebuilding (culture of peace, building peace values, conflict management) rather than economic activities.

5.2.2.3 Platforms for the youth contribution to peace and the role of CSOs

In the Region, the youth took leadership in facilitating the dialogue between representatives of the Bombasi and Manasibu woredas with the funding support of GLAD, which has contributed to sustained peace. GLAD has also created Community-Investor-Government Forum (CIGF) and Community Consultation Forum (CCF) in partnership with GIZ, enabling youth to participate in governance, conflict prevention, and local investment planning. There were two fora organized to discuss how to involve the youth in peace and security.

Berghof Foundation initiated a project to support inclusive dialogue aiming at strengthening locally owned, inclusive infrastructures for peace by facilitating community dialogues and supporting other activities that address grievances and root causes of conflict. The objective of the dialogues was to create spaces for addressing grievances and rebuilding trust and to help rebuild social relations through facilitating reconciliation ceremonies between communities and supporting local peace activities that address the root causes of conflict. The region has experienced a series of violent conflicts in Metekel Zone, and the project has contributed to the reduction of the violence and the signing of agreements between the regional government and armed groups.

5.2.2.4 Needs and aspirations

The youth in the region differ in their backgrounds. A key need and aspiration of the youth is to see young people from different origins living in harmony and have equal rights and opportunities regardless of their gender, social background, ethnicity, or religion.

5.2.3 Oromia Region

5.2.3.1 Job creation and entrepreneurship

To promote youth participation in peace processes, the creation of job opportunities and giving them a hope for living is critical. Numerous graduates are hopeless when expressing their resentment, some are involved in violent conflicts, while others suffer from drug abuse in each of the rural villages and urban areas. The key informants perceive a high correlation between job creation and participation in peace processes since the youth attach great value to peace when they have jobs. Youth key informants indicated that most graduate youngsters are jobless working as daily laborers, without receiving any support to engage in income generating activities, and limited effort is made in organizing them while only a few of them obtain government jobs through their close relatives. On the other hand, the region claims making significant efforts in organizing, training and engaging the youth in different enterprises.

In assessing achievements made so far in organizing the youth to benefit from participation in entrepreneurship, the efforts made are inadequate nor are they transparent. Key informants claimed ‘problem of fairness in selecting target groups while those who have relatives and friends working in the government office are favored, excluding others.’ Favoritism is a key challenge in creating opportunities for joining state-supported entrepreneurship where and when it is available. Most of the urban youth have underlined that there are no political grievances enticing the youth to participate in violence, but the frustration due to joblessness is the main issue.

However, there is also a situation where the regional government has recently started projects on poultry production involving groups of young people in various woredas though it is still inadequate given the number of unemployed graduates. The youth perceive that government spending in supporting them to engage in micro and small enterprises has dramatically reduced in the last five years. Engaging the youth in raising livestock and irrigation-based vegetable farming in rural areas and small-scale enterprises in urban areas would be crucial to enhance youth participation in peacebuilding.

5.2.3.2 Disengagement and reintegration

The regional Administration and Security Bureau makes efforts in the disengagement and reintegration of the armed youth who participated in violence by providing them training and mobilizing resources to engage them in different economic activities. For instance, the region has submitted proposals to donors

and obtained positive response after a needs assessment. The regional government is committed on this while the resources are limited to undertake reintegration. On the other hand, youth key informants emphasize the absence of youth organization through which the government can provide economic support to reverse the trend.

5.2.3.3 Platforms for the youth contribution to peace

Youth key informants indicated that the youth discuss on peace issues among themselves but there is no regular platform created to bring together diverse groups from different parts of the region to train or create dialogues on peace, which the key informants mentioned as a weakness in creating trust. The youth are afraid of speaking about peace related issues on their own as “it can be politicized”. However, they indicated their “readiness to do so if the regional government takes the initiatives for continued discussion on how to bring peace”. The impact of conflict on farming and trade has been significant in cash crop growing areas, making peace central to their livelihoods.

This is a region experiencing violent conflicts between rebel armed youth and state armed forces. Insights from the key informant interviews show that engaging the youth in peace and security issues is not a well-structured project because the youth are not organized and most of the key informants frequently raise concerns over drug abuse, unemployment, and grievance over structural marginalization all of which are contributing to youth participation in violent activities such as the creation of gang groups and kidnapping of people in return for financial gains. The youth key informants mentioned that this is common within woredas close to Addis Ababa. Youth participation in peace processes to discuss on peace and security in their own community and how to prevent violent activities by creating platforms is the key weakness. The youth are aware of the deteriorating security situations in their area but such awareness requires further consultation with the local administration to create common understanding on how to ensure peace at community and societal levels.

However, the regional level expert interviews show that there are different entities that work on peace and security in the region including the youth council, the police force, the court system, and *Gachana sirna* (literally means supporters of the political system) having clear mandates and roles. However, weak monitoring and evaluation of the progress made and their achievements, absence of means to document the process and report to the public, and the lack of information provided by social media were considered as weaknesses and challenges in enhancing youth contribution to peacebuilding.

5.2.3.4 Needs and aspirations

In the context of Oromia, the aspiration for the youth to ensure peace and security in the country is to organize and create continuous discussion forums for the youth if possible at the regional level where the youth from different parts of the region will exchange views and concerns freely. One of the key informants stated, “Yes, we discuss about peace informally because absence of peace in this area has disrupted trade and development. What we aspire to is the reconciliation of the armed groups with the government with a genuine interest and love for the society which is suffering from protracted violence. I think efforts need to be made in building trust to resolve the conflict. I see lack of trust as a reason for the failure of peace talks”.

5.2.4 Amhara Region

5.2.4.1 Job creation and entrepreneurship

The challenges faced by the youth in Amhara Region are similar to others including drug abuse, high level of unemployment and limited access to financial resources to participate in productive economic activities. The recent war in northern Ethiopia has also affected the basic infrastructure and public services that could support youth participation in economic activities. When reinforced with the already shrinking plot size in the rural areas, the youth have insufficient land resources to farm. The non-farm informal sector, which also does not create jobs due to financial constraints (Shuker and Tsadik, 2024), has been equally affected by the conflict. The key informants indicated that the damage caused to soil and water conservation infrastructures and the engagement of an active labor force in the war where the youth joined the Fano militia had an impact on the asset and productivity loss, apart from the humanitarian crises.

The Consortium for Networking and Development (COND) as a CSO works on peacebuilding and job creation for the youth. With respect to peacebuilding, COND emphasizes the need to work on the reason why youth participate in violent conflict rather than trying to address its outcomes. There is also a partnership between the CSOs (working in the region) and the regional government on job creation. As a result, close to 2000 youngsters in South Gondar and Debre Tabor have invested in fattening, irrigated farming, and supply of sands for construction. Job creation contributing to youth economic empowerment in this context will enable the region to prevent youth participation in violent conflicts but requires strengthening partnerships for mobilizing more funds. This may start from taking an inventory of active enterprises prior to the war and trying to reinstall them as the war has caused a total asset loss of about 30% of the MSMEs (CIPE, 2022:11). Contrary to other regions covered in this assessment, the support provided for the youth in terms of job creation and involvement in entrepreneurship is next to none.

5.2.4.2 Platforms for the youth contribution to peace

Armed conflict between the then armed Fano militia and the government has started in April 2023. As key informants indicated, the fundamental reasons of the antagonism are the alleged ‘perceived threat to Amhara people living outside of the region and the contested territories between Tigray and Amhara’. Despite the government’s efforts in making a call for peace, the leaders of the armed youth groups did not respond positively for disarmament and peaceful dialogue. They use social media platforms operated by the diaspora political activists to get their voice heard. The financial and political support from the diaspora as well as having access to social media allowed the youth to maintain their resistance (Yirsaw and Yared, 2024).

Key informant interviews also show that there are no separate forums for the youth to discuss peace and security issues. Most of the meetings and discussions held so far on peace and security of the region involved local community representatives such as elders, religious leaders and lower-level government officials. The youth are organized as 1 to 5 team involved in development activities, which is used as a means to mobilize the youth for various purposes such as participation in events.

5.2.4.3 Disengagement and reintegration

An inquiry into the disengagement and reintegration intervention indicates that the strategy used to reach the armed youth was perceived to be wrong. Frequent meetings to discuss how to disengage and reintegrate the youth took place in the absence of the concerned youth themselves. Insights from the interviews show that representatives of the targeted youth should have participated in such meetings held. The participants of the meetings were various groups within the society (elders, women, party members and local officials) but excluded the youth. This has an implication for the change in strategy to approach the youth and address their underlying questions. The regional administration and security bureau indicate that disengagement and reintegration efforts have been underway using elders, religious leaders and influential persons although it is not fully successful. Taking into account a long-term perspective in influencing youth perception of choosing a non-violent approach, the question of support provided to the youth in the region has been central to this assessment.

5.2.4.4 Needs and aspirations

The violent conflict between armed youth and state military forces has created a huge challenge for the youth to engage in economic activities. Insights from interviews show that efforts made to address this on the part of the regional and federal government is perceived to be inadequate. Even those efforts made to reach the armed youth were not successful, making it difficult to bring their real questions as an agenda for discussion in the national dialogue. Failure to address the crises at the early stage has resulted in an uncontrollable situation. The aspiration of the youth is that the actual efforts in conducting negotiations, and the series of trainings and awareness raising platforms on peace bear fruit so that the region becomes stable and peaceful. This was perceived as a precondition for the resumption of the enterprises lost or collapsed during the war. The actual need of the youth is to secure adequate support to restore their enterprises since contributions of the existing CSOs and regional government cannot meet the demand.

5.2.5 Tigray Region

5.2.5.1 Platforms for the youth contribution to peace and the role of CSOs

In the region, Alliance of Civil Society Organizations in Tigray (ACSOT) is involved in advocacy issues on peacebuilding, human rights, transitional justice and democratization as one of its programs. It believes that the government should consider civic engagement, mainly local COSs, in the process of postwar rehabilitation and reconstruction. It has undertaken training for the youth on trauma informed care, social cohesion, community awareness on peace and social accountability, and led the establishment of GO-NGO forum. As part of youth participation in peacebuilding, the youth were perceived to have no direct influence over the decision in the outbreak of the war, peace agreement and post-conflict reconstruction. However, support for the peace agreement was expressed through demonstrations. A key informant from ACSOT mentioned that *twenty youth representatives* have contributed to agenda setting for the national dialogue very recently. With respect to activities related to peacebuilding, the Tigray Youth Association (TYA) took an initiative in creating a platform for discussions to restore the Amhara and Tigray community relationships affected by the conflict despite the fact such initiatives did not get media support.

As a consortium embracing 72 national and regional CSOs, ACSOT is engaged in internal and external advocacy having long experience in influencing policies. In the aftermath of the conflict subsequent to the peace deal, ACSOT has been involved in activities contributing to youth empowerment through provision of a series of trainings on income generation activities, and entrepreneurship. To achieve this, ACSOT makes efforts in resource mobilization through its networking and coordination program, which reaches national and international organizations as well as the private sector. Affected by the war, ACSOT is in the process of rebuilding its capacity to perform, making it a potential stakeholder to enhance youth empowerment and participation in peacebuilding. Key informant interviews also show the existence of physical and digital platforms for the youth to discuss or exchange information on peace. For example, regular regional level conferences and training on the responsible use of social media in peacebuilding were held for 18,000 youngsters while financial resources are often limited. The region has also formulated peace and security networks among the youth.

5.2.5.2 Disengagement and reintegration

In assessing the status of disengagement and reintegration, the process has been perceived to be slow due to limited support from the international community and delayed action in ensuring territorial integrity of the region. In 2023, 54,000 ex-combatants were disarmed by the regional government with the understanding that the Pretoria agreement will be implemented by the federal government. However, there was no reintegration support from the federal government. This condition has forced the ex-combatants to engage in criminal activities.

For this reason, the key informants insisted that the disengagement and reintegration interventions were not implemented, and the Tigray region will not demobilize any ex-combatant until the conditions for reintegration are met despite the fact the ex-combatants are ready and willing. The regional Peace and Security Bureau recognizes that further delays and limited responses could prompt the ex-combatant youth to lose confidence in the government and trigger another conflict. It was emphasized that “more delays could cause more threats to the nation”. A full and comprehensive approach to the implementation of the Pretoria Agreement was perceived to encourage the youth to contribute to peacebuilding efforts in the region.

Divergence of interests among political elites where some insist on transitional justice while others do not, is a key challenge for engaging the youth in peace processes. When coupled with reasons for the delay of the reintegration of the ex-combatants, the peace process is essentially becoming complex, creating confusion and uncertainty for the youth who can hardly influence the process (Gebru, 2024). An intense collaboration between TYA and Mekelle University and the broad community awareness raising campaign on the need to restore relationships with neighbors can serve as an opportunity to engage the youth in peacebuilding activities.

5.2.5.3 Support and partnerships for the youth

As assessed by the TYA, 81% of the youth are jobless while 19% are either self-employed or state employees (Gebru et al., 2024). There are no external support and partnerships created with the youth association for creating jobs. Most of the external supports available for the youth emphasize provision

of training (on conflict resolution at woreda level youth leaders) and conducting conferences. However, support and partnerships exist between the region’s Peace and Security Bureau and CSOs such as Center for Concern (CoC) Ethiopia on peacebuilding and conflict management. Funding from UNDP has enabled the region in undertaking a post-war situation assessment in 99 Tabias.⁴

5.2.5.4 Needs and aspiration

A study on post-conflict challenges and aspirations of the youth recommends the need to identify key support areas for the youth to engage in small enterprises through prioritizing their needs (Gebbru et al., 2024), as the conflict has caused a total asset loss of 38% among the MSMEs (CIPE, 2022:11). At present, the regional government is making efforts to enable the youth to create jobs through Dedebit Credit and Savings Institution providing loans with a maximum grace period of two years. Insights from interviews with the youth indicate that this is just the beginning and more is required to engage unemployed youth. Meanwhile, the aspiration of the youth is to influence peace and security-related policies and programs by actively participating in governance processes that will lead to the creation of resilient and peaceful communities. Along this, the youth also expect to see that the various platforms created and discussions held will enable them to reaffirm that the only option to move forward is to rebuild the region and live in peace with neighbors.

5.2.6 Somali Region

5.2.6.1 Political transition and the youth

The region is dominated by the pastoral and agro-pastoral production systems. Though there were regional border disputes over contested woredas with the neighboring Oromia in the past (Beyene, 2022), it is the most peaceful region in the country at present. The region has undergone a lot of political transformation since the early 1990s following the downfall of the social government in Ethiopia. The creation of the Somali Regional State and the self-governance system established in which the ethnic Somalis came to lead their own region has brought attitude change among the Somalis. Currently, the Somali youth group got involved in political decisions and regional policymaking. This has resolved the longstanding grievances that the highlanders dominated the region (Hagmann and Abdi, 2020).

Subsequent to the political reform in Ethiopia in 2018, the youth group called *heego* in Jijiga recruited by the administration of the former regional president were involved in violence against ethnic non-Somalis, killing them and looting their properties. As a government affiliated youth militia, some of them came from rural areas and armed with traditional tools to attack non-Somalis. The attack by the *heego* occurred for two days (August 4 and 5, 2018) followed by the capturing of the ex-President on the 6th of August 2018. Nevertheless, the change in leadership has brought peace to the region. The peace deal agreed between the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the Ethiopian Government in 2018 was a turning point for the region after which a number Somali groups and individuals have reunited their families. The youth suspected to have connection with the ONLF have left the region due to problems of insecurity. The peace deal was the first big step in bringing peace to the region.

5.2.6.2 Job creation, entrepreneurship and support

So far, the regional government has not established any structures that support the youth to contribute to peacebuilding in the region. The Regional Bureau of Women and Social Affairs (BoWSA) provides only technical support to the youth council, which is presumed to be an independent body. There are 40 youth associations in different zones of the region as part of the larger Somali Region Youth Association. The associations form a union, which closely works with the youth council, to arrange access to financial resources for the youth who are organized and would like to engage in some income generating activities. Nevertheless, there is no support provided for the youth towards job creation nor do they have access to loans from the banks. The key informants indicated that the youth who were benefiting from the micro-enterprises prior to 2018 have been abandoned which contradicts the quarter report of the National Bank of Ethiopia indicating that 16,220 jobs were created with 3480 SMEs in the year 2020/21 (CIPE, 2022:7). Such economic inclusion of the youth would prevent them from undertaking criminal activities in the regional capital, occasionally moving beyond the police control.

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4 Tabia is the smallest administrative unit in Tigray equivalent to kebele. Regional bureaus are named differently as Administration and Security Bureaus, and Peace and Security Bureaus.

Moreover, support provided by development partners for the regional state institutions such as BoWSA, and Peace and Security Bureau has been relatively effective in the restoration of peace and security and youth engagement in peacebuilding. Support by UNDP has enabled the regional Peace and Security to resolve inter-clan conflicts over communal lands.

5.2.6.3 Platforms for the youth contribution to peace

The conflicts occur not over the use of the resources but rather over establishment of settlements on a clan's communal lands by non-clan members. The system of resolving the conflict still excludes the youth as it involves elders (usually customary leaders) and committees formed at kebele level. The elders consider the youth as "immature, deviants and do not keep secrets". How to remove such cultural barriers, change negative attitudes towards the youth and engage them in resolving inter-communal conflict in the region is critical. However, a recent development is that the youth appear as committee members and provide information for elders as they resolve conflicts.

5.2.7 Addis Ababa

5.2.7.1 Limited jobs and youth engagement in criminal activities

The most important challenge for the city youth is the high level of unemployment exacerbated by the influx of young men and women from different parts of the country seeking jobs. The city government makes its own efforts to create jobs for the youth, but the demand and available opportunity do not match. As a result, it is common to observe a wide range of crimes committed causing feelings of insecurity for the city residents. The crimes take various forms such as killings, kidnapping children and asking for ransom, and looting of properties. Though one cannot attribute all crimes to the youth, their involvement is predicted to be high. Moreover, a study shows that crimes committed by those 'unmarried youth to meet their basic economic needs' account for 73% and that of unemployed persons account for 80% (Yigzaw et al., 2023:9). The study does not examine the interaction effect, which is expected to increase the level of participation in criminal activities. To deter this, key informants underline the importance of creating positive role models among the youth to prompt others reject violent activities and supporting them to enhance their abilities to protect the society.

The key informants recognize that the inability to create 'sufficient' jobs and the socioeconomic challenges the youth face is partly related to structural factors, such as lack of inter-sectoral coordination to address the challenges and limited institutional commitment to recognize the specific concerns of the youth. The efforts made to create jobs and support youth engagement in various businesses in the past were not sustainable due to the lack of a broad-based and comprehensive approach to systematically implement projects and initiatives.

Change in macroeconomic conditions require the youth to acquire new skills and enhance their capacity to take up new opportunities. There are a number of graduates lacking skills but seeking employment. The key informants underlined that organizing the youth based on their disciplinary background to provide skill enhancing training could mitigate the effects of these weaknesses. This is critical since success in entrepreneurship requires skill development. They also emphasized that the massive influx of the youth has created pressure on the limited range of economic opportunities. The city government is yet to confront more challenges unless such influx is controlled by creating jobs and investments in youth entrepreneurship (self-employment) in the regional cities and rural settings. A study shows that self-employment is taken up more by those with low achievement in formal education (Mehari and Belay, 2017).

5.2.7.2 Platforms for the youth contribution to peace

There are new questions and issues from the youth as macroeconomic and political situations change. To respond to those questions, the political reform involved the creation of new institutions in the name of the youth. Nevertheless, the absence of a regular platform for the youth to raise their concerns independently has been underlined as a missing element. The youth council representative is often called upon for the mobilization of the youth when needed for a specific purpose and events. Institutional mechanism for the youth to influence decision-making processes and allocation of resources to respond to their pressing needs is lacking. This has created discomfort and a sense of marginalization among the youth. However, youth participation in the on-going national dialogue was perceived as part of the exercise in ensuring their political empowerment. The city youth council is represented in the dialogue.

Youth freedom of speech to get their voice heard, the role of media in supporting this and investing in youth talent and creativity are believed to enhance youth contribution to peace.

5.2.7.3 Needs and aspirations

Trust is perceived to be central for the youth to collectively get their voice heard while the diverse nature of the city's youth makes it difficult. The creation of a regular platform and ensuring youth independence (free from any influence) were suggested as an essential first step in youth empowerment. In the past, platforms were created to achieve political objectives (during elections) and were often selective to benefit certain 'interest groups'. Some job creation efforts were observed to secure youth political support. A key informant mentioned 'Arkebe Shop' as an example. The aspiration of the youth is to ensure that such job creation initiatives and actions in organizing the youth and creating jobs give reliable and long-term solutions. Finally, the youth prefer to see the government invest in them to recognize peace and stability as essential factors for their academic endeavors and professional growth. This contributes to empowerment of the youth along political, social and economic dimensions.

5.3 Key drivers of youth participation in violent conflict

Insights from key informant interviews show that the social-psychological drivers behind youth participation in violent conflicts include their tendency to see themselves as agents of social and political transformation. Political or ideological factors that drive the youth into conflict include divisive identity-based and grievance-fueled narratives and counter-narratives. Economic factors that push the youth toward violence include a sense of economic exclusion/deprivation.

The key economic factors for participation in violence are high rates of youth unemployment combined with restricted access to economic opportunities leading to feelings of frustration and hopelessness, which may push young people to use violence as a way to express their unhappiness. Grievances are made worse by the perception that some ethnic groups or geographical areas are marginalized, and young people may be radicalized by political systems that are thought to be undemocratic and limit their voices. Young people can be mobilized, and grievances amplified by social media, but there are risks associated with this as well. Propaganda and false information can encourage radicalization and youth involvement in acts of violence.

The other category of drivers is the emergence of people who thrive on conflict using social media regularly exploited by political activists, territorial claims and boundary disputes transformed into violent conflicts involving the youth, and youth unemployment coupled with rising cost of living that prompt youth participation in violent actions. All these are feared to create opportunities for an increase in political activism focusing more on societal divide than social cohesion. Lyons (2009) indicates the role of diaspora in sponsoring violent conflict and framing it while Beyene and Mengistu (2020) advocate the positive role of the diaspora in peacebuilding and suggest that the government create more creative, strategic and sustained partnerships with the diaspora to build peace.

The assessment shows the need to understand the local contexts (discourses and events) as well as the sociocultural values that affect participation of the youth in violent conflicts. Along this, there is a need to differentiate the drivers (root causes, triggers and sustainers) of youth involvement in conflict. For instance, hate speech against leadership and a particular ethnic group was considered as a trigger factor while political orientation was perceived as a root cause. The drivers vary across regions. We can broadly classify them depending on the scale and causes of violence (between communities and resources such as grazing land and water points in the pastoral system, and politically motivated conflict between the armed youth and state forces). A basic point of departure in conflict transformation is to work against inhibitors of youth participation in peace and security and invest in enablers (Figure 1).

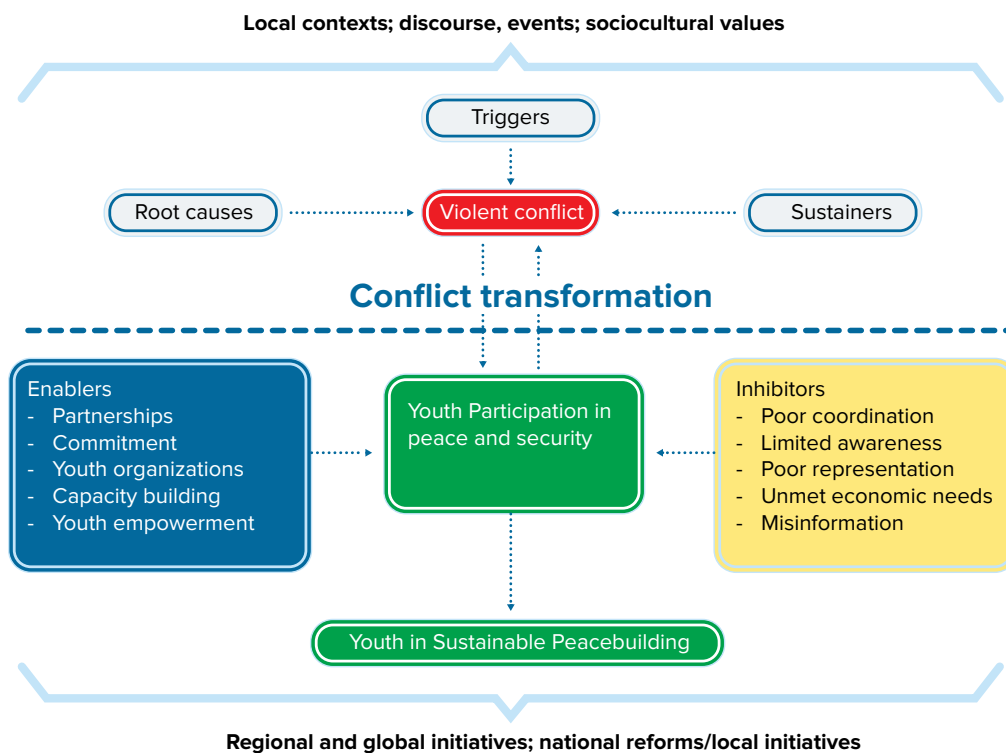


Figure 1: Drivers for violent conflict, enablers and inhibitors for youth in peace and security
Source: sketching of the author

The regional and global initiatives, interventions by CSOs/NGOs on youth capacity building and empowerment, and the national institutional reforms will support the enablers and reduce the influence of inhibiting factors. For instance, capacity building can support the youth to meet their economic needs. Failure to work on inhibiting factors can sustain participation in conflict. The results reported in various sections show that unmet economic needs and misinformation (peer influence, social media) were perceived to sustain the youth in joining armed forces.

5.4 Impacts of violent conflicts in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has been recently prone to different conflicts, specifically in Tigray, Amhara and Oromia Regions where the context and causes of the conflict may differ. These violent conflicts in the country have had multiple impacts on young people that can be clustered as economic, social, environmental and political. The youth have participated in the conflict and become victim of the conflict. The social impact includes youth mental health such as post-traumatic stress disorder and gender-based violence among the young women (Gesese et al., 2021).

5.4.1 Local-level socioeconomic impact

The economic impact is far reaching where young people lost their jobs, experienced disruption of supply chains, increased poverty and food insecurity as regions affected by the conflict did not have access to agricultural inputs and farmers could not smoothly operate on their farms. The impact on the society is immense and complex (Muriuki et al., 2023). The conflict has caused shifting of resources from productive to non-productive activities, adversely affecting economic growth and reducing the opportunities for creating jobs for the youth. As a result, the poorest households in Amhara and Tigray were hard hit due to rising food prices and income shocks during the conflict as young men were recruited for fighting. Some of the social and economic impacts observed during the Tigray war tend to persist in both Amhara and Oromia while the post-war situation in Tigray seems to benefit the youth due to the on-going peace process in disengaging and reintegrating the ex-combatants albeit funding limitation.

Insights from key informant interviews show that the impact of the conflict on social and physical infrastructure is significant. The disruption of social relations and declining of social capital has reduced the resilience of the communities to climate-induced shocks. The youth who could have benefited

from such social networks in mobilizing assets to engage in various economic activities in both urban and rural areas were restricted to their own surroundings due to tensions and instability caused by the conflict. Some youngsters who opted to participate in precarious economic activities forcing them to travel long distance were either looted, kidnapped or lost their lives. This is observed in Oromia where illegally armed youth engage in criminal activities. Loss of basic infrastructures providing public services such as health, damages to schools and research facilities during the conflict was specifically the case in Tigray and Amhara regions. A recent estimate on the extent of damage during the first six months of the Tigray war indicates that 52.5% of hospitals, 17.5% of health centers, 90% of ambulances and all of the 712 health posts were not functional (Gesese et al., 2021).

Massive displacement has been observed consequent to conflicts occurring in different parts of the country. It is often challenging for those tracking the events to obtain reliable data on the number of displaced as displacement is a continuous event. While children and women move into specific locations, young men and women from conflict-affected regions tend to migrate to small towns and cities. Some of the graduates who were interviewed were serving as guards, a case in which conflict can prompt the youth to move into cities. The conflicts have caused family disintegration and increased demographic pressure in urban areas. The key informants have emphasized that only elders were left behind in rural areas while productive youngsters moved into cities to save their lives and look for low paying jobs as daily laborers. An assessment shows that conflict-induced internal displacement in Ethiopia has reduced access to basic services and increased loss of access to farmlands, joblessness, marginalization and discrimination (Tadele, 2022). The nature and scale of conflicts and the context in which they occur influence the magnitude of the impacts on the youth and the society.

Key informant interviews show that school attendance, farming and access to health services, as well as closing of banking services due to looting by illegally armed forces are some of the impacts of the violent conflicts in the regions covered by the assessment. Child school attendance has dropped due to displacement. Farming was affected as animals were confiscated and slaughtered by armed forces, a very common occurrence in Oromia. Access to health services was mostly constrained due to shortage of medicines caused by insecurity. As a result, pregnant women and children suffered most. In Tigray region, asset losses during the conflict, resulting in increased hunger and malnutrition, have affected child school attendance. A related study, taking 15 months of conflict impact, reveals that the war in Tigray exposed 3.7 million people to shortage of drinking water supply and water borne disease risks. It reduced water coverage in rural and urban areas by 50% (Shishaye et al., 2023).

A study covering 43 woredas of the Tigray region estimated that the total economic loss during the war was 134,803,000 ETB among 1.85 million internally displaced persons (Gebreyesus et al., 2023). A related study estimates livestock loss and disruption of beekeeping activities causing the death of 12,872,796 animals and the disappearance of 231,985 beehives during the conflict. Youth participation in the conflict caused labor shortage to move the animals during displacement. As a result, the livestock resources remained unattended and were subject to theft, killings and slaughtering by armed forces. This situation has caused huge economic losses, having serious food security implications (Tedla et al., 2023; Manaye et al., 2023). A comprehensive conflict impact assessment reveals significant income losses by households in Amhara, Tigray and Afar regions with variations in losses across households of different income categories within a region (FDRE, 2022a:36). As empirical reviews were used to examine the impact, making estimates for individual youngsters is impossible, and requires a separate study.

5.4.2 Aggregate economic impact

The aggregate impact analysis of conflicts at the national level requires a separate and in-depth study because the conflicts have been widespread. An empirical study indicates the negative impact of the northern Ethiopia conflict on macroeconomic performance. These include a decline in GDP growth (from 6.3% in 2020 to 3.3% in 2021), expansion of the fiscal deficit (from 2.8% of GDP to 3.8% of GDP), and a considerable increase in the price of food items (highest rate of food inflation at 43.9% recorded in May 2022) (CIPE, 2022:9-10). Nevertheless, it does not make sense to attribute all these to the impact of the conflict since there can also be global influences and natural factors undermining sectoral performance such as flow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), remittances and imports (Hordofa, 2023) and climate-induced shocks (Koning and Krampe, 2022) and also the COVID 19 pandemic (Goshu et al., 2020). At present, the trend is being reversed as GDP growth has increased from 6.4% in 2021/22 to 7.1% in 2022/23 though with the presence of intermittent conflicts, climate vulnerability and other structural factors (considered as downside risks), it is expected to decrease to 6.7% as reported in the Ethiopia Economic Outlook.

5.5 Policy, legal and institutional frameworks

The constitutional provision under Article 31 underlines the freedom for the youth to form associations to pursue their interests; article 43 mentions ‘the rights to participate in national development and to be consulted in the development of policies or projects affecting their community’ ... where such ‘policies or projects are expected to contribute to meeting their basic needs’. These are reinforced by the expressions under article 29 underscoring ‘the democratic rights’ consisting of ‘the right of thought, expression and opinion’. Thus, the existing legal framework supports youth inclusion in various development activities that affect their lives, one of which is peacebuilding. The 2004 national youth policy and subsequent manual developed to support policy implementation emphasized participation of the youth in development activities and their right to benefit as citizens. Youth participation has emphasized economic, education, social service provision as volunteers, and political affairs (good governance and democratization) such as election observers (Aman, 2021). The policy set forth youth empowerment in an effort to create a generation with adequate ethical integrity and bringing unity through the recognition of and respect for diversity. In that sense, the policy recognizes youth development as critical to the creation of productive, equitable and democratic society and youth participation in decision-making as having significant weight in economic development (FDRE, 2004). There are also policies that affected the youth as related to health, education and participation in income generating activities within the framework of implementing the Growth and Transformation Plan I and GTP II (FDRE, 2016).

In terms of political participation, the youth can compete as candidates in election at the age of 21 as per Article 7 of the Candidate Registration Directive No. 7/2021 of NEBE. For example, participation in an election, as an independent candidate for a seat in parliament, requires one to collect signatures from 5000 voters. Though such eligibility requirement is uniformly applied, which can be challenging for young men and women to secure such votes, the national election law provides an opportunity for the youth to influence decisions as related to peace processes and concerns of the youth. At the global level, the youth are underrepresented in the national parliaments where only 2.6% of parliament members are under the age of 30. This gap in representation can cause feelings of disempowerment among the youth. Some countries have revised the age limit to accommodate more youth in their upper chambers (IPU, 2021).

Looking into the ministries, the MoWSA has a state minister for youth affairs under the ministry having two key divisions, youth empowerment and national youth voluntary service expansion. The youth empowerment has three subdivisions including capacity building for youth participation and organization, youth personality development and strengthening youth economic benefit. The national youth voluntary service expansion consists of the national youth service expansion, and extension and monitoring of youth voluntary service desks. The youth affairs, while exclusively focusing on the youth, has a variety of tasks accomplished in collaboration with the regional counterparts. There are a number of policies and strategies such as social protection policy and strategies and a number of guidelines in which youth issues are not taken explicitly into account while addressing issues of children, elderly and urban poor. At the regional level, Bureaus for Women and Social Affairs (BoWSA) closely work with the youth council and associations but they are independent of their influence as the bureaus provide support. The support emphasizes training the youth on integrity, drug abuse and attitudinal change from ‘looking for jobs’ to ‘job creation’, which are expected to lay a foundation for the youth to refrain from participation in violent activities. Moreover, the Ministry of Labor and Skills (MoLS) has started implementing a project focusing on skill development for the youth graduates from Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) where the training emphasized the skills required to serve in the industries, which are potential employers of the graduates. The project has selected at least one polytechnic college per region altogether supporting 24 polytechnic colleges (FDRE, 2023). Such capacity building efforts made by the Ministry will fall into the prevention pillar, as the project is likely to increase the competitiveness of the youth to take up suitable jobs and reduce the skill mismatches.

There are different forms of youth organizations in Ethiopia that are expected to play a key role in supporting youth to participate in the peace processes at different levels (local, regional and national). The youth fora, youth councils and associations enhance youth involvement in national peace processes as those entities raise youth’s consciousness about the essence of peace and conflict. Currently, the youth councils and associations are active, but the youth councils were not fully functioning in some cases. The Government has also established youth development centers across the country where the youth get different kinds of services for their personality development (Tefera et al., 2020). Some of the

organized youth communicate only digitally. These include Youth Network Ethiopia, Young Ethiopian Leaders Initiative, and Hope Ethiopia having their own websites for information exchange. Though it was difficult to trace how far these digital platforms are effective, their presence gives an opportunity to use them as partners for advocacy and support in YPS.

In assessing the national level YPS agenda, one needs to look into the commitments, laws and policies. Along this, the draft peace policy and implementation strategy of Ethiopia provides space for the YPS agenda. It indicates the need to include 'all categories of the society' specifically 'the youth and women' in peacebuilding and ensure job creation and economic inclusion of the youth, women and people with disabilities, which goes along with the prevention pillar of the UNSCR 2250. It also addresses citizens' participation in national voluntary services and the need to introduce interregional youth forum for peace dialogue playing a role in restoring peace within the localities and developing laws to prevent abuse of the digital technology that will affect peace. The policy provides opportunities to address the YPS agenda.

5.6 The structure for youth participation and the national action plan on YPS

A guide for implementing the YPS⁵ agenda at a national level by public officials, developed subsequent to the UNSCR 2250/2419/2535, aims at reinforcing existing agendas on youth, peace and security plans. The guide provides details on the forms of youth participation in peace processes (formal, informal), and the need to have commitments, laws and policies on YPS, and frameworks guiding national actions. It underlines the absence of a single best way of implementing the YPS agenda, and the importance of coordination mechanisms across levels (GCYPS, 2022). Examination of the guide has triggered some questions critical to understanding Ethiopia's move in implementing the YPS agenda. These include: Does Ethiopia have those commitments, and frameworks guiding national actions? Are there agendas on YPS? How are YPS activities coordinated at inter-ministerial level? How is it possible to form a multi-stakeholder coalition for the implementation of the YPS agenda as such coalition contributes to trust building and reduces duplication of efforts? Which opportunities exist for coalition?

In its Proclamation No. 817/2013, Ethiopia has ratified African Youth Charter and has given authority to the then responsible Ministry to take actions in accordance with the provisions of the Charter (FDRE, 2014). In examining the current governance structure of the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, there is a State Minister for Youth Affairs with youth capacity building and youth volunteers' executives. Under the youth capacity building, there exist three operational desks such as youth participation and organizational capacity development, youth ethics and youth economic empowerment. Then under the youth volunteers' executive, there are national youth service expansion and youth volunteer service extension and monitoring desks. These desks can coordinate their activities with a similar structure with the Ministry of Peace in taking initiatives for youth engagement in peace processes. In addition, the Ministry supports youth participation in economic, social and political affairs through the creation of the national and regional youth council (NYC and RYC), representing the 40.1 million youth currently having 153 members.

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5 Security in this context is understood as the state of being secure and feeling safe while the youth trust law enforcement which aims at providing protection from any sort of crime or threats (John, 2017).

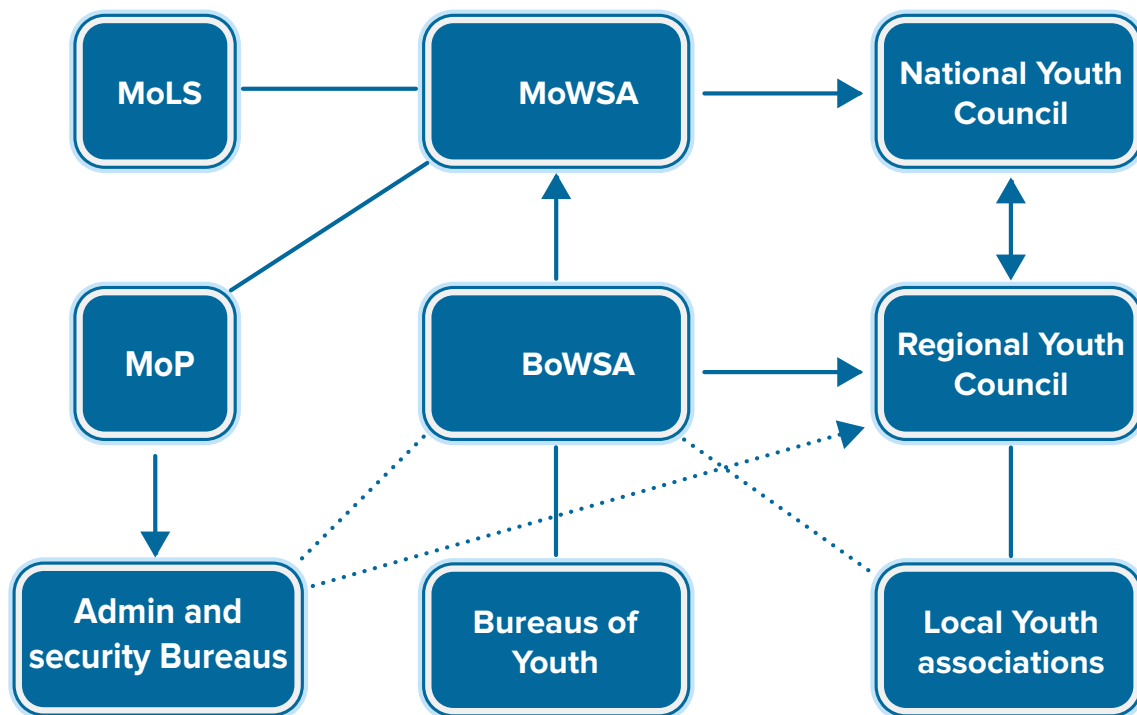


Figure 2: Existing structure supporting youth participation and empowerment

The support involves financial and technical elements in the preparation of documents (rules and regulations for internal governance of the council) and organizing platforms for discussion on various issues. The youth council created at both levels is perceived to be an independent body although this seems to be contrary to the views of the youth. Members of the youth council are elected from the local youth associations while any youngster can be a member of local youth associations. These associations function properly in some cases (e.g. in Tigray) and receive limited government support.

MoWSA supports youth participation in political affairs through partnerships with other state actors (MoP and MoLS) in creating youth awareness, one of which is their involvement in national dialogue by youth representatives from all regions. Youth key informants have concerns over their representatives as the youth did not have a voice in their selection. MoWSA collaborates with the MoP in the organization of events in which case the youth participate in the International Day of Peace celebrated annually on the 21st of September. The narratives from the regional situation analysis indicate that the MoP provides various kinds of support to the Administration and Security Bureaus, while limited financial resources often become challenging in the provision of training. Ethiopian youth have also received support from MoWSA to create relationships with other youth groups within IGAD member states for the purpose of peace advocacy. A recent study assessing youth policy of Ethiopia recommends the need to “establish an independent ministerial youth office to coordinate youth affairs from federal to *kebele* levels and connect this structure to direct beneficiaries” (MoWSA, 2022:12). The Addis Ababa youth council also does not support the creation of youth volunteers as part of the institutional structure within MoWSA. Instead, youth voluntarism should be an independent initiative by the youth having its own way of organizing provision of various social services.

The AU Youth for Peace Program hosted a workshop in Addis Ababa in April 2023 aiming at pooling and sharing resources to initiate the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) on the YPS agenda in which 10 countries participated. The key suggestion out of the workshop was the need to share experiences regularly while developing the NAPs on YPS in order to adopt best practices and the active engagement of the youth in the development of the NAP (Ako and Ukeje, 2023). The youth council established so far in five regions and planned to be established in the remaining regions can represent the youth in the preparation of the national action plan on YPS. The regional experience gained in creating relationships with the youth from IGAD member states will be pivotal in the preparation of NAP for the implementation of the YPS agenda. Given their mandates that tend to overlap in a few instances, the MoWSA, MoP and MoLS can create an inter-ministerial desk to coordinate actions, form a coalition and constantly share information on on-going activities related to youth engagement. At the regional level, the Administration and Security Bureaus and the Bureau of Women and Social Affairs (BoWSA)

are engaged in youth capacity building and facilitate their participation in peace process. Nevertheless, the assessment shows that the preparation of the NAP for the implementation of the YPS agenda can be challenged by knowledge weaknesses among experts involved in the process. None of the key informants from the ministries approached for the interviews is aware of the UN guide for preparing a NAP. Although there are a number of projects and programs in engaging the youth in peace-related activities by the state and non-state actors, a concrete preparation of the NAP has not yet been started.

5.7 The role of social media in influencing the youth

5.7.1 Youth perception

The assessment identified three seemingly distinct views on youth perception with respect to social media: (1) the difficulty to control social media, (2) the need to introduce laws on the use of social media to explore how social media will be used for peace activism by the youth rather than for promoting violent action and (3) the potential role of social media to spread 'violent extremist views' for young people who are vulnerable to be recruited to participate in violent activities. The contemporary literature indicates that social media platforms play a crucial role in providing an international venue for youth to interact and build a feeling of belonging among individuals who have an interest in peace processes. They give young people a forum to speak out about social justice and peace issues, interacting with a larger audience to spread awareness and promote their involvement in decision-making. Social media is also an effective tool for organizing support, which helps youth-led movements swiftly acquire attention by the government. It facilitates the circulation of information about initiatives, events, and resources related to the reconstruction of infrastructure in post-conflict recovery. Online forums also promote inclusive and free communication, which helps different young groups have productive discussions about peace, prevent hate speeches. Social media can aid agency of the youth in peacebuilding where government can formally create structures supporting youth participation in peace processes (Ragandang, 2020).

5.7.2 Assessing social media broadcasts and posts

The way youth perceive peace and security is largely affected by the information provided on mass media. Several sources were screened to find out how far they influence the action of the youth in participating in non-violent activities. Assessment of the various contents indicate that almost all the sources support youth participation in violent conflict, rather than promoting the settlement of political differences in a non-violent and peaceful way. Some non-state media based abroad broadcast facts taking a neutral position in reporting events and circumstances. There are also sources broadcasting/posting news where the contents do not match the headlines, increasing the spread of violent conflict. Careful examination of responses and comments to the messages posted on social media shows that they all promote divergence rather than peaceful co-existence as they convey disrespect to one another (hate speech) and remain unacceptable on moral and ethical grounds. A recent study shows that 'some information on the impact of social media on violent conflicts are exaggerated because social media are used as a mechanism to raise fund from the diaspora to support the armed groups' (Atrsaw and Yared, 2024:9).

Insights from the interviews show that the pervasive use (and abuse) of social media as well as the absence of control mechanisms legally and technically have increased the challenge to divert the attention of the youth from being involved in violence to promoting options for peace. Programs broadcasted on ETV do not directly address youth in peacebuilding, as those preparing the program content believe that the youth have economic challenges rather than political ones. The programs focus on increasing awareness and competitiveness of the youth to create jobs and become more innovative. Specifically, two programs ('my generation and *negadiras*') emphasize youth job creation.

A study on the role of social media shows that the penetration of social media generates collective violence by fostering horizontal linkages within a society, particularly in areas where mass media are weak (Warren, 2015). Meanwhile, another study shows that social media play a role in the restoration of social and psychological capital in the post-conflict recovery process playing a critical role in influencing the youth to commit themselves in peacebuilding processes (Baytiyeh, 2019). Is it feasible to introduce laws on how to use social media? Most key informants indicated the urgency and feasibility of introducing laws but they have concerns on enforcement. The existing media law in Ethiopia mentions the need to register

the address of those administering the social media (FDRE, 2021). The subsequent regulation, in Article 14 (sub-article 2), indicates that the social media users must refrain from posting any hate speech based on religion and ethnicity (ECA, 2022). However, such documents are silent about how to sanction any possible abuse of the media by users abroad who influence the youth domestically. Other countries have adopted policies to protect cyberbullying, defamation and harassment. A recent study reveals that social media helps collect grievances and address them, and communicate back to the society on how those grievances were addressed, which will influence the youth favoring peace rather than violence (Ndawana, 2023).

5.8 Assessing the YPS agenda in the light of the UN and AU frameworks

5.8.1 Participation

5.8.1.1 Participation in national dialogue

Participation can take the form of involvement in decision-making, policy formulation, and peace agreements when these voices are heard which requires elimination of structural barriers and promotion of exchange and collaboration. Recognizing the role of digital space in supporting participation of the youth in peace dialogue is central to peacebuilding as emphasized in the UNSCR 2535 (Akinyetun et al., 2023). The purpose of dialogue is to reach national consensus on a number of issues that have caused division within the society and develop recommendations for actions towards realizing national unity. In its briefing given to the selected representatives of the members of parliament, Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission disclosed that the youth are represented in various ways that allow them to take part in the national dialogue as the process is expected to be all-inclusive. Such representation of the youth gives them the opportunity to voice their concerns as well as to become responsible in determining their future. The commission would benefit from the long experience that the youth had in dialogues when 11 universities in Ethiopia engaged 10,000 youngsters in inter-group dialogue over the last ten years, which has been perceived as essential to establish trust, get exposure to one another's culture, eventually contributing to national peacebuilding.

Among the dialogue commission members, only three are women while the youth are not included as the criteria systematically exclude the youth. Some key informants underlined that ownership of the outcomes of the national dialogue as a key requirement towards building sustainable peace makes youth inclusion critical. Others indicate that it is not necessary to include the youth as members but rather it is important to focus on how the interests and priorities of the youth will be reflected in the agenda for dialogue. It is not, however, clear how the divergence of interests and priorities within the youth will be brought to the table during the dialogue.

Youth participation in national dialogue has been recognized as an essential step to ensure their concerns and ideas will be part of the dialogue. In this regard, the ENDC has visited most regions in which the youth were also involved in agenda setting for the dialogue. Nearly all key informants indicated that an agenda for the national dialogue should focus on job creation for the youth to prevent their participation in violence. The Reporter in its publication on August 28, 2023 has indicated that the ENDC convened Amhara Leaders, intellectuals and CSOs to discuss how to involve the armed Fano groups in the national dialogue, which the public perceived as a pre-negotiation step⁶. The Commission has five objectives one of which is "to lay the social and political foundations on the basis of which current problems can be solved in a sustainable manner, ensuring lasting peace". It is guided by the principles of 'inclusivity, transparency, tolerance and mutual respect' among others. The proclamation for the ENDC establishment recognized the youth with the phrase 'segments of population' (FDRE, 2022b).

5.8.1.2 Mechanism design in participation

Application of the game-theoretic explanation has been made after obtaining information on the extent of efforts made in disengaging and reintegrating the youth. The costs to the government if support is preferred is investment in disengagement, reintegration, training and various kinds of technical and

6 Available at: <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/36172/> accessed on January 9, 2024.

financial supports to the youth to enable them to restore their livelihoods. On the other hand, the benefits for the government, if support is preferred and the youth are willing to participate, is ensuring political stability, long-term peace, gaining more public acceptance and economic gains from increased labor productivity. This benefit will be by far larger than the costs. The net benefits to the youth if they prefer to participate in the intervention of a third party and pressure from local communities but without government providing any support will be low and will not generate a living peace. The narratives from the interviews demonstrate that youth grievances due to economic exclusion have been the key driver for participation in violence. Therefore, youth participation in peace processes without any guarantee over economic support is likely to cause unilateral defection, and this game reflects the features of assurance game.

The choice of strategies depends on rational decisions (guided by rational choice and utility theory), and the assumptions and beliefs on the level of knowledge or information (intelligence) that the youth have about the government. Information from the past about the strategic behavior of the government will influence the choices of the youth whether or not to participate (Table 1). This information will affect their level of trust in the government. As support from the government may not have a quick influence on the decisions of the youth to participate in peace processes forcing them to stay on the S/NP equilibrium (-10, 5), which is a loss for the government. Low level of trust in the government by the youth as influenced by diaspora-managed social media will determine this condition. Insights from discussions with different stakeholders indicate that youth mistrust government, and the absence of a meaningful inclusion of youth in different platforms discourages youth participation. Youth sensitivity, exposure and orientation will jointly determine their preferences to choose a particular strategy. Therefore, consistency in the government behavior in providing sustainable support can cause a shift in the equilibrium favoring S/P, which will provide a stable condition (10, 10), generating highest payoff for both players. In this context, the amount of payoff equivalent to 10 represents the 10 billion ETB revolving fund that Ethiopian government allocated to job creation for the youth, which contributes to realizing prevention and the reintegration pillars of the UN framework.

Table 1: Payoff structure of the assurance game

		Youth	
		Do not participate (NP)	Participate (P)
Government	No support (NS)	(0,0)	(5,-5)
	Support (S)	(-10,5)	(10,10)

In the current situation, Ethiopia has received some supports from different agencies and donors to invest in post-conflict reconstruction involving restoration of basic livelihoods, and infrastructures in parallel with disengaging and reintegrating the youth involved in or affected by the conflicts. For example, Ethiopian reporter in its June 3, 2023 report indicated that the World Bank designated 25 Million USD executed through the UNOPS to undertake post-conflict recovery in Tigray. This is part of the 300 million USD earmarked (but not released) for recovery support in Ethiopia considering other conflict-affected regions (Amhara, Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz and Afar). Such support, however, may not be adequate compared to the scale of damage caused by the war, in which the loss caused to the livestock resources in Tigray alone has been estimated to be 53.56 billion ETB (Tedla et al., 2023). Youth key informants in Amhara and Tigray emphasized the inadequacy and inconsistency of support provided. This circumstance is likely to cause falling back into the NS/NP equilibrium. Partnerships and collaboration of the development partners and non-state organizations in assisting the government to sustain its support to the youth in various forms is critical.

Evidence from interviews indicate that institutional mechanism to devise incentives for the youth participation in the implementation of the YPS agenda requires integration of youth empowerment efforts (political, social and economic) and effective use of social media to induce behavioral change. Government support to encourage the youth to express their grievances peacefully requires a systematic way of implementing the enabling mechanisms specified in the AU framework for promoting the YPS agenda. One of the enabling mechanisms is the *capacity development* where the youth need to have the necessary technical skills to take employment opportunities and soft or managerial skills to assume leadership positions in various sectors and sub-sectors. The support needed in engaging with the youth to participate in peace and security may involve skill development and reorientation to promote an attitudinal change using the established youth networks and associations. This is emphasized in the UNSCR 2419. Relevant skill acquisition for the youth to support their long-term development by

investing in their education and training is pivotal to their contribution to peace and security (UN, 2018). Government support to encourage youth participation in peace processes (as indicated in the game-theoretic analysis) will be effective if the youth acquire the required skills for (self) employment.

In the light of UNSCR 2535, the institutional mechanism design is necessary to develop incentives for the youth to play a role in peacebuilding on various aspects. Most relevant in the context of this assessment is the need to intensify efforts to improve capacity building and development of technical guidance, putting in place programmatic activities, appointing youth focal points, the use of youth organizations, inclusive partnership with the youth, and meaningful and effective participation of the youth in the preparation of the NAP and implementation of the YPS agenda (UN, 2020). Experiences elsewhere show that youth support and participation can take the form of creating a platform for the youth to influence political decisions and processes. For instance, in the post-conflict Liberia, the youth demanded creation of a national youth parliament, in the implementations, monitoring and evaluation of policy decisions, and involvement in election campaigns, which helped them cope with their exclusion and vulnerability (Mutisi, 2012).

5.8.1.3 Principles and practices in engaging the youth in the peace process

The AU framework considers several principles (along with the five pillars) that need to be adopted and implemented in a country in promoting the role of youth in peace and security. It indicates that the gap between the principles and practices informs us on the fundamental challenges the country faces in recognizing and promoting youth participation in peace and security. The most relevant principles in line with the specific objectives of this assessment include:

1. Youth participation in peace agreements – there is no experience in the formal participation of the youth in peace agreements in the Ethiopian context (like in the Pretoria peace accord). Nevertheless, there is an informal practice of youth participation in local-level peace agreements when violence occurs between smaller groups over resources such as land and water or within villages in which the youth serve as mediators and facilitate a reconciliation process (for example, in Sidama and Benishangul –Gumuz).
2. Affirmative actions on youth quota in peace and security – Ethiopia has played a key role in regional contribution to peacekeeping forces with the aim of ensuring regional stability and in fighting terrorism beyond its borders. The draft peace policy and implementation strategy of the country underlines the need to reinforce contribution towards regional peace and security within the framework of regional cooperation for collective peace.
3. Recognizing and nurturing non-violent youngsters and disengaging those involved in violence – This is not successful in conflict-affected regions as the key informants indicated that they do not want to form any connection with friends involved in armed conflict as they could be simply ‘stereotyped as their supporters’. The use of non-violent youngsters to disengage violent youth as a principle suffers from the practical challenges faced in meeting the demands of the non-violent youth. The findings indicate that the armed youth are perceived to have unaddressed underlying grievances that may discourage them to disengage.
4. Acknowledging and facilitating youth as leaders, partners and beneficiaries – Though it varies across regions, the youth take a leadership role in facilitating conflict mediation: as committee members in resolving a conflict in pastoral areas, as agents of the state to reverse any possible security threats to the community in Oromia and facilitate interregional discussion platform by Amhara youth in Mekele.
5. Catering for the needs of young people who have experienced armed conflict – at the national level, there are job creation initiatives fitting into the prevention pillar of the framework (section 5.8.3). These initiatives are yet to be implemented in conflict-affected regions where most youngsters remain idle. Empirical study points out the need to disentangle provision of funds for youth (the revolving fund scheme) from the need to meet political ends as the latter makes repayment of loans much more difficult. National initiatives to address youth dissatisfaction may not succeed unless responsible authority takes such measures (Kefale et al., 2023).

Finally, insights from discussions among the stakeholders during the validation workshop indicate that there are key challenges experienced in Ethiopia in creating a platform for the youth to contribute to the peace process. These include ethnic tensions complicating positive engagement of youth with diverse backgrounds, recurring and complex nature of conflicts, absence of coordination and sense of ownership, limited follow-up on peace initiatives, widespread hate-speech, limited resources and infrastructure, and misinformation/disinformation.

5.8.2 Partnerships

As one of the pillars of the framework, partnerships require a national legislation that safeguards youth participation in peacebuilding that is a missing piece in the youth policy enacted in 2004. Although there are youth-led initiatives for peace and security at a local level, there is no policy and guideline endorsed at the national level to support them. Nevertheless, the draft peace policy and implementation strategy underline the importance of partnerships in peacebuilding. The UN guide for public officials to implement the YPS agenda at the national level indicates the need to have commitments, laws and policies on YPS, which is yet to be put in place in the context of Ethiopia. Insights from key informant interviews show that there are partnerships and coordination of youth focused programs on youth volunteerism, on promotion of peace and in the coordination of activities in empowering the youth at the federal level and regional levels. Partnerships exist at national and local levels.

5.8.2.1 Peace clubs and peace fora

At the federal level, the partnerships involved investment in awareness raising by promoting the value of peace. For example, the Ministry of Peace (MoP) closely works with other ministries such as the Ministry of Education (MoE) and MoWSA to jointly undertake peacebuilding related activities. Schools and universities are used as a strategy to reach children and youth respectively to enhance their understanding on the importance of peace for nation building. The MoP and MoE have jointly developed documents (manuals in 2023) to be used by the MoE to undertake some school (private and public) and university level peace-related activities (peace forum) on issues of diversity, solidarity, peaceful co-existence, participation, rule of law and respectfulness. Assessment of the manuals show that the MoP and MoE will work together in undertaking different activities performed. A students' club in each private and public school involves them in discussions about peace, learning negotiation and reconciliation skills, building and maintaining social capital and respect for ethnic diversity. Students from 5th to 12th grade form peace clubs. Training manuals guide this activity, specifically on how to engage students and shape their thinking towards peace. Students are required to play a music portraying the importance of peace. This will encourage critical thinking, tolerance, and conflict resolution abilities in children, giving them the tools they need to avoid violence and make wise decisions. The club has its own internal rules of governance to carry out its activities as specified in the manual⁷. The MoP and MoE jointly monitor the progress in the performance of the clubs and provide them feedback. The guideline and directions provided by MoP in the establishment of peace clubs at primary and secondary schools from grade 5 to 12 aims at nurturing children and adolescents with the cultural of discussion and dialogue towards building sustainable peace. These practices exist in all regions covered by the assessment.

The partnership between the two ministries has been established based on the proclamation number 1263/2022, which provides joint responsibility to both ministries to work on nation and peacebuilding. This has resulted in the development of a manual to support the operation of the peace forum in public and private universities. Members of the forum are volunteer students, teachers and administrative support staff. The forum undertakes a number of activities including promotion of democratic culture, organizing peace dialogue, respect for diversity, consultation on how to resolve conflicts, and working on ensuring peaceful learning-teaching environment. The forum has a clear organization structure and executive body (consisting of nine members) to coordinate a number of activities and receives support from the top management of universities. Though the forum is limited in its scope of operation to the university, it provides a unique opportunity for the young students to internalize the importance of peace and learn democratic practices. The forum could cooperate with the surrounding communities, youth and civic associations in celebrating cultural events and undertaking voluntary services⁸. The school level interventions and the existing practices of the peace forum in higher learning institutions are important foundations for enhancing the contributions of the youth to peacebuilding.

5.8.2.2 Youth volunteers

Strategic support from IGAD in the preparation of different manuals and financial support from UNDP to provide training for the youth volunteers have contributed towards enhancing the performance of the

7 MOP and MOE (2023). Peace club establishment manual: Final Version. MOP and MOE. Addis Ababa (Available in Amharic).

8 MOP and MOE (2023). Higher learning institutions peace forum establishment manual: Final Version. MOP and MOE. Addis Ababa (Available in Amharic).

Ministry of Peace by filling technical and financial gaps to implement peace-related activities. However, insights from interviews show that the impact of youth volunteers in terms of bringing behavioral change among the youth at the regional level is not significant. The regional administration and security bureaus support the idea that the peace forum established at higher learning institutions have the potential to move beyond their campuses and work with the youth community in their surroundings. This is expected to enhance exchange of experiences, love and respect for each other since members of the peace forum in each university are composed of students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Such youth volunteerism would enhance the collaboration between universities and regional administration and peace security bureaus. It was perceived to be crucial.

The Youth Volunteers Department of the MoP is largely working on youth volunteers consisting of graduates from the university with the purpose of enhancing intercultural exchanges where the youth take training on soft skills which are then deployed to different regions of the country. The youth are selected from the regions by the regions themselves where the ministry provides a quota based on the population size of graduates from each region. The program which was initiated in 2013 E.C with the support from the UNDP selected youth graduates who received training on national consensus and nation building. The deployment of youth volunteers lasts six months. The training provided and their deployment to different regions is expected to contribute to the national peacebuilding process. Altogether, the MoP has trained 45,610 youth in eight rounds, of which 29,226 were male and 16,384 were female graduates from different regions. Most of those trained were from Amhara and Oromia regions (see Annex Figure A-2 and A-3).

5.8.2.3 Partnership in post-conflict reconstruction

Youth partnership in peacebuilding can be achieved through the roles they play in post-conflict reconstruction where they support resilience of communities affected by conflicts. There are instances where the youth forge partnerships with the government to rebuild facilities damaged by conflicts. The interethnic conflict in west Guji and Gedo Zones, in spite of the significant displacements it caused, was addressed through active participation of the youth in restoring relations by organizing joint events such as sports and contributing labor by the youth from each ethnic group in reconstruction of destroyed homes. The government-donor-youth partnership is critical in this aspect (Sackey, 2018). A similar situation prevails in Benishangul Gumuz where the youth mobilized labor to reconstruct facilities providing public services after the 2019 violence. Youth partnership in post-conflict reconstruction provides a chance for them to internalize the cost of conflict. Such partnership needs to be strategic and allow the youth to benefit from the resources mobilized to reintegrate those displaced or who have become victim of the violent conflict. Only then, the peacebuilding process induces greater trust and reduces the likelihood of future conflicts. This conforms to the national peace policy narratives, and the overarching grievances of the unemployed youth corroborated in this assessment.

5.8.3 Prevention

Prevention may involve youth capacity building through peace education, fighting against hate speech and positive use of social media, increasing job opportunities, investing in their entrepreneurship, establishing and implementing peace architectures, and creation of youth-led dialogue and mediation processes. All these will support conflict prevention.

5.8.3.1 Investing in peace education

In the Ethiopian context, capacity-building activities have been underway in universities where undergraduate students take training on peace and engage some of the students to join peace and development programs. The role of peace education for co-existence, mutual respect, reconciliation and peacebuilding is significant for Ethiopia (Tolera, 2019). A number of donors and international organizations have continued financing peace education programs in the country and are working closely with universities. The outcome of such collaboration in supporting prevention of violent conflict is well understood. For example, Pact Ethiopia, and Life and Peace Institute played a key role in supporting a number of universities in the country where peace dialogue as an extracurricular activity has been conducted in these universities to increase awareness of the youth in the value and importance of peace for development.

There are also a number of universities offering postgraduate programs in peace and security studies⁹. Most of these programs are implemented in collaboration with diaspora professionals who collaborate with academicians at Ethiopian universities jointly running projects and conducting teaching activities. The youth specializing in these universities can play significant role in training and capacity building on peace and security in different regions. In this regard, Ethiopia has the potential to introduce short and long-term courses on peacebuilding where those youth trained will be agents of change. Peace education could be recognized as a component of peacebuilding as it promotes attitudinal change and non-violent way of resolving differences (UNESCO, 2020).

5.8.3.2 Deployment of youth volunteers

A recent intervention by MoP was exemplary where youth volunteers were engaged to support social cohesion and peacebuilding. With 45,610 youth volunteers, the program provided training on various aspects (including peacebuilding) to deploy them throughout the country to undertake community services¹⁰. Such actions largely expose the youth to diverse cultures and promote their role in supporting peaceful-coexistence and respect for diversity, which contribute to conflict prevention.

5.8.3.3 Positive use of social media

Assessment on the use of social media platforms by the key informant shows that there are positive and negative use of social media platforms. Some activists use the platforms wisely in a way the youth should give priority to empathy, mutual respect and resolve differences through negotiation and dialogue. Moreover, the narratives of the youth on the use of social media among the youth involved in this assessment indicates that most young men and women follow information broadcasted by these sources. One of the youth key informants mentioned “social media used positively to influence the youth to develop behavior favoring peaceful co-existence of diverse groups, is vital for our development”. Its role in preventing the youth from participating in conflict is significant but it all depends on how it is used. In terms of evaluating the role of social media in peacebuilding, the MoP is systematically monitoring those individuals and organizations using social media to promote peace in the country and providing awards and recognition to those broadcasting contents favoring peacebuilding.

5.8.3.4 Youth unemployment and investing in job creation

Youth unemployment is pervasive and job creation possibilities are limited in Ethiopia (Shuker and Tsadik, 2024). Youth key informants specify that most graduates lack skills and confidence to create jobs. As it stands, the youth receive inadequate attention. The key challenge to the youth is limited or lack of access to financial resources through taking loans, hampering their participation in entrepreneurship as credit providers are stringent in their loan requirements. Creating an institutional mechanism uniquely designed to support access to loans by the organized youth as part of job creation will deter their participation in violent activities and will motivate them to value peace more than anything else.

On average, the urban youth unemployment rate in Ethiopia, though somehow declining for some years (between 2010 and 2015), tended to increase in the past few years. This was more evident for urban women than for urban men while the general unemployment rate is not declining (See annex Figures A4 and A5). Insights from interviews indicate that rural-urban migration within regions and from regions to Addis Ababa are perceived to be a cause for rising unemployment in urban areas. Such migration is driven by economic and security-related factors. In response to this, MoLS invested in the creation of digital labor-market information systems. The information system enables every skilled young man and woman to be registered online and obtain reliable information on jobs that fits them, lowering transaction cost of searching for jobs. This technological innovation is a response to the general perception that a delay in action to create jobs for the youth can adversely affect the social, political, and economic stability of the country.

Ethiopia also has a plan of action for 2020 to 2025. With 2 million youth joining the labor market every year, the country is required to create 14 million jobs for the plan period. Among numerous strategies

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9 These include Haramaya University in Peace and Development Studies, Bahar Dar University in Peace and Conflict Studies, Wollo University in Peace and Development Studies, and Addis Ababa University in Peace and Security Studies.

10 Available at: <https://www.undp.org/ethiopia/news/investing-youth-volunteers-foster-social-cohesion-and-peacebuilding-ethiopia>
Accessed on January 10, 2024.

proposed, provision of specific support for youth employment has been indicated¹¹. A recent study suggests that support provision for self-employment needs to be free from politicization; it should be based on adequate understanding of the youth needs and requires youth training on entrepreneurship as these were found to be barriers to success (Kebede, 2022). Considering the total employment opportunity share of the sectors of the economy, the service sector employs 57.27% whereas industry and agriculture employ 24% and 18.72% respectively. The private sector provides more of temporary than permanent job opportunities as most of the investment goes into the service provisions since 2016 (Debebe and Bessie, 2022:17).

Since 2017, Ethiopia has been allocating 10 billion ETB annually for the purpose of job creation for the youth, which was known as the Youth Revolving Fund in response to widespread youth protests. The scheme gave priority to those who politically supported the ruling party. This funding scheme has benefited many but started without undertaking feasibility assessment prior to loan provision. This fund still operates in some regions while it is not functional in others. By addressing these limitations, the MoLS introduced a 'Job Creation Fund' more or less using a similar approach to loan provision at 8% interest rate and with an adequate grace period. This support scheme does not consider political support as a criterion to get the loan. Among those youth benefiting from the job creation action, 41% were female and 59% male with such divergence due to personal backgrounds of females. Since the start, 314,000 females were employed as domestic workers abroad accounting for 10% of the total beneficiaries from the job creation action. The achievement is far less than the plan. On the other hand, the National Bank of Ethiopia quarterly report reveals an increase in the total asset of the SMEs by 18 %, standing at 54.4 billion ETB in 2022/23. The asset growth does not necessarily indicate creation of new jobs and the report is silent about youth inclusion (NBE, 2023).

5.8.3.5 Investment in skill development

Youth empowerment through engaging them in business entrepreneurship is a decisive step taken by the government of Ethiopia where the MoLS is heavily involved in enhancing the skills of the youth thereby increasing their employability and productivity. The technical, vocational education and training (TVET) segment of the Ministry is largely responsible for this. It undertakes the expansion and capacity building of the agricultural, technical, vocational education and training (ATVET) centers in rural areas of the country, having direct impact on youth empowerment.

Nevertheless, a recent assessment shows that there is a mismatch between skills required in the job market and the curriculum of the TVET (Sinidu et al., 2020), which hinders the private sector in the role it should play in job creation for the youth. Any external support to the capacity building effort of the Ministry in increasing the required skills of the youth will induce attitudinal changes among the youth favoring peace and security since such support and partnership will fill the skill gaps of the youth while enhancing their chance for employment. At the same time, government policies that support the expansion of the private sector by increasing its capacity to create more jobs for the youth with relevant skills is central. There is evidence showing that the pace of growth of the private sector does not commensurate with the increase in the number of unemployed youth population of the country.

Youth empowerment in peace and security also requires paying attention to the strategic gender needs and the unique challenges young women face while engaging them in peace processes. The sociocultural and structural barriers to their participation might differ from that of young men. For example, young women taking micro economic activities do not have time to attend training on peace and security. Key informants indicated that young women need to earn income to support their family, as they are often less employed compared to young men specifically in the urban settings. The local level women and social affairs offices responsible for addressing gender gaps on empowerment, in cooperation with other sectors, do complain about the inadequacy of budgetary support to take actions. Neither the private sector nor the public sector creates adequate space for young women to take up or create jobs, indicating that the prevention pillar of the AU framework for YPS requires greater attention.

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¹¹ Job Creation Commission (n.d). Plan of Action for Job Creation 2020-2025. Briefing Document. Downloaded at <https://fsdethiopia.org/wp-content/pdf/National-Plan-for-Job-Creation-Brief.pdf>

5.8.4 Protection

Protection referring to the compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law during and in the post-conflict situation is somehow being practiced in the country. For instance, protection of the youth in Tigray in the aftermath of the conflict was indicated in the Pretoria Agreement as clearly stipulated in Article 4 of the agreement. Nevertheless, the assessment shows that the progress made is not significant. In other conflict-affected regions, the safety and wellbeing of the non-armed youth do not receive significant attention by the regional governments while substantial effort is made in prevention.

5.8.4.1 Post-conflict reconstruction

The post-conflict reconstruction efforts of the government to protect young people from being economically vulnerable requires a lot of investment. Ethiopia has made some progress on this with the support of international donors and through mobilization of domestic resources. The National Rehabilitation Commission of Ethiopia indicated that post-conflict reconstruction for regions affected by the Northern Ethiopian region requires 800 million USD. The supply and demand for resources to undertake post-conflict reconstruction that would benefit the youth do not seem to match, as the scale of the disaster has been significant. Young people who were suffering from recent violent conflict in northern Ethiopia are beginning to attend schools while emerging and renewed forms of violence has put new stresses in some areas of the Amhara region. This might make the protection efforts slow and difficult. The post-conflict reconstruction in conflict-affected regions of northern Ethiopia generally involved counselling and psychosocial support for the youth to recover from trauma, with specific focus on disturbances of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, which is critical to ensure stability and reconstruction.

5.8.4.2 Establishing an early warning information system

Key informant interviews show that at the regional level, the Administration and Security Bureaus often establish an early warning system to reduce the level of risk associated with the youth being victim of a conflict. For instance, the youth who are appointed to serve as state agents will provide information on any suspicion to the local authorities for immediate actions. This has been observed in Sidama and Benishangul Gumuz regions that are relatively peaceful while undertaking the assessment. The key informants emphasized that certain youth groups work closely with the bureaus on peace and security issues. However, in areas where conflict is widespread, the ordinary youth prefer to remain silent than providing information to the security personnel, failing to contribute to protection. This indicates that in conflict prone areas, protection remains problematic despite the fact that youth cooperation in undertaking protection measures by the security forces is critical to reducing the impact of violence in conflicts (loss of lives, properties and livelihoods). Political volatility and the risk of being targeted (or detained) by either conflicting party influence the youth to remain silent. Consistent with the framework, limited level of protection for the youth (personal safety) is the main reason for non-cooperation.

5.8.5 Disengagement and reintegration

5.8.5.1 Challenges and delays

Activities related to *the disengagement and reintegration* pillar were initially placed under the MoP, but eventually moved to the National Rehabilitation Commission since it is mandated to facilitate the Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) nationally. There are challenges in achieving this pillar. For example, in its plan to disengage the youth, the disarmament intervention of the federal government in Amhara region has contributed to confrontation with the armed youth. Despite this, the Amhara regional government disarmed 3000 youngsters who took rehabilitation training in order to implement reintegration. In the Tigray Region, disengagement and reintegration following the Pretoria Agreement is yet to be implemented due to limited budget to support ex-combatants and other complex political matters, which have become an obstacle for disengaging the armed youth. In terms of support, the European Union is willing to contribute 16 Million Euro (1 billion ETB) to demobilize and reintegrate ex-combatants. The agreement in its Article 6 specifies that 'disengagement of the ex-combatants will be conducted within 30 days of the agreement' reached on November 2, 2022. Youth contribution to peacebuilding can only succeed if there is a clear reintegration strategy. However, the empirical evidence indicates that in the absence of adequate economic support, the youth can return to committing crimes or be involved in war (Kostner, 2001).

Disengagement and reintegration require adequate investment in creating employment opportunities for the ex-combatants to return to their pre-conflict situation. In Oromia Region as well, disengagement and reintegration of the youth has become challenging due to unresolved differences on political matters. The national strategy for disengaging and reintegrating the youth in the three regional states, though central to the stability of the nation, is not clear either. Given these challenges and delays in fully reintegrating the ex-combatants in Tigray and disengaging the youth actively engaged in conflict in Amhara and Oromia, the national outcomes of implementing this pillar are yet to be observed.

5.8.5.2 Preparing guidelines and youth inclusion in the process

Insights from interviews show the absence of guidelines and youth inclusion in planning disengagement and reintegration. Given the fact that the process was delayed, it is difficult to make adequate judgement on how far the youth are involved in the process. Historical accounts also show that most of the disengagement and reintegration interventions after the downfall of the social government were undertaken based on political decisions rather than relying on legal and policy frameworks. A key factor in such disengagement and reintegration processes is the inclusion of the youth in the planning and implementation process as they are going to be affected by the outcomes of those interventions. Projects for reintegration needs to be demand driven (Berhe, 2017). Experience of other African Countries shows that reintegration actions, giving priorities to income generation and development of guidelines, have involved the youth in preparing and implementing reintegration. Nevertheless, disengaging 'non-state armed youth groups' through state monopoly of violence in an attempt to exercise 'elimination' will not lead to sustainable peacebuilding (Munive and Stepputat, 2015).

5.8.5.3 Preparedness and progress

Evidence from the fieldwork reveals that disengagement and reintegration plans are on the table but the strategies and procedures are yet unclear. In addition, fear on limited resources to create economic opportunity, and delay in the implementation of the disengagement and reintegration can undermine the confidence of the youth in the reintegration process. On the part of the government, the National Rehabilitation Commission (NRC) indicates that the reintegration efforts will recognize the youth and their family members to make the process smooth, efficient and effective, hence requiring careful assessment and planning, and mobilization of funds needed for its implementation. *What are the efforts made by the NRC of Ethiopia with respect to disengagement and reintegration?* The Commission is preparing 16 camps to rehabilitate 371,900 ex-combatants in eight regional states though there is a funding limitation. It expects that the number of combatants for rehabilitation will increase should the federal governments make a peace agreement with the armed youth in Oromia and the situation in Amhara become stable. The commission has planned for the strict procedure to be followed in the reintegration effort including "conducting psychiatric and political rehabilitation, and provision of skill training"¹².

In Tigray, there are 270,000 ex-combatants to benefit from the disengagement and reintegration intervention. The general perception held among key informants from the region is that delays in reintegration were due to limited commitment on the part of the federal government to implement it quickly rather than resource constraints. This contradicts the generally held view at the National Rehabilitation Commission that the process could last five years costing close to 850 million USD, requiring immense resources. Though a number of international donors promised to support the reintegration program, funds are secured to reintegrate 75,000 ex-combatants.

5.9 Advocacy and initiatives for youth participation in peacebuilding

There are a number of advocacies for youth participation in peacebuilding in the country. There is a variety of ways to support the youth to take part in peacebuilding ranging from political activism to training of the youth on how to influence the peace processes. While some undertake media campaigns to engage the youth in negotiation processes for peace, others sponsor training of the youth in peacebuilding (such as peace education), prepare guidelines for training or for developing

12 Information available at: <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/36169/> accessed on January 9, 2024.

national action plans to implement the YPS agenda as prescribed by the GCYPS (2022). There are a number of actors involved in advocacy and taking initiatives in the Ethiopian context, including: (1) USAID in the establishment of Ethiopian Women Peacebuilders Network (EWPN), which is mandated to ‘enhance women’s role in peace keeping, negotiation, and resolving conflict’¹³ and in support of curricula on dialogue facilitation at the Institute of Peace and Security Studies (Addis Ababa University); (2) Ethiopia Institute of Peace in the provision of training for a number of individuals drawn from different regions on various occasions and in contributing to conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding in Ethiopia and the horn of Africa; (3) UNDP in providing technical support and working in partnership with government agencies; (4) Life and Peace Institute in supporting sustained dialogue program at Ethiopian Universities; (5) Light Ethiopia involved in peace dialogue focusing on students, teachers, communities and support staff of universities, and (6) Ethiopian Peacebuilding Network (EPN) engaged in providing training, experience sharing and advocacy as related to youth role in peacebuilding.

5.10 Stakeholders and their degree of influence in promoting and implementing YPS

5.10.1 Potential stakeholders

In this assessment, there are a number of potential stakeholders having a role to contribute to the attainment of the different pillars of the framework used to assess the YPS agenda. These stakeholders can be classified into three categories: non-state, state and community. The non-state potential stakeholders include: Ethiopian Institute of Peace (EIP), Life and Peace Institute (LPI), CSOs in different regions (GLAD, TYA, COND and ACSOT), and those operating at national level, including Center for Concern (CoC) Ethiopia, Ethiopian Peacebuilding Network (EPN), Light Ethiopia and the youth council. The state agencies that can be considered as key stakeholders in the promotion of youth participation in peace and security may include USAID, MoWSA, MoP, MoLS, Ministry of Culture and Sports (MoCS), Universities, MoE, and public media (PM). Ministry of Innovation and Technology (MIiT) that support the startup ecosystem engaging the youth in small businesses and the Ministry of Health (MoH) providing mental health services to those youth affected by conflict can also be potential stakeholders in supporting YPS implementation. At the community level, customary leaders (CLs), religious leaders (RLs), youth groups (YG), and local peace committees (LPC) can be key actors/partners in implementing the YPS agenda. The youth groups vary in nature including those taking part in violence, organized youth such as the Youth Council at national and regional levels, youth volunteers, those serving as peace ambassadors, all having diverse or overlapping interests and priorities in YPS.

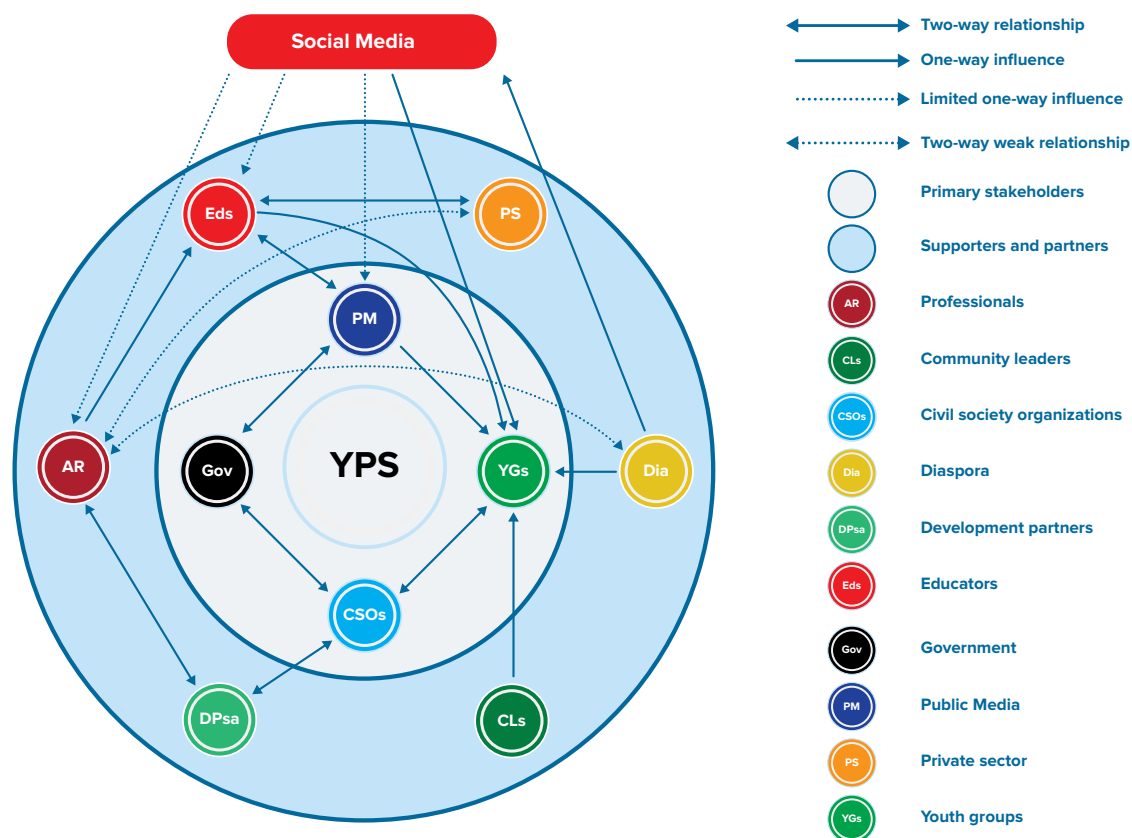
Moreover, the assessment inquired what regional governments can do in supporting the preparation of the NAP and implementing the YPS agenda. Insights from discussions at the validation workshop indicate that the role of the regional bureaus can be: 1) providing evidence on the needs and priorities of the youth in their regions to ensure the approach adopted will be an inclusive one, 2) institutionalizing the agenda at the local level, facilitating consultations with regional stakeholders by creating civic space, 3) developing regional specific strategies and sectoral plans that align with federal policies related to the YPS agenda, 4) fostering interregional collaboration and relationships between youth organizations, 5) making sure that peace education integrates cultural values within a region, 6) translating legal frameworks needed to implement YPS into local languages and ensure its accessibility to the implementers and the local communities, 7) providing data (statistical evidence) for preparing the NAP, and 8) creating an enabling environment for implementing the YPS agenda.

5.10.2 Influence, linkages and interests

MoWSA and MoCS work on youth issues whose activities contribute to peacebuilding. MoLS and MoWSA overlap in their actions as they invest in youth empowerment and capacity building. A number of development partners and the diaspora have a great level of influence in peacebuilding efforts in Ethiopia. This assessment has indicated the development partners’ contribution to youth capacity building. Hence, the stakeholder analysis and mapping has taken into consideration the *interest, expected level of influence* and *the nature of existing linkage* among the stakeholders in promoting the YPS agenda.

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13 Available at: <https://newaethiopia.org/ethiopias-women-peace-builders/> accessed on January 11, 2024.



The private sector provides job opportunities for the youth and will benefit from peacebuilding efforts to run its businesses and would support and promote the YPS agenda. It invests in the education sector and influences educators to implement school-level peace-related activities as part of the compliance to national peace policy. In this light, the diaspora can be a source of fund for the private sector to support investment in education. It can also dominate the social media that directly influence youth decisions and to some extent educators and professionals. The relationship between diaspora and professionals focus on exchange of experiences, teaching and research on peace and conflict studies at universities. The diaspora can play a critical role in knowledge sharing that will support implementation of the YPS agenda. Insights from interviews show the presence of several academic and research projects currently active in some universities (section 5.8.3.1).

5.10.4 Coordinating and financing the YPS implementation

The UN guide for implementing the YPS agenda emphasizes the ways YPS activities are coordinated at inter-ministerial level, the possibilities in forming a multi-stakeholder coalition for implementation to build trust and reduce duplication of efforts and exploring opportunities for coalition. For Ethiopia, the inter-ministerial collaboration and coordination of project activities related to peacebuilding exist (Figure 2).

Financing implementation of the YPS agenda is often challenging. However, this assessment indicates the presence of partnerships and collaboration between state and non-state agencies in committing resources towards implementation of youth-focused projects on capacity building, and economic empowerment. Different ministries provide funds for the National Youth Council, CSOs spend in youth capacity building, development partners provide direct financial support for CSOs and government agencies in the implementation of specific projects focusing on youth. Part of the annual budget by ministries (MoP, MoWSA and MoLS) is allocated to events and activities focusing on youth, indicating that there is already a commitment on the part of the government to finance implementation of the YPS agenda. The preparation of the NAP is expected to contribute to a more efficient utilization of such resources and may serve as a means to mobilize more funding from development partners (such as UNDP, EU and USAID) that are already showing interest in supporting peacebuilding processes in Ethiopia.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are provided. Each of these recommendations can contribute to the attainment of one or more pillars of the framework.

- ▶ *Integrating peace education into existing curricula at higher learning institutions:* The findings indicate the role of peace education as a device for coexistence, reconciliation and peacebuilding given the diverse nature of Ethiopian society. It is thus essential to integrate peace education in the existing curricula for the youth at university level. This should be done in two ways: as a course in the regular curriculum and as part of the community-engagement program using students who are members of a peace forum. As a course, peace education has a multiplier effect in terms of promoting social harmony, preventing violent conflicts, and nurturing responsible youth and building sustainable peace. An entry point for this is to start with those universities running peace and conflict studies at undergraduate or postgraduate level. As a community-engagement program, the peace forum, currently active within universities, should move beyond the campus to work with the surrounding youth groups, providing them training and organizing events of cultural exchanges. Universities can align this with the already existing community-engagement program in their relevant academic streams. It can be embedded within existing practices of community engagement but with new target groups – the youth. The key players in implementing this could be the MoE and higher learning institutions. Along this, a university peace-forum performance assessment may be an immediate intervention in order to compile achievements and challenges recognizing the purposes for which it was established. UN agencies and CSOs can play an active role in providing the necessary support to add a course into existing curricula and to conduct the peace-forum performance assessment.
- ▶ *Reconfiguring partnerships to integrate support for the youth:* The youth differ in their emotions, political orientations and decisions to take part in violent conflict as influenced by their peer groups, and social media. The analytic narratives provide an explanation on how youth-government relations can be influenced by certain factors and support for the youth can influence their choices to participate in the national peace processes. A response to youth grievances could determine their participation in violent activities (Figure 1). The findings indicate that while there is limited intervention in the organization of the youth in supporting their participation in peace and security, their involvement in development activities (farming high value crops such as fruits, and poultry production) is taking good shape. The regional situation analysis reveals that the actors supporting the youth in various forms do not often coordinate and integrate their actions but tend to follow a piecemeal approach. Where partnerships exist, they are limited to a few actors. Reconfiguring such partnerships in a way it involves many actors to integrate their actions given their mandates is essential. The ministry (MoWSA) primarily responsible for the preparation of the NAP can set up mechanisms of coordination for such partnerships. This assessment does not provide adequate evidence on the types, levels and extent of economic support provided by the state and non-state actors in the conflict-affected and relatively stable regions.
- ▶ *Investing in capacity building of the experts and officials for the preparation of the NAP:* The assessment reveals that all experts and institutions, which could support development of the NAP for implementing the YPS agenda, are not familiar with the UN guide for developing the plan. It applies to all regions covered by the assessment and implies that there is a need to organize training for the experts in the relevant ministries and regional states prior to engaging them in the preparation of their NAP. The global and continental frameworks for implementing the YPS agenda provide directions on the importance of training experts using a ‘guide for public officials’ as it remains a key document for preparing the action plan. UNDP and other UN agencies can provide technical and logistical support in building the capacity of experts and officials to be involved in the preparation of the NAP for the YPS agenda implementation. This can be an immediate action with proper identification of the key persons and institutions

at the national and regional levels. The NAP preparation needs to follow a bottom-up approach where the exercise should be meaningfully informed by the needs and priorities of the grass-root communities and regions.

- ▶ *Proper targeting of the youth in supporting job creation and entrepreneurship:* The reduction in support for small and micro enterprises and the ineffectiveness of the youth revolving fund have had a compounding negative effect on job creation and youth employment. This gap is critical to the efforts made by the government in promoting youth participation in peacebuilding. The NAP to be developed for implementing the YPS agenda needs to assess how to revitalize youth-led enterprises and enhance performance of the revolving fund scheme. At the national level, Ethiopia has an action plan for job creation for the period 2020 to 2025, which can be used as a reference document in the preparation of the NAP for YPS targeting to achieve objectives of the prevention pillar.

The key informants emphasized that the central agenda for the national dialogue needs to focus on job creation for the youth if peace has to prevail. This is justified on the ground that the creation of employment for the youth to engage in various economic activities is currently very limited in Amhara and Oromia regions. Activities related to prevention as one of the pillars of the framework used in this assessment do not seem to be sufficient in these regions, which can be a potential obstacle to sustainable peacebuilding. The regional situation analysis shows that across regions and within a region, the youth differ in the nature of inputs they need in specific enterprises; giving the impression that not all are necessarily in the same boat. Hence, MoLS as the responsible government agency is required to differentiate its intervention in targeting and supporting the youth.

- ▶ *Speeding up the implementation of disengagement and reintegration:* Disengagement and reintegration as one of the pillars of the AU framework for YPS is being implemented in Ethiopia on a limited scale, mainly due to funding limitation and a general lack of coordination and strategy at the national level on how to implement it. Experience of other countries show that disengagement and reintegration require planned investment and a progressive move to return the armed youth groups involved in violence to their pre-conflict situation. This will be critical as large groups of ‘illegally’ armed youth groups, who could otherwise be productive citizens, are involved in violent conflict against the state armed forces or are committing crimes against their own citizens. In particular, the delay in the reintegration of the 270,000 ex-combatants in Tigray has been emphasized as a “potential security threat to the nation”, and the tendency to predict that the process will take five years could cause a breakout of another war. There are already indicators for this in that those ex-combatants released are engaged in criminal activities, an early sign of violent conflict, due to the absence of rapid reintegration action. In the short-term, the National Rehabilitation Commission should take quick measures in implementing disengagement and reintegration measures in cooperation with relevant regional stakeholders. Reintegration also requires monitoring in the longer-term to identify areas of support needed for the ex-combatants to succeed in the livelihood activities. This recommendation also applies to Amhara and Oromia regions where the armed youth groups confront state military forces. The NAP for implementing the YPS agenda must develop the monitoring strategy for rapid reintegration where disengagement took place and disengage the youth where active conflicts prevail.
- ▶ *Reviewing the draft peace policy document to incorporate youth priorities:* The government is yet to endorse the draft peace policy and implementation strategy document. Analysis of the policy content reveals some opportunities where the views and concerns of the youth can be addressed. The MoP and the MoWSA need to take an initiative to incorporate the needs and priorities of the youth. These ministries need to create a platform for the youth to be involved in the review of the draft policy document. Ethiopia has the experience of recruiting Youth Peace Ambassadors. They can also contribute to the review of the policy to ensure that youth concerns are addressed. Given the implementation strategies of the policy, the review will help the youth to ensure inclusion of the following issues: (1) strengthening youth participation in interregional public relations in protecting their communities from violent activities; and (2) providing space for the youth to take part in culturally embedded ways of preventing and resolving conflicts. The youth council and youth peace ambassadors should be given an opportunity to contribute to the review process.

- ▶ *Partnerships for enhancement of youth entrepreneurial skills:* The findings indicate the influx of displaced and unemployed youth to regional capitals, major cities and to the national capital in search for better lives. This calls for a rapid concerted action among the state and non-state stakeholders to pool required resources to tackle the problem. The findings also indicate the skill gap among the youth, which has become an obstacle to take up available job opportunities. The ministries working on youth, peace, education and job creation could create partnerships to invest in enhancement of youth entrepreneurial skills, which will increase their chance to use available opportunities. The already existing cooperation among stakeholders such as key ministries and CSOs can be transformed into partnerships for joint action. Implementation of those alliances requires cooperation with regional counterparts. Coordination of these partnerships is part of the mandate of MoLS as it is already taking various kinds of measures to enhance skills with different ministries. A project needs to be initiated by development partners to support the MoLS on how to enhance the skills of the youth who could potentially be employed by the private sector. This may begin with the assessment of skill gaps in different economic sectors. Any action on youth skill enhancement complements the macroeconomic reforms currently in place to increase efficient use of human resources.
- ▶ *Increasing youth participation in leadership:* The different forms of youth organizations can be used as an entry point to hear the voice of the youth on various issues remaining unaddressed. The youth forums and councils established for various purposes can consolidate their effort to ensure their representations at different levels of governance in a way they influence the existing system to respond to youth needs and aspirations. An entry point to address the challenges faced by Ethiopian youth requires youth involvement in leadership in different ministries. The CSOs targeting the youth should enhance leadership skills through training. Youth involvement in leadership can contribute to the development of trust, fairness and transparency in planning any intervention that supports the promotion and implementation of the YPS agenda. The MoWSA and the Federal Civil Service Commission can cooperate to find ways on how to promote youth leadership as part of the institutional reform agenda. A project should be designed to assist these institutions to be able to undertake a comprehensive assessment that will enable it to identify where youth leadership is decisive.
- ▶ *Establishing a center for peace and conflict studies:* The assessment shows that in response to intermittent conflicts, awareness creation meetings and trainings are often held in all regions on good governance and peacebuilding. This shows that there is a demand for training on peace in a more structured way that can increase the knowledge and skill of the youth to contribute to peacebuilding more effectively. Therefore, establishing a ‘center for peace and conflict studies’ at the national level will build local capacity in managing peace processes and resolving conflicts. The active engagement by the MoE and MoP in this process with the support from development partners, such as UNDP and UNESCO are critical. This should be considered as a project consisting of detailed needs assessment to consolidate existing demands, and then to develop short courses of different durations with varied contents. The contents of such courses should be pragmatic, practical, and tailor-made so that the training will bring the desired impact. This will serve as a strategic move to achieve a long-term goal, having a spillover effect in producing agents of peace.
- ▶ *Promoting positive use of social media and revising the existing media law:* The findings point out the negative and positive influences of social media on peacebuilding. Different actors tend to use these outlets to pursue their own collective interests. An appropriate government agency, typically the MoP, can promote the role of youth groups already established and having their own digital platforms to scale up their operations. The Ministry has already created an incentive scheme for individuals and organizations promoting positive use of social media. The existing proclamation on media (no. 1238/2021) does not suggest how abusers and misusers of social media can be sanctioned and hence needs to be updated to include emerging challenges associated with improper use of social media. Therefore, promoting positive use of social media and introducing specific laws to prohibit abuse and misuse of social media should be given priority. Developing youth-focused TV programs on the proper use of social media should be an immediate action to undertake. MoP and ETV should cooperate in the preparation of program content and in advocating for revision of the existing media law.
- ▶ *Prioritizing the YPS agenda given the specificity of regions in experiencing diverse challenges:* The regional situation analysis and insights from discussions among stakeholders during the

validation workshop indicate the need to prioritize the YPS agenda and consider the same in preparing the NAP. For instance, in the regions affected by a conflict, the priority agenda is restoring social relations and investing in post-conflict reconstruction (physical and social infrastructure such as psychosocial support to reverse the post-traumatic stress disorder among female youth), and reintegration of the youth ex-combatants. Where conflicts are active, priority should be given to ceasefire and reconciliation between the conflicting parties. In the regions and localities where migration is pervasive, emphasis should be given to job creation and ensuring youth economic security, which should be considered as an integral part of the peacebuilding effort vis-à-vis the UN framework. Investment in youth capacity building is a common agenda for all regions, where such interventions need to emphasize youth behavioral change, and knowledge and skill change, which will ensure their employability and participation in governance at different levels. Those ministries and experts involved in drafting the NAP, with prime mover being MoWSA, need to consider regional contexts.

- ▶ *Revising institutional mandates and eliminating mandate confusions to prepare the NAP:* The assessment has indicated that there are a number of institutions at different levels of governance (national, regional and local) all having their own legally defined mandates which tend to overlap in some circumstances, creating confusions on their roles and responsibilities. The absence of horizontal coordination in performing certain tasks has increased uncertainty on who does what with respect to supporting the youth. For instance, Administration and Security Bureaus of regions and BoWSA do not coordinate their actions (Figure 2) but both invest in the youth to enhance their contribution to peace and security in various ways. The preparation of the NAP to implement YPS requires revision of legally defined institutional mandates to reduce confusions and then eliminate overlaps. This is a precondition for assignment of tasks to each stakeholder to be engaged in implementing the action plan (section 5.10.4). This will be the task of a team preparing the NAP.
- ▶ *Creating and harnessing youth-led discussion platforms to enhance youth contribution to the NAP:* The assessment has revealed efforts of regions in creating platforms for youth to discuss peace and security issues despite differences in using them. The regional situation analysis discloses that Amhara and Tigray have organized peace conferences, Sidama and Benishangul-Gumuz conducted youth trainings on peacebuilding while there are gaps in Somali and Oromia in creating such platforms. In any case, the youth did not have the opportunity to create and harness their own platform for discussing and exchanging ideas on peace and security issues. This implies that the responsible bodies of the regional governments need to consider it as a priority area to ensure youth independence from any influence and give them the chance to freely exchange ideas on peace and security issues in the country and identify their areas of contribution to peace. MoWSA can take the initiative in creating youth-led discussion platforms in cooperation with regional counterparts. The existing youth council at the national and regional levels can be used as an entry point to initiate the process. This is critical to ensure the development of a youth-led NAP for implementing YPS as prescribed in the AU framework.

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Annex

Data Collection Tools

Instructions

The data collection tools consist of questions guiding key informant interviews. The consultant will only use the questions to start discussions or interviews with further probing depending on the responses and interview/discussion settings. Efforts will be made to stimulate discussions to get into the crux of the assessment and balance the differences in the flow of information across series of interviews and discussions. Given the importance of the outcomes of the assessment, the respondents will be encouraged to provide the additional information that they think is relevant for this work.

Key informant interviews

Federal (MoWSA/ MoP/MoLS/ETV/youth council/Addis Youth Association/Universities)

Participation

- ▶ What policy, program and project level initiatives exist in the regional and federal system of governance to facilitate youth participation in national peace process/national dialogue?
- ▶ Are there initiatives to promote youth participation in national dialogue? If yes, what are the steps taken?
- ▶ How do you see the role of social media to promote youth participation in peace processes? How do you see their role in advocating youth participation in violent conflict?
- ▶ Could you please describe how the existing youth forum, youth council and youth associations in Ethiopia could be used to enhance youth involvement in national and local peace process? Are there other youth platforms for similar purposes? What would you suggest?
- ▶ Is there any guideline available to implement youth participation in peace and security? If yes, could you elaborate it? If not, do you think it is needed?

Disengagement and reintegration

- ▶ How do you evaluate the progress in disengaging and reintegrating the armed youth in conflict-affected areas of the country?
- ▶ Is there any capacity building and awareness raising strategy planned or implemented to reverse participation of young men and women in violence? Are there any challenges faced in doing so?

Prevention

- ▶ In your view, what are the drivers (social, political and economic) for the participation of the youth in violent conflict? What are the underlying grievances of the youth?
- ▶ In your view, should public media (ETV and Ethiopian Radio) respond to messages by social media, which could otherwise prompt youth participation in violence? Can you provide some examples (if any)?
- ▶ What can be done in terms of strategic solutions to prevent the youth from being victim of violence or just become active agents of violence?

Partnerships

- ▶ Are there partnerships created/required to support the recovery of the youth from the impacts of violent conflicts? Yes/no. If yes, explain? If no, are they needed? Would you elaborate on your answer, indicating the purpose for which partnerships are needed and with whom?
- ▶ Which stakeholders in Ethiopia do work in partnerships to empower the youth and to promote their positive role in peacebuilding?

Protection

- ▶ What measures are often taken to ensure the safety and security of the youth, and civilians in general, during violent conflicts?

General

- ▶ Are you aware of the availability of a guide for public officials by the UN? If yes, are there challenges faced in using the guide (financial, technical and organizational)?
- ▶ Is there any progress made in the development of the National Action Plan for the YPS agenda? If yes, could you explain? If not, what are the challenges? What kinds of supports are needed?

Regional (*administration and security bureaus*)

Participation

- ▶ Are there youth-centered organizations that can be used as an entry point to promote youth role in peace and security?
- ▶ Is there any distinction between urban and rural youth in the approach followed to enhance contribution of youth to peace and security?
- ▶ Is there any guideline available/followed to support youth participation in peace and security?
- ▶ In your view, what are the current challenges, and available opportunities in promoting participation of the youth in peace and security?

Disengagement and reintegration

- ▶ Has there been any event organized to conduct discussions on peace within the region? If yes, what were its outcomes?
- ▶ What initiative or programs exist at the regional level to speed up the recovery of the youth from impacts of violence?
- ▶ Were there actions taken by the regional government in supporting the youth to influence their peers to stop violence and reintegrate into the society?
- ▶ Is there any reintegration intervention so far?

Prevention

- ▶ Did young people have a chance to evaluate the consequences of violent conflict over the last few years?
- ▶ Is there an appropriate system of documenting and tracking youth participation in violent conflicts, normal businesses and working as volunteers to ensure security of their community? If yes, do you use this as a means to reorient and shape them to bring behavioral change? (for security personnel only)
- ▶ What can be done in terms of strategic solutions to prevent the youth from being victims of violence or just become active agents of violence?

Partnerships

- ▶ How do you coordinate your activities with federal ministries in addressing the challenges faced by the youth?
- ▶ Are there any other strategic external support provided to build the capacity of the youth? If yes, which ones? If no, are they needed? Would you please elaborate?

Protection

- ▶ What measures are often taken to ensure the safety and security of the youth, and civilians in general, during violent conflict?
- ▶ How are the youth protected from being victims of violence?

Youth (*different categories of young men and women*)

Participation

- ▶ Are the youth ready to contribute to the peacebuilding process? If yes, in what way?
- ▶ Are there structures created to promote participation of the youth in peaceful and constructive engagements and prevent them from taking part in violence?
- ▶ What conditions need to be fulfilled to promote participation of the youth in peace and security?
- ▶ Have you heard about the proposed national dialogue planned to be all-inclusive? If yes, what could the youth consider as an issue in this dialogue?
- ▶ In your view, what are the current challenges, and available opportunities in promoting participation of the youth in peace and security?

Disengagement and reintegration

- ▶ Do young men and women in this area discuss about peace? If yes, what do they see as important to be considered by the regional as well as federal government?

- ▶ Did young people have a chance to evaluate the consequences of violent conflict over the last few years? Was there any platform created for such purpose? If yes, what impact did it have?

Prevention

- ▶ In your view, what are the drivers (social, political and economic) for the participation of the youth in violent conflict? What are the underlying grievances of the youth?
- ▶ Can you describe the extent of job creation opportunities for the youth in this area? Where do young men and women spend their time? Are there volunteers giving community services? If yes, which services?
- ▶ Which information source do young people in this area trust? Social media? Public/state media? Why? Why not?
- ▶ In your view, should public media respond to messages by social media? Can you provide some examples (if any)?

Partnerships

- ▶ Are there any organizations (governmental or non-governmental) providing support to the youth to build their capacity?
- ▶ What are the aspirations of the youth over the peace and security of the country? What do you see as a potential obstacle/barrier to achieve those aspirations? What do you suggest to overcome those barriers?

Tables

Table A1: Mechanisms, descriptions and questions to operationalize the AU framework on YPS

Mechanisms	Descriptions	Relevant questions
Capacity building	Support needed to acquire knowledge and skills through training of the youth	What capacity building activities are underway and with which group? Are there any functional youth rehabilitation centers to engage the youth in peace processes?
An inclusive approach to youth	To ensure advocacy of youth agendas, mainstream the needs and perspectives of youth of all categories	Is there advocacy work for youth in peace and security? Are there hindering or supporting factors?
Mainstreaming gender	Gender parity across interventions on YPS to eliminate structural inequalities	What practices exist in ensuring gender parity in involving young women and men in peace and security?
Communication	The way media presents youth role in peace and security and the role of media in building trust between government and the youth	How do different media communicate and project on the youth role in peace and security?
Knowledge management	Collecting data and evidence on youth initiatives on peace and security and using them to inform policy and design programs	Are there mechanisms established to update and share information on youth contribution to peace and security?

Table A2: Perceived actions and roles at different levels of governance

Actions	Roles at Different Levels		
	Local communities	Regional	Federal
Prevention	Set up community centers and youth clubs; bolster community policing initiatives	Training, education, and social services; community-based initiatives favoring youth inclusion	Providing funds and technical assistance to regional governments to enable regions execute initiatives towards prevention
Reintegration	Accepting and volunteering to support returning youth	Invest in job creation and vocational training and engage the private sector	Prepare guidelines and standards for reintegration and provide funding
Protection	Improve neighborhood patrols to prevent crime and increase youth safety; community training on how to spot and handle signs of abuse and exploitation	Coordination between law enforcement agencies and healthcare providers to prevent drug abuse to protect the youth from being victims of violent action	Pass and enforce laws and regulations (e.g. youth protection legislation)

Figures

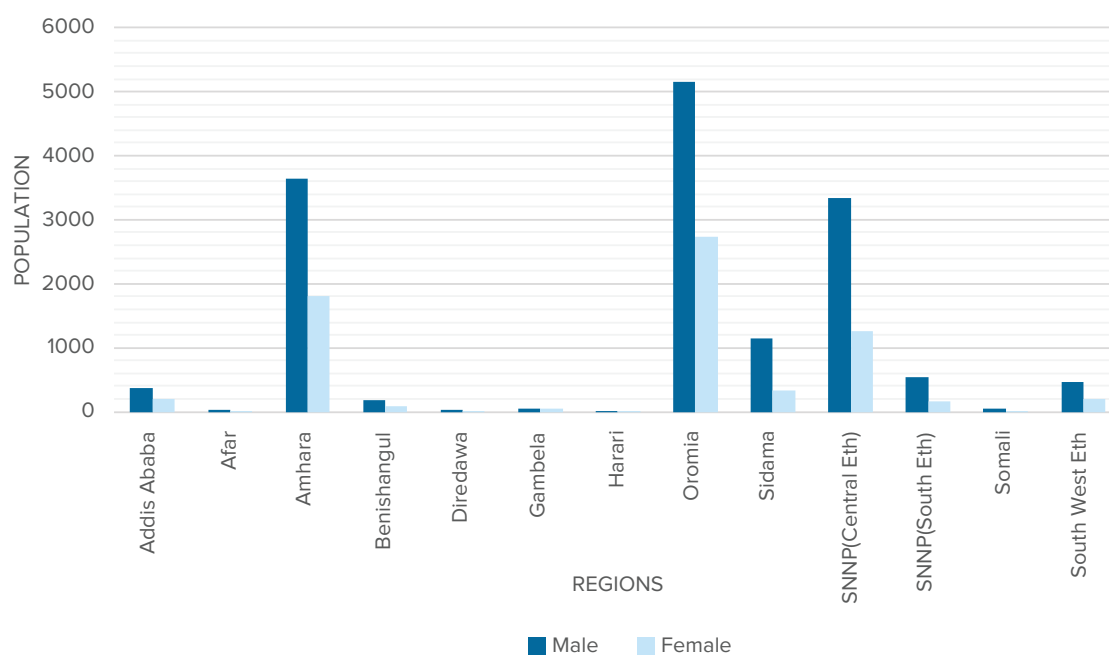


Figure A- 1: Youth volunteers trained by regions in five rounds¹⁴

14 Regional disaggregated data is available only for the five rounds due to newly emerging regions (Sidama, Southwest and Central).

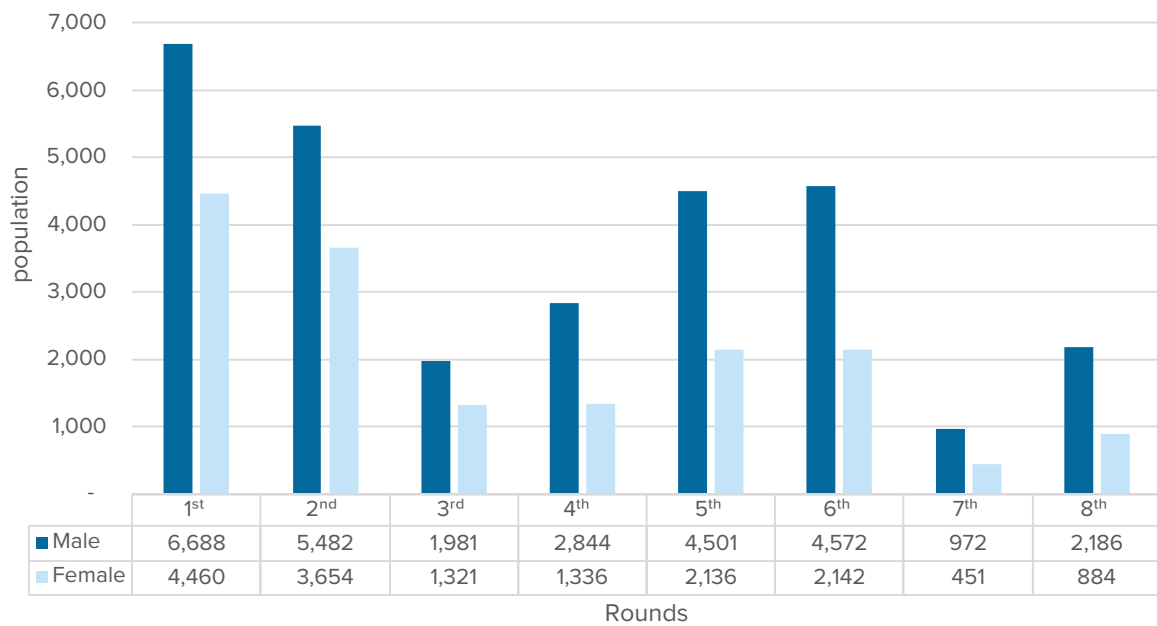


Figure A- 2: Youth volunteers trained by MoP in eight cohorts disaggregated by sex

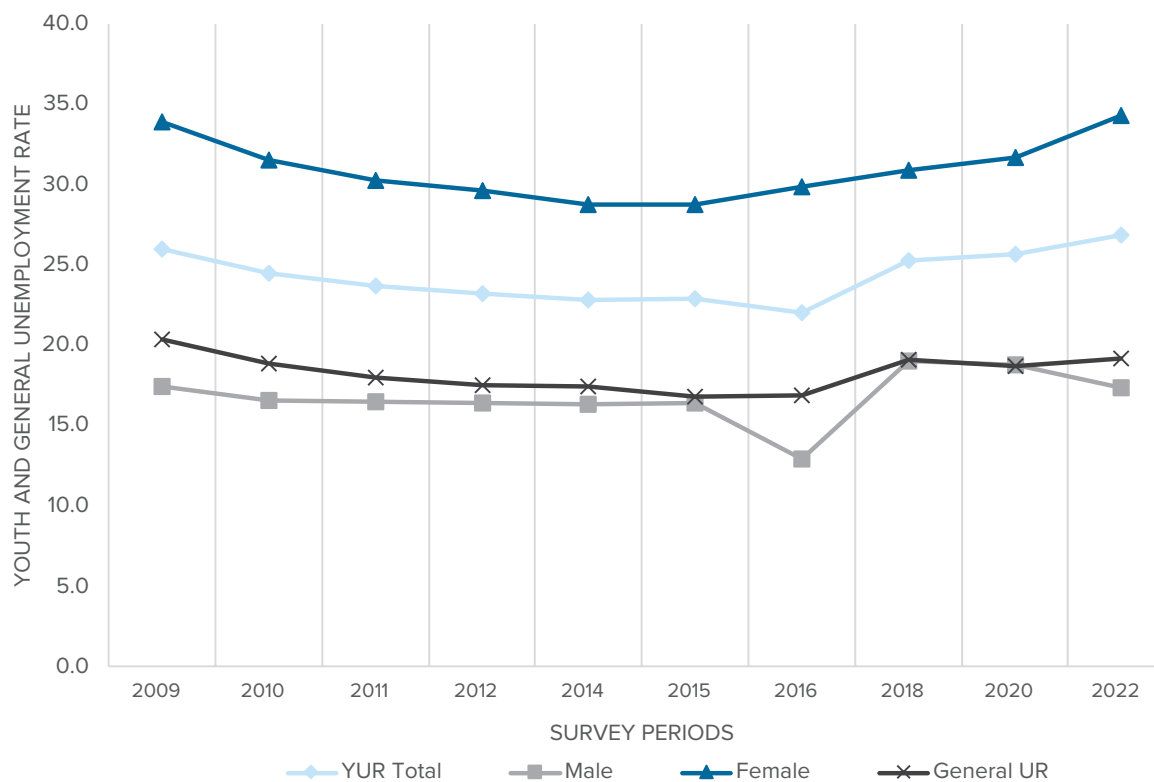


Figure A- 3: Trend of Urban Youth and General Unemployment Disaggregated by Sex

Source: Based on Ethiopian Statistical Survey Report 2022

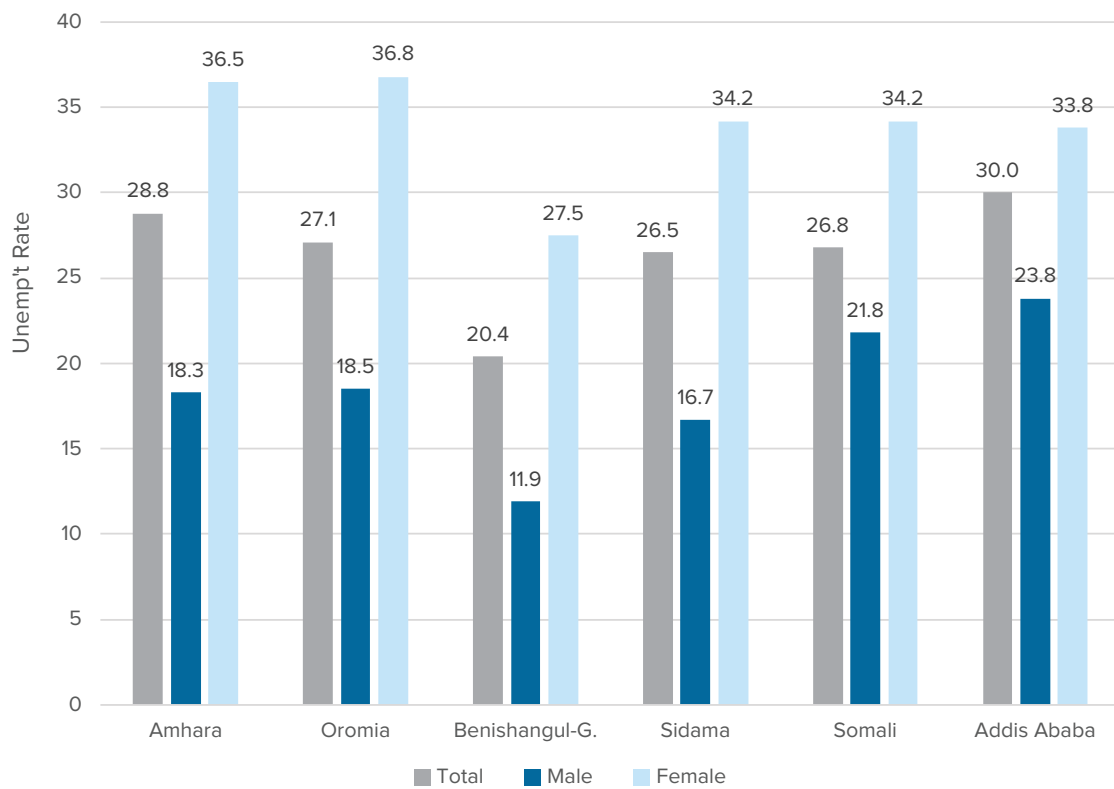


Figure A- 4 Youth unemployment rate in urban areas of the regions for the year 2022

Source: Based on Ethiopian Statistical Survey Report 2022



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