



Genocide and Atrocity Prevention Support

Why they Don't Fight : Resilience , Relationship , Social Bonds and Self-Advancement among the Youth in Uganda.

Introduction

As communities struggle to respond and redress manifestations and consequences of Exclusion, Discrimination and Injustice (EDI), states have taken to reactive approaches that focus on law-enforcement or strengthening the security sector to counter insurgencies, rebellions and violent riots. A few proactive initiatives have also been undertaken at political and civil society levels, albeit insufficiently to address these conditions, their associated hostilities and violence in the short term. In Uganda, the youth constitute the largest percentage of those who are affected by EDI, and participate in criminality and violence to seek redress. The youth thus, have and continue to play a central role in various manifestations of mass violence and crime.



Since the NRM government captured power in 1986, many violent demonstrations have occurred and more than 20 militant groups have attempted to overthrow the government the majority of whose memberships are youth below the age of 35. Demographically, the youth bulge below the age of 35 is currently at 77% of 40 million people in the country but experiencing inadequate jobs opportunities, poor education and access social services. These factors produce vulnerabilities that render the youth more susceptible to incitement and violence. The country has a complex and diverse social climate characterized by inter-group tensions and marginalization among the 54 ethnic groups; also facing serious challenges with unemployment, HIV/AIDS, gender inequality, and inadequate service delivery, among others.

EDI tends to be attributed to conditions that are external to the individual or the group experiencing it. Enduring political, bureaucratic and administrative constraints due to rampant nepotism, corruption, mismanagement of national and natural resources, weaknesses in laws and their enforcement, political repression, and massive long-term unemployment are some of the factors that account for the injustice and frustration experienced by the youth. Proliferation of programs and projects that raise expectations among the youth, but fail to produce meaningful solutions aggravates their vulnerability, especially when marginalized communities are manipulated by local elites for political gains. To this extent, many young people who are eager to build families and prosper in their lives tend to become outspoken to express their frustration with EDI, and use various avenues ranging from public demonstrations to massaging on social media and violence to respond.

This policy brief is based on a study conducted in Kampala and Jinja Districts of Uganda with support from the International Development Research Cooperation (IDRC), to examine why majority of the youth do not participate in violence to respond to experiences of exclusion, discrimination and injustice (EDI) despite being affected by the same conditions as those who do. Through a comparative study of both districts, the study focused on youth experiences and responses that those who do not fight employ to seek redress.

The problem

Despite the implementation of various policies and programs by government to respond to youth-specific grievances that influence their participation in violence and crime, little is known about why majority of them 'Do Not Fight' while responding to experiences or perceptions of EDI. A range of national and community level policies and programs contain structural interventions often developed in reaction to escalating grievances over deteriorating living conditions and violence. Agency-based approaches that can reduce the preference to participate in crime and violence are rarely part of any policy discussions. Subsequent policies thus remain poorly informed and largely ineffective, and account for the enduring vulnerability of youth and their exploitation by competing elites to perpetrate violence, which undermines mainstreaming them as key stakeholders in the development of the country.



Study findings

The findings reveal that resilience, relationships and social bonding are some of the agency-based mechanisms that influence especially self-identified non-participants in violence. Resilience as a response to EDI is both a process and an outcome, during which internal and external factors influence victims to adapt, build relationships and social bonds that increase the preference for non-violence towards self-advancement. Proactive action and setting clear expectations are internal factors that drive self-regulation and problem-solving by individuals and groups who chose not to fight. Religion, culture, family and gender are some of the external factors that promote prosocial values and behaviors to facilitate adaptation, provide safety, and help restoration of a sense of belonging, self-esteem and security in the place of exclusion and discrimination. In doing so, the overall motivation for non-participation in violence is the focus and pursuit of self-advancement. The critical indicators of self-advancement identified among the youth include: self-esteem regardless of vulnerabilities that may inhibit someone e.g. poor education; demonstration of gratitude even under conditions of meager resources; respect for differences across age, tribe, religion or social status; social development e.g. ability to effectively engage with all kinds of people; and ability to compete peacefully and effectively to achieve their goals and interests.

Rationale:

The youth are a social and functional construct that can influence or be influenced to reduce perpetration and participation in violence and crime, especially when they are empowered to engage and play constructive roles among peers, communities and in governance. During conditions and experiences of EDI, various factors influence the preference for nonviolent responses to seek redress among the majority, yet these remain undocumented to inform policies and programs implemented to counter violence by the very few. By focusing on the factors that influence pathways to nonviolent responses to adversity, strategies that government and the civil society can use to engage the youth as change agents in overcoming EDI will be developed and strengthened. These will further contain individual and group level norms, behaviors, local practices and practical approaches to reducing youth participation in violence in Uganda and can enhance implementation of the Uganda National Youth Policy (2015-2020). A cross section of the policy makers and practitioners working on youth issues have participated in the study to increase the relevance of findings to expand policy options, strengthen local ownership and encourage sensitization about youth issues.



These factors can be cultivated among the youth when such elements are integrated in state policies, local government, school and community programs, and family practices, to support reduction in youth vulnerability and violent responses to EDI. Uganda is prominently known for a very active and politically engaged youth population. While there has been strategic coherence at the leadership level to develop various policies and programs to respond to enduring and emerging youth-based grievances, many remain operationally deficient. For example, the National Youth Policy (NYP), the Youth Livelihood Program (YLP), Expanding Social Protection (ESP) Program, the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Pro-

Resilience, Relationships, Social Bonds and Self-Advancement (RRSS)

Resilience

Resilience manifests both as a process and outcome, during which internal (agency) and external (structural) factors combine to influence reduced preference for violence. Internal factors include decision-making, proactive action, self-regulation and problem-solving. Family values and influence, religious, cultural and education orientations, and existence of development opportunities are some of the external factors that provide security, promote pro-social values, restore belonging and self-esteem among those affected by EDI. The factors combine to generate non-violent responses to EDI, even in the face of compelling conditions for violence e.g. peer influences or rented/paid-for violence. This is more so when the factors we well internalized to command loyalty and prove that they really work for those who are successful. In which case deviation from, for example, upholding prosocial values, culture or religious traditions, indirectly imposes a cost against self-advancement.

Fear of the consequences from violence, including loss of lives, property and known past experiences can discourage participation in violence and instead influence positive adaptation to adversity as a factor of resilience. This occurs through various forms of using dialogue, negotiating, mediation and other processes to avoid the disastrous cost of violence. Positive adaptation also involves being able to, among others, manage peer and elite influences constructively. Family responsibilities and community service contribute strongly to influence building of adaptation capacities. While religion is known to provide strong spiritual influences to this end, culture and gender also provide safety valves in form of norms and in-group policing practices that provide restorative ways for one to be able to bounce back from the consequences of EDI



Relationships

Relationships begin when identified parties are drawn into the same space by their interests, and depending on how they perceive each other, they interact for each party to exercise their power and capacities to achieve them. Unlike the traditional approach to understand interests of the youth under the broader national interests of the state, the youth often inject their own and seemingly very specific interests, needs and personal values that influence their relationships with the state and in communities under conditions of EDI. For example, over majority of self-identified resisters to violence indicate the presence of supportive peers and positive adult role models and mentors with whom they interact often for support and guidance through their social life, work and preparation for adulthood. To the youth, this relationship is of particularly important and requires collaboration between communities, CSOs and the state to cultivate, e.g. youth-based mentorship, school and community activities that promote positive peer interactions, promote effective parenting etc. Similarly, social and institutional arrangements are necessary to facilitate such relationship building between the youth and their peers, elders or families in ways that also facilitate positive outcomes from adverse conditions that otherwise predispose them to violence and crime.



Social bonding

Social bonding enhances resilience and involves established networks and connections that influence ones' intellectual, emotional, moral and behavioral competences to remain optimistic and to be able to adapt or cope with adversity. Bonding, in this case, draws from such internal factors to produce strong emotional attachment and commitment to community, build close relationships, and social connections with mature, pro-social and rule-abiding friends and adults. Competence, with respect to non-violent responses to EDI, concerns with having cognitive abilities and skills for self-regulation, positive self-esteem and perceptions, pro-social values and optimism. For example, optimism among self-identified non-violent youth is marked by meaning and positive interpretation of EDI. Through social bonds, the youth learn about and practice values and norms that counter negative experiences from EDI, and are helped to overcome the influence of discourses of violence experienced around them. Family also provides uncontested spaces to promote prosocial values, develop resilient personality traits, deconstruct narratives of violence and reconstruct new voices and empowered discourses that seek to constructively transform EDI.



Self-advancement as a motivation for Resilience

There is a positive relationship between resilience and positive youth development, and the relationship combines controllability, optimism, conflict resolution, decision-making and problem-solving skills to enhance self-advancement of those affected by EDI. To this extent, the youth are neither objects of manipulation collectively, nor compliant and passive actors who lack abilities of their own to resist incitement or constructively engage EDI. Instead, and from a resilience point of view, their agency remains eminent in exploring agency-based options and skills e.g. self-regulation, problem-solving, to remain positive, overcome stressful events, and transform their lives. RRS are exhibited in different forms among the youth who do not fight, but are generally exercised to preserve pathways that groups or individuals craft or hope to lead to self-advancement. Relatedly, the networks developed and coping techniques employed during the processes are rationally utilized towards self-advancement and the major goal.



Majority of youth are resilient actors who realistically develop and act on their plans to remain positive and peaceful even in the face of compelling conditions for violence. Factors and processes that influence how some of the youth grow their resilience strengths and abilities include; education, cultural and religious orientations, family environment, peer influences and pressures and other principled and humanitarian considerations while managing their fears, vulnerabilities and grievances. During a focused group discussion in Kampala, the youth demonstrated that resilience decisions were derived out of rational, enlightened and economic considerations. In each of these instances, education, cultural and religious orientations, family environment, and other protective factors influence the considerations and the competences that individuals or the group develop and employ to pursue self-advancement, and to meaningfully sustain disengagement from violent responses to perceived EDI.

Gaps in existing youth-related policies:

A number of policy gaps have been identified to account for failure to influence the youth to constructively engage conditions of EDI, opting for violent collective actions to find redress. Uganda's policy and legal frameworks seeking to deal with legacies and enduring drivers of EDI are reactionary, in responding to grievances and manifest conditions of violence than being proactive to redress underlying conditions of enduring EDI. The policies referred to were developed in the same manner. In the same way, Uganda's skills-deficient-education system persists as one of the major policy gaps identified. Much as government has offered free primary education for more than 10 years, products of the system through the secondary and university level remain unable to apply themselves with skills and practical approaches to improve their livelihoods. Many are not employable, which leaves them frustrated and susceptible to incitement and participation in violence to force them into gainful work.

A number of policies reviewed also provide no youth-specific roles and structures for youth participation to build leadership and ownership. While most policies in education, agricultural, transport, health or security sectors articulate issues and problems related to actions, behaviors and status of the youth in the country, majority provide no clear and youth-specific roles and structures through which they can participate to implement them, besides the generic civil service duties that come with one's employment. Similarly, many of the policies and associated programs e.g. the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) program, are less flexible to accommodate the vulnerable and marginalized, and are not youth centered with respect to leadership and managing implementation.

Existing policies are also not based on the desirability and feasibility of the interventions they prescribe to deal with enduring legacies and experiences of EDI among the youth and rest of communities in the county. Instead, preference is made in favor of programs and projects that government prioritizes as politically rewarding to fulfill political agendas, which undermines meaningful performance by government to meet the needs of the youth.

Failure to instill pro-social values among the youth also affects relationship building and social bonding with communities and families, and many have not been oriented well in the basic tenets of civility and peaceful resolution of disputes. In the same way, there is limited coordination and mainstreaming of youth issues in state policies and political programs to complement each other in responding to causes and drivers of youth violence. This is made worse by back-rolling youth-specific socio-political and economic problems where solutions tend to be short term, very basic, haphazard, and patronized to create of political constituencies.

The challenges to overcoming these policies gaps

The gaps are multi-faceted and require broad but highly localized strategies. The country greatly suffered from legacies of bad governance, where through the successive political regimes, the state failed to develop youth-based responses and tailored solutions to youth related challenges, problems and concerns. A youth-based approach places the youth at the center of policy planning and insists on ensuring that the majority of beneficiaries i.e. the youth, also become agents and bearers of the duty of their implementation. Putting the youth at the center is not to suggest that state leaders and senior citizens are less important, but it further reduces perceptions and experiences of EDI that have characterized youth mobilization into violence over the years. Attention to building resilience, relationships and social-bonding among the youth are a necessary condition in developing of future plan for future development, security and management of the state. As indicated through the history of insurgencies and violent conflicts in Uganda, if governance and development programs are not based on such a premise, the risk is that associated activities will be too limited in their response to current and future needs and expectations of the youth. The other risk is that self-advancement as desired and understood by the youth themselves will be postponed, in preference for what the state may currently prioritize as development, though may attract more violent responses.

In the rush to score political victories and sustain voting constituencies, building youth relationships and resilience is paid no attention regardless of clear vulnerabilities that manifest to incite violence like; poor or no education, long-term unemployment, hunger, poverty, orphanage, gender-based violence, etc. These are enduring factors challenging many peacebuilding, transitional justice or development efforts across the world, while many other strategies disregard experiences of female youth in particular and their inclusiveness in and access to opportunities for self-advancement. In many ways, especially in traditional communities, there is still a great need to reorient cultural patterns that deny females opportunities to engage in self-advancement ventures before they are married.

Policy failures to build and strengthen prevention efforts of inter-communal and domestic violence provides a training ground for the youth to acquire skills and adopt violence as a tool for problem solving. Information and technical assistance for individual victims and affected communities is critical in this area but still lacking and requires partnership with religious, cultural and civil society institutions and organisations towards this goal. The state always plays a pivotal role in preventing violence and this occurs when institutions and systems of government are sensitive to prevention and necessary information to support conflict resolution and reconciliation is mainstreamed and shared



Prevalence of political favouritism denies access to self-advancement opportunities to majority of the youth in the country, in favour of political supporters at a particular time and location. Self-advancement support policies cannot be promoted for political purposes by the ruling or opposition political leaders, but should be advanced collectively by all and at all times. The resulting lack of inclusiveness and inaccessibility to employment, education, health and other opportunities among the excluded increases vulnerability among the youth and renders them susceptible to manipulation and incitement into violence.

There are inadequate legal provisions to support the prevention and mitigation of EDI, where the respect for the core rights of everyone is left to politicians and technical officers to interpret and implement. Constitutional and budgetary limitations have been used to explain failures for instance, in recovery and reconstruction efforts in areas affected by civil wars and communal violence. Furthermore, government pursuance of prevention and participation of the youth in violence has been associated with strengthening the police and other security organisations to respond to their collective actions, and not addressing conditions that deny the youth opportunities for self-advancement.

Critical stakeholders in policy development and implementation towards RRSS

- Ministry of Education, including lower and higher institutions of learning.
- Ministry of Local Government through Local Government structures at district, country, parish and village levels working with formal and informal groups and communities.
- The Uganda Police Force under the community-policing and social cohesion program.
- The civil society (international, national, district, and community-based organizations).
- Media institutions operating radio and televisions, social media platforms and bloggers.
- Religious and cultural institutions and organizations e.g. the Inter-religious Council, or Buganda Kingdom's ekisaakate program that focuses the youth in schools.
- Political Parties through youth league forums and the Inter-party Dialogue Forum
- Local communities through peers and family i.e. immediate and extended.
- Art, drama and sports clubs and associations.

Guidelines to effective policies and programs towards self-advancement of the youth.

- Enhancing equality and equitable opportunities
- Facilitate youth networks that collectively solve problems facing their communities
- Promoting respect for individual differences and building trusting relationships.
- Comprehensive and well-coordinated to build critical capacities for resilience
- Fostering youth capacities for consensus building, dialogue and dispute resolution
- Driven by lessons learned and best practices
- Feasible and consistent with the contemporary rather than the obsolete and unfeasible
- Flexible and adaptive enough to foster behavioral change towards nonviolence
- Gender sensitive and responsive
- Advancing human security and professional development.
- Maximizing youth engagement and involvement/participation.

General policy engagement recommendations to advance RRSS among the youth.

● Promote and strengthen partnerships between government and the civil society, political, religious and cultural leaders and institutions towards a whole-of-society approach to advance pro-social values and facilitate civic engagement and participation of the youth at all levels of society. This will also involve educating the youth about life challenges, opportunities, respect, tolerance and prosocial behaviors that respect the rights, feelings, and wellbeing of others.

● Expand education opportunities and employable skills development, including establishing at least 3 specialized vocational training and 3 counseling and crime rehabilitation centers in each district to help transform the youth population into a workforce to effectively contribute to national development

● Increase support and strengthen management of sports, drama, music and youth-based wellness programs that counter the preference for drugs and crime among the youth, and to develop a healthy, peaceful and active population to peacefully transform conditions that account for EDI.

● Develop advocacy and communication capacity of youth to effectively engage and build partnerships with peers, elders, leaders and the state to prioritize youth-based public and private sector programs and activities seeking to respond to conditions of EDI. For example, public and private partnerships to be able to undertake multi-sectoral implementation of strategies and tailored tools for relationship and resilience building in private and public schools, civil society and community-based organizations, informal-sector youth groups e.g. market traders, boda-boda riders, street vendors etc.

● Enhancing coordination and build synergies between local youth leaders and agencies and international resilience building networks and organizations to share best-practices and lessons learned from youth friendly interventions to accelerate self-advancement.

● Mobilize human expertise and material resources to promote and support sustainable youth livelihoods, including creating youth entrepreneurship opportunities to contribute to poverty eradication and the creation of a social environment that offers protection from drugs and violent crimes.

● Promotion of youth participation in leadership at all levels of society to promote civic responsibility among the youth as a basic motivation for maintaining resilience and positive relationships among peers and within communities. Participation in this case will promote ownership of strategies and programs to respond to and redress EDI through education, poverty eradication, health, culture and sports etc.

● Collaboration between decentralized local government system and cultural institutions to support relationships and resilience building programs among the youth occurs even at the lowest level of society. Collaboration should also advance equitable opportunities for social justice and self-advancement of the youth in the communities where services are delivered, including for female youth and returnees from insurgent groups, criminal gangs or prison.

Specific policy engagement recommendations towards RRSS in Uganda Government

Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development:

- i. Builds capacity of line departments' staff in mainstreaming relationships and resilience building among the youth at national and district level government programs, through partnerships with CSOs.
- ii. Strengthens indigenous mechanisms and empowers community elders, religious and tribal leaders and their structures as primary mechanisms for youth engagement in resolving disputes e.g. Mayumba kumi system, and promotes involvement in local activities e.g. bulungi bwansi that help build responsibility among the youth towards their communities
- iii. Promotes cultural and religious resource centers for youth networking and information sharing

Ministry of Education and Sports:

- i. Integrate resilience and relationship building as part of the teacher training programs, and in the education curricula of particularly primary and secondary schools. To this end, the content, activities and educational outcomes from resilience building programs should be indicated by developing skills and attitudes that strengthen self-regulation, proactive action, positive adaptation, competence with decision-making, problem-solving, conflict resolution, sense of security, and self-esteem. Similarly, the content, activities and educational outcomes from relationship building programs should be indicated by developing skills and attitudes that advance recognition of individual and group identities, patterns of interaction among the youth marked by mutual respect and understanding of the other, positive perceptions, compromise and fair exercise of their abilities towards self-advancement.
- ii. Promote access to educative tools, progressive social media and information kits that facilitate social bonding and promote pro-social values among the youth in formal and informal sectors. Such access should enhance (i) attachment (e.g. to family, community or institutions), commitment (e.g. to values, teachings, practices that characterize the bonds they form), engagement (e.g. of others during adversity to make meaningful collective choices/decisions), and maintenance (e.g. of helpful relationships to overcome adversity towards self-advancement).



The Ministry of Local Government:

- i. Prioritizes building capacities of local governments to improve local conflict resolution, community reconciliation, and mediation of disputes.
- ii. Encourage and promote cross-regional youth leadership development opportunities and job placements to improve relationships across ethnic groups and communities in the country.
- iii. Depoliticization of especially community-level local government development programs to improve inclusivity and participation of the youth in productive and gainful work regardless of their political affiliations.
- iv. District local governments establish community-level counseling rehabilitation centers to help the youth deal with historical and contemporary traumatic experiences and conditions that influence their responses to perceived EDI.

The Civil Society.

- i. Develop community-based mentorship programs and activities that seek to strengthen youth collaboration to manage social pressures, community and family related challenges.
- ii. Continuous mobilization of young people for social cohesion e.g. participation in religious and cultural activities programs, sports and drama, and related events to increase awareness towards non-violence.
- iii. Utilize sports, drama, music and counselling to increase engagement with the youth in informal sectors to build and develop capacities for non-violence, respect for rule of law and dialogue.
- iv. Sharing and promoting linkages between local and international youth-based organizations to share best practices and lessons learned in building youth resilience and non-violence.
- v. Undertake inter-cultural and inter-religious activities to build youth-based networks that facilitate local engagement and problem-solving, especially in vulnerable communities.

Towards a multilevel approach to promote RRSS among the youth:

- Develop policy, legal and operational frameworks at the national, district and community levels to facilitate whole-of-society and whole-of-government participation in engaging, enabling and working with the youth towards self-advancement.
- Integrate clear mandates with roles and measures to be implemented by local governments, religious and traditional authorities to be able to create adequate and decent working conditions and improve overall access to gainful development opportunities for the youth. To this end, sufficient guidelines should be published elaborating how the youth can access these opportunities while recognizing and paying special attention to existing limitations among the most vulnerable and often rural-based youth.
- Establish a national and district-level mechanisms to provide prosocial value orientation to local youth, coordinate and monitor resilience and relationship building programs and activities e.g. in schools, churches, communities and families, with expertise and resources to respond to emerging challenges and create new opportunities where necessary.

Participation of the community in RRSS.

- Building resilience, relationships and social bonding require involvement of communities in shaping the necessary social, political, ethical and cultural environment to facilitate self-advancement of the youth. While the state bears the responsibility to create formal opportunities towards this goal, communities are not just recipients but provide the informal environment where the youth interact with these opportunities to meet their needs and interests. Both the formal and informal processes are therefore linked in countering EDI, prevent participation in violence and successful pursuit of self-advancement by the youth. Government and the civil society should therefore increase support for traditional and cultural practices of communities to improve awareness to resilience and enhance relationships among the youth.
- Community involvement and participation in youth resilience and relationship building programs and activities should be integrated in mandates and activities of local government structures, to ensure they are accessible to and inclusive of especially the most vulnerable among the unemployed and poverty stricken. Measures to reconstruct lives affected by violence should ensure that communities participate early enough, and often allow locals to take the lead in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs and projects that seek to respond to EDI among the youth. Their participation ensures greater ownership and contributes to sustainability of relationships and resilience efforts to reduce youth participation in violence.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that conditions and experiences of EDI endure and manifest in various forms, Uganda lacks a clear strategy for building resilience, relationships and social bonds that reduce the preference for violence and empower the youth to effectively focus on self-advancement. Based on the study findings, we recommend that key sectors working more directly with the youth, including education, law enforcement, local government, the civil society, religious and cultural institutions review existing policies and activities to integrate RRSS. The research team is sceptical to recommend adopting new policies and laws as these ought to evolve organically within communities and systems and structures of government. We also want to avoid policy overloads, duplication of efforts, and instead review existing initiatives through advocacy to make RRSS of the youth a required criterion to be met across government and civil society programs. To this end, a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach is necessary to ensure youth-centered engagements and facilitation of related activities.