Former Armed Groups in Power and Post-war Youth Policies

WRITTEN **BY LOVISE AALEN**

LOVISE AALEN

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Introduction

The UN Security Council Resolution 2250 acknowledges the important role of youth in achieving sustainable development, preventing crises, and promoting peace. While youth are increasingly recognized as positive change agents globally, many youth in post-war settings struggle for meaningfully inclusion and instead experience exclusion and marginalization. This research brief discusses the role of youth in relation to rebel-to-party transitions and how to improve the inclusion of youth in such processes, bringing about genuine youth participation.

The rift between power holders and young people often runs deep in regimes that previously emerged from wartime armed movements transformed into peacetime governing parties. In these settings, national leaders point to wars won decades prior to justify their remaining in power, while the majority of young people, born long after these wars ended, feel no allegiance to those

war narratives. Political elite may then use international donor–supported youth policies, such as job creation schemes, to keep the youth population in check instead of empowering them. Youth quotas, youth councils and youth party wings can also be tools for ruling elites to co-opt politically active young citizens. This research brief examines the exclusionary effects of youth policies in such contexts, showing that in post-war contexts where former rebel movements run the government, mainstream youth policies can be used as instruments to reinforce authoritarian political control over youth. It is important that youth policies be anchored in an understanding of politics if they are to contribute to long-term security and stability. This ties directly into discussions about how to make Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) processes genuinely inclusive and people-centred, two of the guiding principles of the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) module 2.20 on the Politics of DDR.[1]

The world today is home to the largest generation of young people in history, with a population totalling 1.8 billion youths between the ages of 10 and 24. Close to 90 per cent of this population segment live in developing countries.[2] In social and cultural terms, the transition from youth to adulthood is often defined by social markers such as marriage or economic independence. The majority of youth in developing countries find it difficult or impossible to attain social adulthood due to failed public policies and the multiple political and economic crises they experience. This had led to a prolonged 'youth' before transitioning into adulthood.[3] National governments and the international community remain worried about the possible instability that such large youth cohorts may produce. The 2020 report of the Secretary General on Youth, Peace and Security identifies two main challenges for the inclusion of youth: a participation gap that excludes young people from decision-making, and an opportunity gap manifested most clearly by steeply rising youth unemployment.[4] This research brief, however, shows that that youth policies implemented to fill these gaps may not necessarily have the intended outcomes unless the political challenges of youth inclusion in post-war situations are addressed. It builds on research on interactions between regimes and youth populations in four post-war African states where former armed groups hold power (Ethiopia, Mozambique, Uganda and Zimbabwe).[5]

Former rebel parties and post-war policies towards youth

States where former rebel movements have been transformed into government parties provide a particularly challenging context for the inclusion and empowerment of youth. While former rebel leaders use past military victories to justify their continued hold on power, growing youth populations have no experience with and few memories of these wars. The growing schism between aging liberation leaders and their countries' youth can create crises of legitimacy. To address these crises, regimes invent and introduce new strategies to manage youth, seeking new sources of legitimacy not rooted in a liberation narrative. This rejuvenation could potentially lead to more-inclusive policies. However, research on interactions between governing regimes and youth populations in post-war states shows that the ways in which these regimes respond to and deal with their youth populations is instead part of their wider strategies to sustain and consolidate power. In post-war regimes with large youth populations, timing has a particularly strong effect on how such strategies evolve. There is a clear difference between short-term strategies deployed when wartime memories are still fresh and long-term strategies deployed at a point when the majority of the population does not fully identify with the participants in past armed struggles and thus feels less obligated to be 'loyal'.

During armed struggle and in the period immediately after, formerly armed movements now holding

political power must balance internal fractions and control former combatants.[6] During this period, the young people who make up the majority of ex-combatants often constitute a key constituency and a crucial political base for armed groups. Thus, youth are an inextricable part of the internal group dynamics of rebel parties from the outset. Still, military organizations are based on a hierarchy of age and experience, and long-term veterans—the old guard—occupy the most powerful positions. Former armed movements may also argue that youth interests are taken care of by default, due to the mere fact that their leaders were young in the early days of the liberation struggles, and that there thus no explicit need to include youth in the higher echelons of the post-war governing party.

Youth therefore rarely take leadership positions in the transition from rebel movements to parties. Instead, these emerging parties often create youth wings to mobilize existing members and recruit new ones. Research on youth sections of former rebel parties show that such youth wings are, in most cases, to co-opt politically active youth. Youth wing members act as 'foot soldiers' for the central party machinery, leaving little space for genuine youth representation and impact on party decision-making.[7] Another way of controlling and co-opting youth is to create youth associations that are formally independent but that in reality are dependent on the party both for funding and for permission to operate in the limited space granted to civil society organizations.[8] One implication of the research presented in this brief is, therefore, that increasing the number of youth in representative bodies does not necessarily increase the ability of such youth to participate meaningfully in decision-making. This applies to the introduction of representative youth quotas in parliaments as well.[9] If the old-guard rebels and their issues are not de-centred, youth quotas will simply act as a way of co-opting and controlling politically active young people. In Tunisia and Morocco, for instance, the introduction of a youth quota and the increase in youth posts in parliament after the Arab uprisings in 2011 has been described as 'fencing' in young people's participation within restrictive formal political structures.[10]

In the years immediately following the end of war, both youth party wings and youth associations operate in a space clearly defined by the rhetoric of former rebel parties' war legacy: the rebels fought the war and made sacrifices, inspiring a narrative of the party's indispensability and legitimacy. The expectation is that the younger generation should help secure the gains won by remaining loyal to the party. Those youth who do not accept this narrative are often victims of labelling and suspicion. In Zimbabwe, the label 'born free' is used as a negative term for the generation born after independence in 1980. The 'born frees' are accused of taking independence and freedom for granted and not appreciating the liberation struggle and its fighters. The leading ZANU-PF party has used this rhetoric to deny a political voice to this generation and dismiss their grievances.

THE YOUTH WING OF MOZAMBIQUE'S FRELIMO

When the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique – Frelimo - won the war and came to power in 1974, it soon organised the nation's youth into a party-affiliated youth movement – the OJM, Organização da Juventude Moçambicana. With the emergence of multiparty elections in the 1990s, the OJM was turned into the Frelimo party's youth wing.

Frelimo's youth wing serves essentially three purposes. First, it is the backbone of the Frelimo party machinery during elections, mobilising the country's majority young population through rallies, distributing gifts and harassing the opposition. Second, it is a recruiting ground for Frelimo's political leaders. Third, it is part of the Frelimo clientelist machine that distributes patronage at the local level, in which youth join the OJM to gain access to jobs, credits and licenses.

We find similar stories of former rebel parties' youth wings in post-war states such as Zimbabwe and Uganda. In Ethiopia, however, where ethnicity was the organising principle soon after the former rebel movement took power in 1991, no youth wing was organised until 2009.

When war memories wane, however, and the majority of the growing youth populations no longer have combat experience, parties find it harder to appeal to loyalty on the basis of armed struggle. This forces them to rethink their approaches towards youth. Particular events, such as opposition success in mobilising youth support in elections or youth-dominated protests, may force ruling parties to change their strategies and the way they address young citizens in public. War narrative, which might include rhetoric such as 'we made sacrifices in the struggle and should therefore rule' come to be replaced by arguments underscoring the government's ability to perform (legitimacy through performance), such as 'we have brought development and economic growth, and if you want to continue reaping the benefits of this, you should remain loyal to us'. Such messages were deployed by the Ethiopian Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), for example, in response to challenges from a youth-supported opposition in the 2005 elections.[11] A change of narrative may not succeed in controlling and co-opting youth, however, if the former rebel party fails to demonstrate actual development gains: for instance by providing jobs, financial support or other benefits to young people through party-state patronage networks.

Youth employment schemes and the conflation of party and state

The waning war narrative and specific youth-centred opposition movements provide forceful incentives for post-war regimes to add new youth-specific policies to their menu of strategies. One of the most prominent of these are youth employment schemes. In countries where former rebel parties hold power, there is often a lack of distinction between party and state. This blurred line makes it possible for the party to claim legitimacy for benefits that the state provides and to use state resources to reward party loyalty. By providing youth with loans or cash donations to start their own businesses, or by enrolling them in government-run job schemes or co-operatives, political leaders are able to demonstrate that they can also deliver benefits in peacetime.

Controlling and distributing access to employment has been recognized as a key feature of patrimonialism, where patronage jobs are distributed to supporters in exchange for political services.[12] Access to patronage jobs privileges young people who hold the same political views or sympathies as the power holders, while excluding and marginalising those with opposing political views. This leads to skewed opportunities and incomes. In a post-war setting, redistribution networks tend to be strongly intertwined with the legacy of the war economy, sometimes many years after the war has ended.[13] Patronage politics may affect young more strongly in such contexts compared to others, as patronage has grown out of war-time relationships. War economies and criminal networks often continue to influence economies and societies long after peace agreements are forged. In the Ethiopian context, for instance, different endowment funds created from the eco-

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SCHEMES AS PATRONAGE IN ZIMBABWE

The Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), which has remained in power since independence in 1980, has used several patronage strategies to sustain its rule. Membership in the ZANU-PF has, for instance, facilitated individuals' access to civil service jobs, land, food aid and humanitarian relief. To incorporate youth into the patronage system, youth have been appointed as 'ghost workers' – workers who do not actually perform any work but remain on the state payrolls as government employees.

In addition to general patronage mechanisms, Zimbabwe has introduced specific youth employment schemes. The Youth Development Fund was established as a revolving microloan facility around 2006 with the intention of promoting and supporting youth entrepreneurship and income-generating initiatives. ZANU-aligned groups such as Upfumi Kuvadiki (Wealth to the Youth) benefited from these funds. In 2018, the government established the youth-oriented Empowerment Bank, whose founding must be viewed within the context of ZANU-PF's election campaign narrative, in which the party promised to accelerate youth empowerment programmes to provide jobs for young people.

nomic gains from the war (1974–1991) remained the backbone of the Ethiopian economy for nearly three decades.[14]

The creation of job opportunities is still central to post-war reconstruction processes. Young people need meaningful jobs and an adequate income to be able to contribute to rebuild their communities after war. This relates to the goals of inclusion and people-centring in post-war reconstruction processes, which are described in the IDDRS Module 2.20. It therefore becomes paramount to prevent job-creation schemes, whether funded by governments or external donors, to be monopolized by powerful interests so that they merely feed into pre-existing dynamics of favouritism and clientelism, tactically leveraged to advance their own agendas.[15] To prevent this from happening, international donor-funded youth employment policies and programmes[16] must acknowledge the social and political relationships in which young people are embedded and understand how politics may pervade local economies and how political power brokers can mediate access to jobs.

YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP SCHEMES AS A WAY OF CAPTURING URBAN YOUTH IN ETHIOPIA

For the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which came to power in 1991, the controversial elections of 2005 became a turning point in the party's approach to the nation's youth population. These elections were the first time the ruling party had been meaningfully challenged by the opposition, largely due to urban youth who voted for opposition parties. In the aftermath, the EPRDF shifted its rhetoric from describing youth as 'dangerous vagrants' to a more conciliatory approach, promoting young people as positive change agents and entrepreneurs.

Soon after the 2005 elections, the EPRDF rolled out urban development schemes targeting youth in big cities. Micro and small enterprise (MSE) programmes and urban development packages, partly funded by the World Bank, provided youth with loans to start their own businesses. Party-affiliated youth and women's associations were in charge of screening and selecting beneficiaries. These programmes therefore allowed the regime to reach out to a large number of people, and it consequently used them to recruit members to the ruling party. This leads to the conclusion that '[MSEs] have been extremely successful in enabling the [EPRDF] – the party which has ruled Ethiopia since 1991 – to expand its structures of political mobilization and control at the bottom of urban society'.[17]

Conclusions and implications

There is a growing recognition that youth are key actors in achieving sustainable peace in post-war settings. Still, both national political leaders and international policymakers often see large youth populations as a potential threat to stability. The main youth-centred strategy of former rebel parties in power has been to control and co-opt this population without opening up for genuine youth representation. Moving gradually from war-based legitimacy to performance-based legitimacy, post-war regimes have opted to use the delivery of social and economic services through patronage-based youth employment schemes as a way of pacifying youth. Under these regimes, representatives of the ruling party often play a dominant role in the economy and act as gatekeepers to job opportunities for young people. As with employment schemes, youth political representative bodies can be highjacked by dominant ruling-party interests, an outcome that is particularly likely in post-war settings where former rebels have become the dominant party. This means that there is a high risk of double marginalization, as politically excluded groups are also denied access to economic opportunities.

Recommendations

Former rebel parties' methods of dealing with their youth populations have thus failed to address the gaps identified in the UN Secretary General's report on Youth, Peace and Security: the opportunity gap, referring to young people's lack of meaningful job opportunities, and the participation gap, which marginalizes young people from decision-making. However, the findings of this research brief point to the future policy and practice recommendations listed below.

How to address the opportunity gap (youth employment):

- Before implementing donor-funded employment schemes, context-specific political economy analyses need to be conducted in order to uncover potential patronage and clientelism.
- The potential for employment schemes to be used as tools of party patronage can also be addressed by engaging young people themselves in research and policy design.
- To further minimize political favouritism, employment schemes should include transparent and inclusive selection or recruitment processes that focus on vulnerability and risk and not political connections and sympathies.

How to address the participation gap (youth representation):

- The independence of youth wings of former rebel parties should be supported, allowing youth to genuinely represent the interests of their peers.
- The introduction of youth quotas can potentially render political institutions more inclusive and strengthen democratization.[18] However, for youth quotas to achieve this goal, the political culture of former rebel parties must be transformed, allowing young people to set agendas both in parliament and in parties.
- Experiences from women's mobilization for equal opportunities in politics globally have shown that success is dependent on strong alliances among civil society organizations.[19] The same applies to young people. The international donor community should therefore continue and reinforce its support for civil society associations targeting youth issues.
- Former rebel party governments should secure and strengthen the freedoms of association and expression and allow youth associations and NGOs working for youth empowerment to work without political guidance and interference.

Endnotes

[1] See more about IDDRS: https://www.unddr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IDDRS-2.20-The-Politics-of-DDR.pdf

[2] See United Nations. 2018. 'Youth and the SDGs' https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/youth/

[3] Alcinda Honwana. 2012. The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change, and Politics in Africa. Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press.

[4] See United Nations. 2020. 'Youth and peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General 2020' https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3855975?ln=es

[5] See Marjoke Oosterom and Simbarashe Gukurume. 2019. 'Managing the born-free generation: Zimbabwe's strategies for dealing with the youth.' Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI Working Paper WP 2019:02), and Asnake Kefale, Mohammed Dejen, Lovise Aalen. 2021. 'Neglect, control and co-optation: Major features of Ethiopian youth policy since 1991.' Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI Working Paper WP 2021:3).

[6] See other research briefs in this series: John Ishiyama. 'Rebel party organization and durable peace after civil conflict'; Veronique Dudouet and Claudia Cruz Almeida. 'Political engagement by former armed groups outside party politics. 2022. Joint brief series on the Political Dynamics of DDR. Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, PAW and UNDPO/OROLSI/DDR.

[7] Lovise Aalen, Ragnhild Muriaas and Aslak Orre. forthcoming. 'Post-war ruling parties and their youth wings: How old rebels handle the African millennials' in Sindre et. al …. (to be completed).

[8] Eyob Balcha Gebremariam and Linda Herrera, L. 2016. 'On silencing the next generation: The legacy of the Ethiopian Revolution on youth political engagement.' Journal of Northeast African Studies 16:(1):141 –166.

[9] See Ragnhild Muriaas and Vibeke Wang. 2012. 'Executive dominance and the politics of quota representation in Uganda.' Journal of Modern African Studies 50(2): 309–338. doi: 10.1017/S0022278X12000067

[10] Jana Belschner. 2018. 'The adoption of youth quotas after the Arab uprisings.' Politics, Groups, and Identities, DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2018.1528163

[11] Eyob Balcha Gebremariam. 2018. 'The carrot and stick of Ethiopian 'democratic developmentalism': Ideological, legal and policy frameworks.' In Democratic Developmental State: North-South Perspectives (Tapscott, C., Halvorsen, T., and Rosario, T.) CROP and Ibedem Press.

[12] See R. Sigman. 2021. 'Which jobs for which boys? Party finance and the politics of state job distribution in Africa.' Comparative Political Studies. doi:10.1177/00104140211024291, and Eyob Balcha Gebremariam. 2017. 'The politics of youth employment and policy processes in Ethiopia.' IDS Bulletin (Vol. 48, No. 3),

[13] Christopher Cramer. 2006. Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing: Accounting for Violence in Developing Countries, London: Hurst.

[14] Sarah Vaughan and Mesfin Gebremichael. 2011. 'Rethinking business and politics in Ethiopia: The role of EFFORT, the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray.' Africa Power and Politics Programme, Research report 02/2011.

[15] The World Bank has been an important funder for governmental job creation schemes in Ethiopia; see, for instance, 'World Bank supports Ethiopia's small and medium enterprises to boost job creation' https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2016/05/17/world-bank-supports-ethiopias-small-and-medium-enterprises-to-boost-job-creation

[16] Marco Di Nunzio. 2015. 'What is the alternative? Youth, entrepreneurship and the developmental state in urban Ethiopia.' Development and Change 46(5):1179-1200.

[17] UNDP. 2013. 'Enhancing youth political participation throughout the electoral cycle. A Good Practice guide.' https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/electoral_systemsandprocesses/enhancing-youth-political-participation-throughout-the-electoral.html

[18] Jana Belschner. 2021.'The Adoption of Youth Quotas after the Arab Uprisings'. Politics, Groups, and Identities 9, no. 1 (2021): 151–69. https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2018.1528163.

[19] See Samia al-Nagar and Liv Tønnessen. 2017. 'Women's rights and the women's movement in Sudan (1952-2014)' in Balghis Badri and Aili Marie Tripp: Women's activism in Africa. Zed Books.

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Author biography

Lovise Aalen is a political scientist and senior researcher at Chr. Michelsen Institute, Norway. She has followed politics in the Horn of Africa for more than 20 years and is currently leading research on youth in authoritarian post-war states in Africa, focussing on Ethiopia, Mozambique, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

The Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) is the Swedish government agency for peace, security and development. FBA has since 2005 supported research primarily through its international Research Working Groups.
These are composed of well-merited scholars from universities and research institutes worldwide who conduct scientific research on issues related to FBA's areas of expertise.

The Politics After War (PAW) is a research network for collaborative activities and knowledge sharing among researchers interested in dynamics of party politics, political mobilisation, state-society relations and the state in post-civil war contexts.

The United Nations Department of Peace Operations, Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions: DDR Section (UNDPO/OROLSI/DDR) established in 2007, deploys peacekeepers who, as early peacebuilders, assist conflict-affected countries in re-establishing the rule of law and security institutions necessary to build and sustain peace. It includes five components: Police Division; Justice and Corrections Service; Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Section; Security Sector Reform Unit; and UN Mine Action Service.