Exploring the Space for Young People in Peacebuilding in Coastal Communities of Tanzania and Kenya

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Acknowledgements

List of acronyms

CBO	Community Based Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DC	District Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
VICOBA	Village Community Banks

Executive Summary

This synthesis paper consolidates findings of two case studies undertaken along the Swahili Coast of Kenya and Tanzania. It explores the intersection between youth, culture and peacebuilding and seeks to identify existing and potential spaces for young women and men to exercise positive leadership and influence in addressing conflict, security, and peacebuilding issues.

Research was undertaken in Kwale, Kenya, by the Horn International Institute for Strategic Studies led by Dr Halkano Abdi Wario, Dr Hassan Khannenje and Daniel Iberi and in Tanga and Mtwara, Tanzania, by the University of Dar Es Salam led by Dr William Walwa. Research in Kenya and Tanzania took place in August and September 2024 through key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

KEY FINDINGS

1

Young people participate in community discussions about security, conflict and peace, however, many of these spaces are security focused, exclude women and are controlled by elders.

Young people have used their own spaces to promote peace, including Boda boda associations, youth- led CBOs and women-led village community banks (VICOBA). Cultural and religious ceremonies are also valued by communities as spaces for coming together, including people who may not be active in more formal security-focused arenas. However, these spaces are often underappreciated and underutilized by actors (such as NGOs, INGOs and national and local authorities) seeking to increase young people's support for peace and stability.

2

Factors preventing young people from playing a positive social role in their communities differ between contexts, but a common obstacle was the control of civic space by elder males.

This included limiting young people's access to economic resources, such as land. Patriarchal social structures and values mean that young women face additional obstacles. There is limited trust between elders and young people, and particularly between young people and security actors. All this is despite the significant contribution that the support of young people would bring to efforts to maintain peace and security.

3

Pervasive perceptions of young people as incapable of influencing security and peace inhibit their participation.

Young men are generally perceived as culprits of insecurity rather than as agents for peace, while the role of young women is seen as less relevant to security governance and issues of conflict and peace. When the role of young people is acknowledged, this tends to be either confined to their role within formal governance structures or preconditioned on the guidance of elders.

4

Cultural practices and values are important sources of social cohesion, with space to strengthen the inclusion of young people and young women in particular.

Values of solidarity and acts of hospitality within ethnic groups bond people together and contribute to social cohesion, even across national borders. Religious and cultural ceremonies provide an important informal space for discussion on issues of peace and security. However, over time these cultural practices have been eroded, particularly in Kenya, and remain the preserve of elders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations emerging from this research include the need to acknowledge and leverage cultural and 'everyday' spaces, values and practices for peacebuilding.

Efforts are needed to change perceptions of young people and positively transform relationships between young people and the older generation, for example through intergenerational dialogue that opens up possibilities for young people to contribute to peace and stability. Trust needs to be strengthened between young people and authorities, particularly security agencies, through an approach that supports these agencies to see the value of young people's support to their work. Strengthening youth-led civil society organisations would support them to hold local authorities to account in this and increase their efforts to bring about the meaningful inclusion of young men and women in local civic space. Particularly, young people who are not currently engaged in formal space and young women must be included more deliberately to catalyse their positive contributions to peace and security.

Introduction

Young men and women across the Swahili Coast are critical to efforts to build and sustain peace in their communities, but they are too often viewed as perpetrators of conflict rather than agents of peace, or, as irrelevant to peacebuilding efforts. There is limited knowledge regarding how the Swahili culture contributes to young people's positive role in discussions pertaining to peace, security and conflict. Equally, there is less understanding about the role played by Swahili culture in promoting social cohesion and solidarity in the Swahili Coast.

Building on research undertaken in the Swahili Coast communities in the coastal border-regions of Kwale, Kenya, and Tanga and Mtwara, Tanzania, under the Kujenga Amani Pamoja (building the peace together) project, this paper explores the intersection between youth, culture and peacebuilding.[1] Specifically it seeks to identify existing and potential spaces for young women and men to exercise positive leadership and influence in addressing conflict, security and peacebuilding issues and to uncover how cultural values and practices play a role in social cohesion, dialogue and collaboration. While acknowledging that there are certain aspects of Swahili culture that are not conducive to peace or that perpetuate existing power hierarchies such as gender inequality, the research seeks to draw out the positive cultural characteristics and spaces that exist in Swahili Coast communities.

This paper is prepared by Peaceful Change initiative (PCi) and draws on the individual research papers from Tanzania and Kenya to present a case study from each context and synthesise the key findings and recommendations emerging across both contexts.

1. A third case study, looking at Northern Mozambique, is currently under way and is scheduled to be published in 2024.

Kujenga Amani Pamoja

The Kujenga Amani Pamoja is a three-year project being implemented by WeWorld with support from Peaceful Change initiative (PCi), TABUFO (Tanzania Building Future Organization), 4H Tanzania, Stretchers Youth Organisation (SYO) and CNV (Conselho Nacional de Voluntariado) from 2023 to 2026 and co-funded by the European Union. The project is focusing on the Swahili Coast of Kenya's Kwale region (Msambweni, LungaLunga and Matuga sub-counties), Tanzania's Tanga region (Pangani DC and Mkinga DC) and Mtwara region (Mtwara DC, Tandahimba DC and Newala TC) and Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province (Ancuabe, Chiure and Mecufi districts) and Nampula province (district of Erati).

The project hopes to build on the experiences and practices of Swahili culture picking up on the positive aspects to support and empower young people to contribute positively to peace in their communities.

* Swahili Culture

Acknowledging the complex history of the areas under study and their diverse contemporary cultural characteristics, this paper applies the simplified term "Swahili culture" loosely to refer to dynamic and heterogenous customs, values and traditions of the communities that occupy the coastal regions that are the foci of the research.

Methodology

In both Kenya and Tanzania, the research methodology was qualitative, relying on desk review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with a diverse set of community stakeholders across the selected locations. Participant selection sought to ensure representation of the relevant sub-locations, gender balance, and representation from various age groups and ethnic backgrounds to provide a comprehensive view of the community dynamics related to the intersection between youth, culture and peace. It further sought to consult both authorities, government representatives in security and culture, informal community leaders, youth who are civically active and those who are not.

The research faced significant challenges exploring the influence and positive role played by young women in peace, security and conflict. Often even female respondents would make reference to the influence and role played by male youths rather than female. This is partly attributed to gender norms and roles where matters related to peace, conflict and security are male dominated and perceived as the realm of men to which women have limited relevance. Building on this research, more work is needed to further explore and expand the existing and potential roles played by young women in matters of security, conflict and peace. Furthermore, while the project baseline indicated that Swahili culture promotes social cohesion, results showed that it is less conducive to gender equality. More detailed exploration is needed of the gendered aspects of the spaces, values and practices outlined in this paper to inform engagement strategies.

While the research designs employed similar data collection tools and approaches, the findings naturally emerge from the specific contexts and are shaped by the uniqueness of each context. As a result, while many findings are common across the contexts, the structure and focus of the case studies varies slightly.

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Key findings

1

How young people participate in community discussions about security, conflict and peace

Young people in the Swahili Coast (in Kwale, Kenya and in Tanzania, Tanga and Mtwara) participate in community discussions about security, conflict and peace through a variety of diverse spaces, formal and informal.

Government and police and other security agencies tend to privilege the use of formal mechanisms of community-based security governance such as ulinzi shirikishi, sungusungu and mgambo (Tanzania), Nyumba kumi (Tanzania and Kenya) , and peace committees (Kenya). While the research did show that such mechanisms have demonstrated some effectiveness at involving young people in maintaining security in their communities, they tend to be implemented in a top-down manner, detached from the culture of communities and without young people in the driver's seat, overwhelmingly male-dominated and financially unsustainable.

While such formal security mechanisms constitute important spaces within which youth involvement should be strengthened, the research uncovered a range of other spaces with varying degrees of formality that are critical for young people's participation and influence but underappreciated and underutilised by authorities including cultural and religious ceremonies, informal gathering spaces such as Maskanis, Vijiwe'[2], Boda boda riders and associations and youth led community-based organisations and VICOBA (self-help groups for women).

Communities in the Swahili Coast highly value cultural and religious ceremonies such as weddings and funerals and traditional dances and music. Such celebrations are deeply rooted in local culture and bring a diverse array of people from within and outside the local community together in collaboration, including those who may not be active in more formal security-focussed spaces. However, authorities have limited understanding of the viability and value of such spaces but disregard them as leisurely activities that promote poverty and laziness.

Religious institutions are generally held in high esteem within communities and do play positive roles in resolving conflict and engaging with young people, in some cases acting as intermediaries between young people and authorities and security actors. However, much needs to be done to carve out a stronger space for the involvement and leadership of young people and women within religious spaces.

> **Communities in the Swahili Coast highly value cultural and religious ceremonies such as weddings and funerals and traditional dances and music.**

2. Maskani is a term used in Kenya and parts of Tanzania to refer to spaces where young people meet, sit and chat often after work for recreation and sharing ideas. Vijiwe refers to similar spaces but it is the term used in Tanzania.

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Boda boda riders (motorcycle taxis) and associations occupy an increasingly important space within communities and role for peace and social cohesion. However, they are negatively perceived as perpetrators of crime and insecurity by authorities with whom they have poor relationships. Constructive engagement with the boda boda sector is an important entry point for engagement with young men on security and peace.

In Kwale, Kenya, civil society (civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs)) is a central platform for young people's involvement and leadership on issues of security, conflict and peace which collaborates with other spaces such as boda boda riders and community celebrations such as weddings. Whereas in Tanzania, the role of civil society did not feature in the research, presumably as civic space is more limited and capacity of civil society generally lower in Tanzania than in Kenya. While civil society does have a limited reach and does not involve the majority of young people, it does provide a critical mechanism for young people's involvement and particularly for the involvement and leadership of women who find themselves marginalised from other security-focused spaces.

Ulinzi shirikishi is a community-based security mechanism that consist of groups of male youth mobilised by local government who form and participate in patrol units mandated to provide security in the neighbourhoods. Sungusunu (biting ants) is a community security infrastructure which was adopted to fill the security gap in the border areas owing to the increase of security threats. Sungusungu is implemented through the deployment of patrols of male community members who patrol at night and sometimes during the day when the level of insecurity is high. Mgambo (reserve army) consists of community members who have received basic military training and help local government and security. Nyumba kumi is a community security system where residents are organized into clusters of ten households, each led by a designated leader. These leaders are responsible for liaising with the police and other security agencies, as well as keeping their cluster members informed about security threats and other community issues to the police.

Generally, most spaces along the Swahili Coast tend to be elder- and male-dominated with challenges to young people's and to women's participation. Efforts are needed to work with young men and women and elders and authorities to enlarge the space for young men and women's participation in existing spaces and to support youth-led and women-led spaces.

2

Community perceptions of young people and their role in peace and security

The contribution of young men and women in the Swahili Coast to peace and security is inhibited by pervasive perceptions of young people as incapable of exercising effective leadership to influence security and peace. Young men are generally perceived as perpetrators of insecurity rather than as agents for peace, while the role of young women is seen as less relevant to security governance and issues of conflict and peace due to differentiated perceptions of gender roles.

Authorities and elders do show some acknowledgement of the role of young people; however, this tends to be either confined to their role within formal governance structures or preconditioned on the guidance of elders. These negative perceptions of young people need to be tackled and transformed in order to create a conductive environment for young men and women to participate constructively in community affairs around peace and security.

3

Factors obstructing young people playing a positive social role in their community

In addition to stereotyping and negative perceptions of young people within communities in the Swahili Coast, numerous other factors obstruct their ability to play a positive social role in their communities. In Tanzania, youth exclusion and marginalization, economic precarity and the presence of radical religious strands were identified as the main factors, whereas in Kenya challenges to the operations of civil society were emphasised. Despite the efforts by youth led CSOs in the rural Kwale, the elders do not trust them and see them to be unsustainable.

Young people face exclusion from decision-making which is controlled by elders and authorities (who tend to be dominated by older people, particularly older men), and from economic resources (such as land), limiting their ability to be positive forces within communities. Due to dominant patriarchal norms that define gender roles, young women are additionally excluded.

Relationships between young people and security actors (particularly between boda bodas and the police) are poor with limited mutual trust. Furthermore, the presence of radical religious ideologies further strengthens the isolation of young people from the rest of the community and stipulates restrictions on social activities that promote community cohesion.[3]

In Kwale, Kenya, where civil society is a critical mechanism for youth involvement in security and peace, the main challenges highlighted include limited financial resources, lack of skills to run organisations, lack of support from authorities and community members and underrepresentation of young women.[4]

3. Although these issues were not raised in the research in Kenya, our conflict analysis suggests that they are important factors driving conflict in Kwale and negatively impacting young people.
4. Civil society in Tanzania face additional restrictions on civic space and capacities that would need to be addressed in order to strengthen their role as vectors of youth involvement in peace.

4

Manifestation of Swahili cultural values, bonds and practices

Various cultural values, bonds and practices held by Swahili Coast communities in Kwale, Kenya, and Tanga and Mtwara, Tanzania are important sources of social cohesion. The culture of Swahili Coast communities is deeply intertwined with religion.

The research shed light on how values of hospitality and caring for each other (sometimes expressed as the notion that all members of ethnic group are relatives) bond people together and foster social solidarity thereby contributing to social cohesion within communities and even across national borders.

Gatherings, religious and cultural ceremonies solidify the bond of community members residing within and outside of the areas as family members return home to celebrate. They also provide spaces for exchange and discussions about issues of security, conflict and peace. In Tanzania, cultural dances and music were highlighted to promote messages of peace and are used as spaces to reconcile differences in the community.

In Kwale, Kenya, the research findings indicate that old cultural practices and traditions are less prevalent in today's society. This is corroborated by data collected for the project's conflict analysis which suggests that some cultural and traditional practices held by the older generation have not been taken up by newer generations. Nevertheless, the research did identify cultural practices that encourage peace and collaboration. Such practices are predominantly the realm of older generations but could be tapped into given that space is allowed for meaningful youth involvement.

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Values of hospitality and caring for each other bond people together and foster social solidarity thereby contributing to social cohesion within communities and even across national borders.

Tanzania case study

This case study explores the space of young people in peacebuilding and the potential to utilise Swahili culture to promote peace in Mtwara (Tandahimba DC, Newala TC and Mtwara DC) and Tanga (Mkinga DC and Pangani DC) regions in Tanzania.
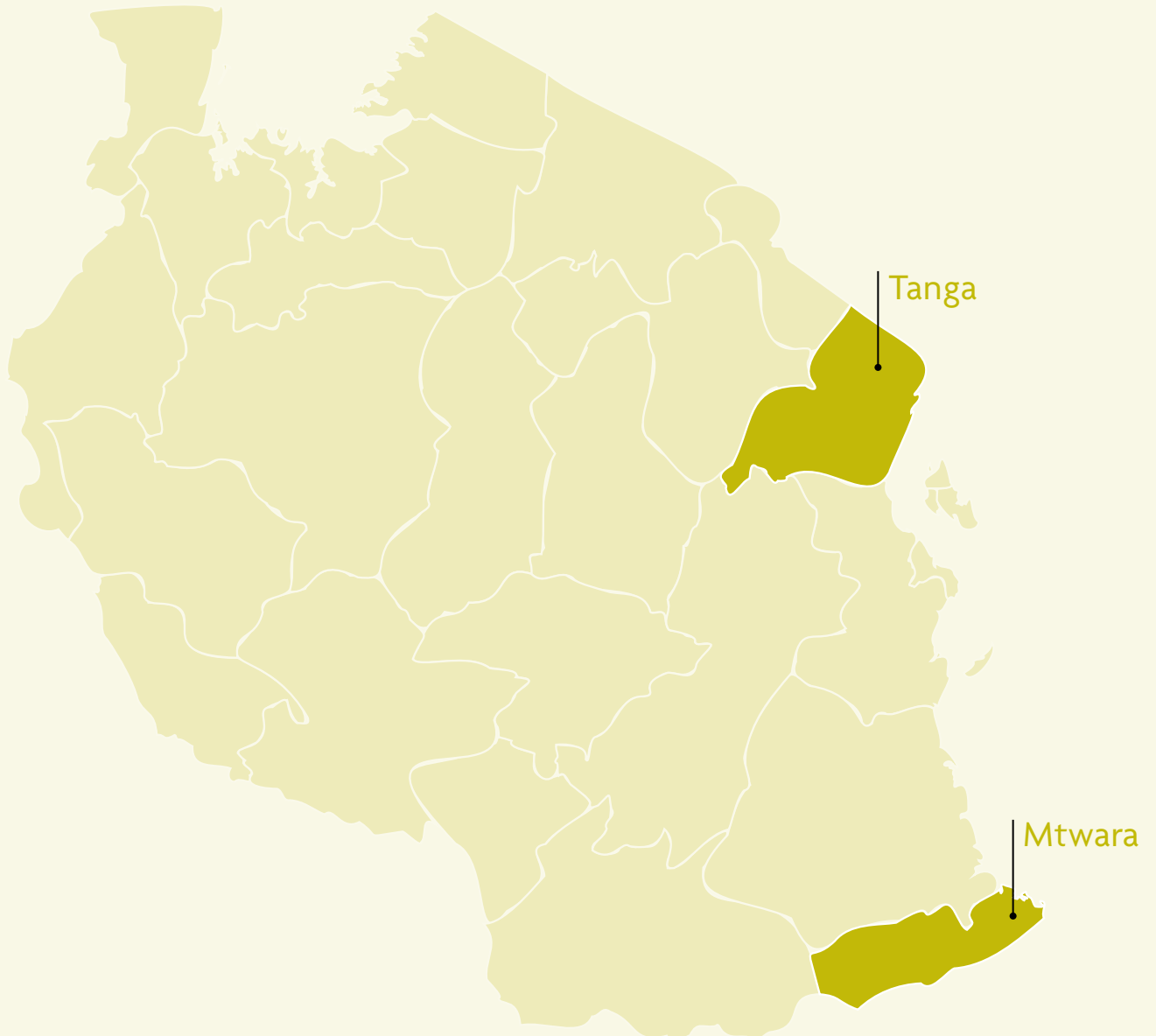
Tanga

Mtwara

1

How young people participate in community discussions about security, conflict and peace

The research uncovered a range of spaces for participation of young people in community discussions about security, conflict and peace, namely the participatory security mechanism ulinzi shirikishi, cultural events and practices, Boda Boda associations, informal gathering spaces and groups and religion.

The research identified a range of community-based security initiatives (including sungusungu, mgambo, nyumba kumi) but established that the government-led ulinzi shirikishi is currently the most prevalent and influential formal community-lead peace and security initiative for youth engagement in discussions and influencing matters pertaining to peace, security and conflict. Ulinzi shirikishi is strongly supported by the government and police and has demonstrated effectiveness in involving young men from the communities in helping to reduce security threats in the border districts of Tanga and Mtwara.

However, the research uncovered several challenges faced by ulinzi shirikishi as a meaningful mechanism for youth involvement in matters of security, conflict and peace. Firstly, ulinzi shirikishi is not inclusive; it is dominated by men with little space for involvement of women, as security provision is seen as a male responsibility. Secondly, the operation and organisation of ulinzi shirikishi is top-down making it detached from the community and culture of community members. Young men involved in patrol units are mobilized by local government leaders and officials and the police, and patrol units report to the police and local governments and not the community. Finally,

the ulinzi shirikishi model is not operationally nor financially sustainable; it operates like an ambulance, becoming functional when security threats increase and disappearing when they decrease. Members are not compensated financially but rely on contributions from community members which are scarce in rural districts like Mkinga, Pangani, Tandahimba and Newala where community members cannot afford to pay. As a result, some young people refuse to participate in ulinzi shirikishi, as the prolonged involvement in patrol units infringes on their income generating activities. In some cases, this has created tensions between those that continued to participate and those that stopped, with the former accusing the latter of being supporters of violent extremism.

For their part, community members and young people described cultural dances and music as preferred unifying spaces. Religious and cultural ceremonies (such as weddings and Maulid celebrations) continue to attract the participation of male and female youth in the affairs of their community, including peace and security matters. These celebrations also connect community members across national borders, i.e. members of the Digo ethnic group in Mkinga District, Tanga and Kwale and Mombasa counties in Kenya, and members of the Makonde ethnic group in Mtwara, Tandahimba and Northern Mozambique[5].

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5. The deterioration of security on the Mtwara-Northern Mozambique border has weakened possibilities for community and youth engagements through cultural spaces as the government has imposed restrictions on cultural gatherings in response to attacks waged by the violent extremist group known as Al-Shabbab.

However, government officials and the police expressed limited understanding and appreciation about the viability of cultural spaces for youth engagement and influence on peace, security and conflict issues. They perceived cultural spaces negatively, saying that dances, music, rituals, informal gatherings and celebrations promote laziness and are a cause of poverty.

The importance of boda boda drivers and associations in shaping security, peace and conflict and youth engagement in discussions regarding those matters also came forward in the research. While there are contradicting perceptions of boda boda drivers' role in conflict between government and security officials (who see boda boda as perpetrators of conflict) and boda boda drivers (who consider themselves victims of conflict and excessive use of force by police), a third perspective emerged from the research which acknowledges the agency of boda boda drivers in helping to promote peace and security. Besides transporting passengers, boda boda drivers are involved in neighborhood watch to promote peace and security and share information about illegal activity with police. Boda boda associations have created space for young people to discuss and promote peace and bridge the gap between the boda boda drivers and the police and government.

Religion can be another vital space for the engagement of young people. Although young people are often not directly involved in religious structures, experience has shown that the community and young people tend to have more trust in religious leaders than the government and police. Hence religious leaders and interfaith committees have shown potential to promote youth involvement and bridge the gap between the government, police and young people.

Finally, informal gathering spaces known as vijiwe where women and men gather separately in the evening were identified as important spaces of exchange. Particularly, the gatherings of women have become vital arenas for raising funds needed to finance women-owned businesses and have resulted in Village Community Banks (VICOBA) that offer table banking and small loans to women. Furthermore, the research discovered instances where information shared through these informal gatherings helped the community and government to detect and respond to security threats and other problems such as gender-based violence and child abuse.

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For their part, community members and young people described cultural dances and music as preferred unifying spaces.

2

Community perceptions of young people and their role in peace and security

Community perceptions of young people and their role in relation to peace, security and conflict are mixed. Elders, who are considered custodians of culture and enjoy power over political, cultural and economic matters of the community, have negative opinions of young men. They often described young men as a group that has lost morality and direction. According to elders, young men do not listen and do not participate in official meetings in the village. On the other hand, elders did not raise concerns regarding young women, presumably due to different ideas of gender roles where women are seen as less relevant to issues concerning security, conflict and peace.

According to elders, young men do not listen and do not participate in official meetings in the village.

Government officials and the police perceived young people in two distinctive ways. On one hand, they acknowledged the positive contribution of young people involved in ulinzi shirikishi in helping to reduce conflicts and security threats. It should be noted, however, that such perceptions are limited to ulinzi shirikishi, a platform favoured by the government and police. On the other hand, the police and government officials supported elders' negative opinion of young men. Tellingly, according to the police and government officials, young men alleged to be involved in the supply chain supporting violent extremist suspects on the Mtwara-Northern Mozambique border. In Tanga, government officials and the police accused young men of facilitating illegal activities, notably, the crossing of the border by illegal migrants and the transportation of miraa (khat).

3

Factors obstructing young people playing a positive social role in their community

Youth exclusion and marginalization, economic precarity and the presence of radical religious strands were identified as the main factors inhibiting young people to play positive role in their community.

Young men expressed concerns regarding the exclusion and marginalisation of young people's interests (particularly economic) and voices in the community. Even though young women are equally excluded and marginalized economically, they did not raise similar concerns. This is attributed to the reality that matters pertaining to the economic affairs of the community are male dominated. In the view of young people, the voice of youth is not taken seriously because formal decision-making bodies in the community and government are controlled by elders. In particular, young men complained about a cultural practice that empowered elders to exercise control over land. On their part, elders claim they retain land until young people are older because they do not feel young people will manage the land well and fear that they will sell it.

Secondly, in the view of many young people, especially the boda boda drivers, brutality from police and other security organs patrolling the borders remain a challenge inhibiting young people to play a positive role. Police brutality has created mistrust between young people and the police, so much so that young people do not see the usefulness of engaging with the police to find solutions to security problems.

Finally, the presence of radical religious narratives is causing divisions in communities and inhibiting young people's participation in communal spaces. This is because a conservative interpretation of Islam opposes cultural practices, such as dances, music, rituals and religious and cultural celebrations. In Tandahimba and Newala and some rural parts of Mtwara, the disconnect between the Salafi and other community members, is notable.

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In the view of young people, the voice of youth is not taken seriously because formal decisionmaking bodies in the community and government are controlled by elders.

4

Manifestation of Swahili cultural values, bonds and practices

The research highlighted how values such as hospitality and intra-ethnic solidarity, cultural and religious practices such as celebrations, music and dance and performance of rituals contribute to social cohesion in Tanga and Mtwara.

Hospitality is a visible cultural value and practice upheld by communities in Tanga and Mtwara which manifests itself in different ways. Firstly, through sharing of food with guests served outside the house for all to come together and eat. Swahili Coast communities believe that guests have to be entertained so they do not go back with a bad impression. The act of eating together promotes family and community solidarity and is used as a space for elders to speak to young people about issues pertaining to peace, security and conflict. Secondly, hospitality manifests through helping each other during funerals and weddings. In particular, community members contribute financial and non-financial resources to hold funerals, weddings and cultural celebrations. Preparations and participations in wedding involve people from within and outside the villages.

Another value that is deeply embedded in the culture particularly within big ethnic groups such as the Digo in Tanga (and Kwale) and the Makonde in Mtwara (and Northern Mozambique) is the belief that they are all relatives. This is further promoted by the Islamic religion that promotes the narrative that all Muslims are relatives. This belief carries with it a sense of solidarity and mutual responsibility of all members in that ethnic group to be care takers and protectors of other members. It is common to see members of the same ethnic group crossing national borders to join celebrations of members on the other side.

Cultural dances and music promote the message of peace and are also used as spaces to reconcile differences in the community.

However, it should be noted that the government and security forces raised concerns that the cultural practice of protecting each other is a source of security problems as it has allowed violent extremism suspects and smugglers to escape across borders and enjoy protection from community members on the other side.

Religious ceremonies and performance of rituals unite community members residing in Tanga, Mtwara and outside. Members of the community go back home to join their families and communities to celebrate Maulid and perform rituals. The celebration and gatherings solidify bonds between community members and allow space for exchange between young people and elders and other community members and to resolve conflicts in the family and community. Cultural dances and music promote the message of peace and are also used as spaces to reconcile differences in the community. In particular, common songs, such as 'baba na mama' (father and mother) in the Makonde ethnic group encourage community members to avoid taking revenge. Also, dances, such as Mzobe in Mtwara and Mduara in Tanga symbolize peace. During the performance of these dances, community members meet and touch each other, as a sign of peace and ending any differences between them. Traditional proverbs that can be either peace-promoting or provocative are also included on traditional clothing such as kangas worn by women.

Kenya case study

This case study explores the space of young people in peacebuilding and the potential to utilise Swahili culture to promote peace in Kwale county (Lunga Lunga, Msambweni and Matuga sub-counties) in Kenya.

Kwale county

1

How young people participate in community discussions about security, conflict and peace

The research uncovered a range of spaces for the participation of youths in community discussions about security, conflict and peace, namely civic spaces, community ceremonies, formal security mechanisms (peace committees and nyumba kumi), boda boda associations and religion.

Civil society organisations (CSOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Kwale have evolved into significant platforms for reaching and engaging with young people in matters of security, conflict and peace. They have done this by providing capacity building, social cohesion and trust-building initiatives, through direct mediation and conflict resolution, through awareness raising and advocacy and by empowering marginalised groups such as women, youth, and the poor. They compose a wider network of young people who are civically active, regularly participate in public barazas6, community awareness programmes and other initiatives related to security matters. Youth-led organizations within these structures serve as significant platforms for disseminating information on peacebuilding and cohesion, ensuring that the voices of the young men and women are heard. Importantly, women have also assumed active leadership roles in women-led chamas (table-banking groups), CSOs and CBOs.

Nevertheless, those who are civically active are in the minority and are sometimes invited to forums to discuss issues of security, conflict and peace as a 'check-box' exercise to show diversity of participation rather than for the value of their contributions.

Two official government security mechanisms featured in the research. These were peace committees and the nyumba kumi system (the latter most strongly in Lunga Lunga). Peace committees provide young people with training on conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and mediation. These trainings have in the past built relationships between young people from different groups and promoted mutual understanding and respect and helped young people to develop the skills they need to resolve conflicts peacefully and promote peace and cohesion in their communities, particularly during periods when the recruitment activities of violent extremist group was at its peak. However, the research noted that there is a disproportionate representation of older men in peace committees, whether elders, government administrators or security personnel.

The community-based governance system Nyumba Kumi has its primary focus on security, however, in some areas it has evolved into a platform where individuals of all ages can voice their concerns, address community issues, and even initiate business activities. However, young people's participation is limited.

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6. Baraza is a council or assembly - it is a meeting of people, usually held in a public place, to discuss matters of common interest.

Among informal spaces, communal ceremonies such as weddings and funerals were identified as significant occasions deeply rooted in Swahili culture which serve as a unifying force, creating a space for social cohesion, dialogue, and collaboration within communities. These gatherings tend to draw large crowds, often involving a diverse array of individuals including young women and men who are otherwise not active in other structures such as civil society and official security-focused mechanisms.[7] Furthermore, young people (men in particular) who are not civically active often gather in maskanis (informal hang-out spaces/gatherings) to socialize and exchange. They constitute effective platforms for disseminating important announcements and messages to the population. Some CSOs/NGOs actively make use of such ceremonies to advocate for peace and social cohesion.

Boda boda riders and associations (called SACCO) have emerged as important existing spaces deeply embedded in the local fabric for young men to engage in issues on security, conflict and peace at the grassroots level.

Youth-led organizations within these structures serve as significant platforms for disseminating information on peacebuilding and cohesion, ensuring that the voices of the young men and women are heard.

7. In recent years, weddings and other communal celebrations have increasingly been the targets of attacks and raids from youth gangs who operate in Kwale, eroding the value of such events as spaces that are conducive to community cohesion and peace.

Although the boda boda sector is regarded by many as source of criminal activity, the research found that boda boda associations have in the past collaborated to address conflicts within the sector and identify criminals posing as boda boda riders. The boda boda sector is sometimes involved in community projects and becomes particularly important during elections where their associations meet politicians to present their requests and suggestions. Nevertheless, relationships to decision-makers, security actors and communities remain conflicted.

Finally, religious institutions have a history of mediating conflict and resolving disputes. They have a deep understanding of local culture and values and moral authority which gives them a strong capacity for peacebuilding. Communities tend to respect religious leaders and are more likely to listen to their messages of peace and reconciliation. However, religious leaders are overwhelmingly older male community members, whereas young people, and in particularly women, are restricted from active participation within religious spaces.

Generally, the research revealed disparity in the level of participation by young people in issues related to peace and security with regard to the locality of their residence and gender. Those living in more urban sub-counties such as Msambweni and Matuga are more integrated in collaborative security and peace discourses than those living in more rural areas such as Lunga Lunga. Even within sub-counties an urban-rural divide can be observed. For example, in the urban areas of Matuga, more people are embracing the concept of youth-led organizations and their role in the community, which includes advocating for peace. However, this remains a challenge in the rural areas of Matuga. Secondly, young men are also significantly more represented in such engagements than young women. This underrepresentation of young women reflects a highly patriarchal society.

2

Community perceptions of young people and their role in peace and security

Young women and men in Kwale are generally not viewed as particularly impactful to discussions of peace and security but more commonly as disruptors of the same. Elders, those in positions of influence such as national and county government administrators blame young people for rising cases of theft, attacks against elders, substance abuse and general lawlessness in the county. Reasons given range from unemployment, boredom, drug abuse, breakdown of the age-old Swahili cultural values and customs, the desire to make quick money and lack of proper parenting at home.

Various stakeholders do acknowledge the capacity of young people to contribute to peace, however, many elders feel that young people must be guided and engaged in learning about their past and ways of inculcating Swahili cultural values and norms. The older generation questions the competency of young people to assume leadership responsibilities. The Digo phrase "ngoma ya anache taichesa" (music played by children cannot play through the night) is often used by the older generation signifying that any initiative undertaken by the youth or 'children' is viewed as unsustainable, and therefore, elders should always take the lead and provide guidance. Doubly marginalized from matters of community peace and security, due to pervasive patriarchal structures, are young women and girls.

3

Factors obstructing young people playing a positive social role in their community

For young people who are civically active several challenges obstruct their contribution to security and peace. These include limited financial resources, oversaturation of CBOs, CSOs and NGOs in many localities competing over meagre resources, financial illiteracy and project management skills inadequacy, insignificant support from political elites, county and national governments, scepticism and lack of support from community members, trust deficit within and between CBOs, underrepresentation of young women in CBOs and lack of clear organisational goals.

Regardless of these challenges, civically active young people bring valuable experience in community engagement and insight into activities beneficial to their communities and many CSOs, CBOs and NGOs have established positive relationships with the Kwale County government, creating a favourable environment for conflict resolution, security, and peacebuilding activities.

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Manifestation of Swahili cultural values, bonds and practices

The research showed cultural and religious values and practices that promote peace and social cohesion in Kwale. Some traditional cultural practices are largely remnants of the past and not actively practiced today but could still be leveraged to promote peace.

The research found that Swahili culture in Kwale and the Islamic religion share similar principles. Both encourage living in a communal setup and promote mutual sharing. Such values are evident during Ramadan and Eid ul-Hajj, where Muslims share meals and provide the less fortunate with a portion of what they have. A similar traditional practice exists in Swahili culture, known as Aro, where members of an extended family cook food and bring it to a central location where it is shared among all members, ensuring that no one goes without food.

Swahili culture encourages regular family meetings where families can come together, catch up, and strengthen their bonds. This practice promotes peace and conflict resolution, as families have the opportunity to address any issues affecting the family unit. Social gatherings like weddings bring communities together and contain traditional songs and dances that foster collaboration among family members.

Traditional cultural practices that used to be prevalent in Kwale and historically promoted peace and social cohesion include 'mweria' (also wiri, resource pooling and collaboration). This practice entailed community members coming together to help others in house constructions, ploughing, harvesting, etc. It instilled collaboration, coexistence and peace among members of the community.

Old forest cultural places of worship known as Kayas to this day still hold some spiritual and moral significance within Kwale communities. Although there are instances where young people have been involved in projects to map Kaya forests' flora and fauna, protect the Kaya lands from land grabbing, and mitigate against effects of climate change in these sacred enclaves, the Kayas remain a cultural spaces dominated by elders.

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Conclusion and recommendations

The research has showed that the contribution of young people to peace and security is inhibited by a range of factors such as lack of access to economic resources, limited trust between young people and elders, particularly security actors, and marginalisation of young people from decision-making platforms. In particular, pervasive perceptions of young people as incapable of influencing security and peace prevent them from exercising positive influence on peace and security. Young men are generally perceived as perpetrators of insecurity rather than as agents for peace, while the role of young women is seen as less relevant to security governance and issues of conflict and peace.

Young people participate in community discussions about security, conflict and peace through various spaces. However, many of these spaces are security focused, exclude women and are controlled by older people. More informal spaces and spaces dominated by young people are often undervalued and underutilised by actors (such as NGOs, INGOs and national and local authorities) seeking to increase young people's support for peace and stability. Cultural practices and values are important sources of social cohesion, with space to strengthen the inclusion of young people and young women in particular. Key actors should leverage the potential of young people to and the capacity of existing Swahili cultural characteristics and practices to contribute to peace and security.

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Support cultural spaces that are underutilised for peace and leverage peace-promoting aspects of Swahili culture

Government authorities including security actors, civil society and the wider peacebuilding community must recognise the critical role played by cultural values and practices such as ceremonies, dances and music for social cohesion and peace building and develop strategies to make use of those spaces more actively. For example:

— Build local partnerships and collaborations between key actors such as civil society, cultural organisations (government and non-government), religious leaders, cultural officers stationed in the districts and community leaders to promote the use of cultural spaces and practices with young people.

— Work with organisers of celebrations (moulid, weddings etc.) and with traditional singers and dancers to promote positive values of Swahili culture such as caring for each other, unity and collaboration among the youth and the community.

— Teachers, schools and civil society should make use of cultural traditions, values, dances and music that promote values of peace in working with children and young people.

— Create spaces for government officials and security officers to participate in and pay acknowledgement to cultural events that promote and showcase peace-promoting local cultural values and practices. This could include organising a cultural day within schools where students can develop and share arts pieces that highlight peace-promoting aspects of culture.

— Elders should promote and allow for young people to take up leadership roles in cultural events and within cultural spaces. For example, in Kenya, collaboration between elders and young people around preservation of Kaya cultural sites can be explored.

— Journalists and media should document and disseminate content that displays peace-promoting cultural values and practices with a focus on their contribution to social cohesion.

Change perceptions of young people and build relationships between young people and elders in the community as well as government security actors

In order to create conditions for young people to increasingly contribute to and influence matters of peace and security in their communities, efforts must be made to change the way young people are perceived by the wider community and community leaders (formal and informal) as well as to transform relationships between young people and older community members and government security actors. For example:

— Civil society, the wider peacebuilding community, community leaders and government officials should promote and enable inter-generational dialogue to develop common understanding between elders and young men and women, potentially using dialogue around cultural practices and how these can be used to promote peace as an entry point.

— Initiatives to build bridges between older generations and young people and between government security actors and young people should explore utilising the role of religious leaders to mend and strengthen relationships.

— A range of approaches to build better relationships between young men and women and elders and government security actors should be explored, such as sports, and music and drama.

— Schools should create opportunities for elders to interact with the pupils, for example around cultural values and practices through a mutual conversation rather than a one-way lecture to the students.

— Media and journalists should pay attention to the way in which they portray young men and women and seek to showcase their positive contribution to peace through a variety of spaces, including cultural and 'everyday' spaces and practices such as vijiwe, maskani, VICOBAs/chamas (informal savings and credit groups), boda bodas, celebrations etc.

Expand the quantity and quality of young men and women's involvement in formal security focused spaces

To strengthen the role of existing formal spaces in maintaining security and promoting peace, efforts are needed to make them less top-down and more embedded in communities and to carve out a stronger role for young people to influence these spaces. For example:

— Integrate into dialogue processes between young men and women and government officials and community leaders discussions around opening up spaces for young people to participate in and influence existing elder-dominated spaces such as formal security structures and religious institutions.

— Revisit community security governance models such as ulinzi shirikishi, nyumba kumi and peace committees and engage communities and young men and women in conversation about how to ensure such mechanisms are community-led and bottom up and how to ensure leadership for young men and women.

— When selecting young people to participate in formal structures, seek to reach young people and women who are marginalized and disenfranchised and mobilise them to participate.

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Opening up spaces for young people to participate in and influence existing elder-dominated spaces.

Focus on engaging marginalised young people and young women who are usually excluded from discussions on peace and security.

It is imperative that any initiatives aimed at promoting young people's participation in and influence on matters of peace and security focus explicitly on engaging young people who are not already included in formal spaces; and on elevating the role of young women. For example:

— Undertake additional research that explicitly looks at young women's role and contribution to peace and security and at the gendered aspects of cultural values and practices, seeking to identify positive aspects that can promote women's empowerment.

— Engage with young men and women in the spaces they already occupy such as schools, boda boda associations, community-based organizations (VICOBA and chama for women), informal gathering places (vijiwe and maskanis) and ceremonies such as weddings and moulid.

— Government officials, informal leaders, international organisations and donors should support youth-led organisations to mobilise hard-to-reach young people through peer-to-peer influence to engage in peace and security matters directly (in dialogues, forums etc.) and indirectly (through activities such as arts, music, dance etc.).

— Schools and teachers should engage young girls and young boys in conversations and activities around culture and peace on an equal footing seeking to break with gender stereotypes.

— Journalists and media should seek to showcase positive contributions to peace of marginalised young people and of young women in particular via content that seeks to break with traditional stereotypes of different groups, such as young women, boda boda riders etc.

Engage with young men and women in the spaces they already occupy such as schools, boda boda associations, community-based organizations.