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Youth Engagement in the Realm of Local Governance: Opportunities for Peace?

Marjoke Oosterom

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Summary

An interest in young people has gained significant traction in both policy and academic circles over the past ten years, partly informed by the correlations between 'youth bulges' and large numbers of unemployed youth and a country's instability. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security endorses a view of young people as contributors to peace, and is likely to prompt support for their participation in peacebuilding. While local governance might be an entry point for youth participation, little is documented about the specifics of young people's participation in local governance in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Based on a review of existing literature, this paper discusses the ways in which youth engage in local governance processes through formal and informal mechanisms, and the politics and power dynamics that shape their engagement.

Marjoke Oosterom is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), in the Power and Popular Politics research cluster. Her research focuses on citizenship and agency, and forms of social and political action in contexts of violence and conflict. Within this theme, her expertise is on youth politics and gender. She has conducted research in Zimbabwe, northern Uganda, South Sudan, Kenya and Nigeria.

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Acknowledgements

Acronyms

CVE	countering violent extremism
CDR	Community-Driven Recovery
DDR	Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration
IDP	internally displaced person
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PVE	preventing violent extremism
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNSCR2250	United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security
WDR	World Development Report

Summary

More than 600 million young people live in fragile and conflict-afflicted areas (UNDP 2014). Over the past decade, large numbers of jobless (predominantly male) youth came to be considered a security risk. Importantly, there is mixed and even contradictory evidence for a linear, causal relationship between youth unemployment and violence (Cramer 2010; Dowd 2017). Despite young people often being the largest population group affected by conflict and fragility, there is only an emergent understanding of youth-specific issues in conflict or post-conflict settings. This paper addresses the existing gap in knowledge on youth participation in local governance and peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected settings, focusing on the politics and power dynamics that shape the ways in which youth engage in local governance processes. The paper reviews existing literature on national youth councils and quotas for including youth in local government frameworks – both *formal*, often state-initiated mechanisms for youth participation. It contrasts this with young people's *informal* actions in everyday life – actions taken on their own initiative to influence local governance actors and dynamics.

The paper will argue that formal mechanisms for involving youth in local governance are unlikely to be the most effective avenues for supporting youth inclusion in local democratic processes. Informal forms of youth action can generate insights about how youth organising happens, how young people understand peace, and what changes they want to see in governance in a broad sense of the term. However, informal youth actions need to be critically examined for how inclusive they are, and whose interests they serve. One main conclusion from the review carried out for this paper is that there is still a striking lack of research on the gendered experience of youth participation in local governance. A deeper understanding of young people's engagement in local governance requires further knowledge on three issues, which each require a dedicated gender analysis: first, how everyday processes of political socialisation evolve in violent contexts; second, the intergenerational power dynamics between young people and the adult generation, particularly at the interface between society and the local state; and third, the conditions under which young people channel their efforts into peaceful strategies that promote democratic processes, and when they take part in initiatives that are neither inclusive nor democratic.

Formal youth participation

Focusing on two of these mechanisms – youth councils and youth quotas – this section will show that valuable lessons learnt about citizen participation in formal mechanisms (Cornwall and Schattan Coelho 2007) are often cast aside. In stable settings with functioning democratic institutions, youth councils offer viable avenues for young people to effectively participate in the planning of services, to review policies and to take decisions over budgets earmarked for children and youth. In fragile and conflict-affected settings, however, it appears that national youth councils have functioned primarily as vehicles for co-opting youth activists, have been reserved for young people linked to the political elites, or have been hampered by political divisions. Budgets of municipal and sub-national youth councils are often limited, the councillors are not involved in real decision- making processes by local governments, or their recommendations are ignored. In several countries, decentralised local governance frameworks enable young people to stand for elections and become local youth councillors, and some countries have formally adopted youth quota systems. However, in reality, it often remains difficult for youth to be elected, as political parties may refuse to support young candidates. Also, especially in African contexts where much power is concentrated in the executive and presidency, quotas have become instrumental in consolidating the power of a government or incumbent party. To conclude, formal mechanisms for youth participation are not immune to some of the 'classic' participation

challenges such as mechanisms having 'no teeth', weak representation and the exclusion of marginalised voices, and token participation.

Informal youth actions

In many contexts where formal mechanisms are failing young people, they engage in activities to further peace and development *outside* formal government frameworks. They can take actions as individuals, taking up leadership roles and working as political 'brokers', or collectively, through networks and associations. However, there is little literature on gendered experiences of activism at the local level, or on the experiences of young female activists. Often, young people are indifferent to or explicitly distance themselves from ways of working of formal local councils, politicians and political parties, and bureaucrats, seeing them as corrupt and self-enriching. Therefore, besides addressing concrete issues like education and livelihoods, young people's organising may be motivated by their implicit critiques of the mode of governance they know. However, while young activists may work to attain certain social goods, they may reproduce or even exacerbate divisions between better-off and more marginalised groups, or reproduce gender inequality.

Whereas the social positionality of youth can be a source of motivation for youth action, their positionality also generates specific power dynamics that have received limited attention in the local governance literature. The interface between youth and adult generations and the bargaining that occurs is what makes youth participation different from more general citizen participation. In different studies on youth participation in the global North, the presence of supportive adults who mentor youth and help facilitate a process but then step back to leave enough room for their decisions is highlighted as a contributing factor to the success of organised youth participation. Yet examples from fragile and conflict-affected settings show how young people experience the adult generation as a major obstruction to enjoying full citizenship and making the transition to adulthood. Just as gender norms inform interactions between men and women, certain social norms govern interactions between the young and the old. In many cases, such norms require young people to accept authority and be docile, and young people cannot speak their own mind. Furthermore, various examples suggest that adult leaders are not evidently taking up roles such as youth facilitators and mentors, or are not accepted as such.

The paper concludes by highlighting a number of issues that are central to understanding how young people are part of – and take part in – local governance in fragile and conflict-affected settings, issues that need to be addressed in any approach seeking to support young people in local governance and peacebuilding:

- There is a risk of seeing 'youth' as a homogenous category, overlooking important power inequalities among youth, especially based on gender and socioeconomic status.
- Formal institutions like National Youth Councils continue to be exclusive and flawed.
- Young people are engaged in a wide range of informal actions that reflect their priorities and forms of organising that work for them. However, young people's actions are not necessarily democratic and inclusive.
- Intergenerational dynamics are part of the power dynamics that shape local state–society relations. Trust between generations has often been broken down, but some degree of receptiveness to young people and mutual understanding is needed for collaboration to happen across generations.

1   Introduction

The current world population is the youngest ever. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), there are 1.8 billion young people in the 10–24 age group (UNFPA 2014). More than 600 million young people live in fragile and conflict-afflicted areas (UNDP 2014). They are highly represented among refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), with 50 per cent of the world's 21.3 million refugees being under the age of 18. Despite young people often being the largest population group affected by conflict and fragility, there is only an emergent understanding of youth-specific issues in conflict or post-conflict settings. Furthermore, other than demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) programmes for young ex-combatants, there are few interventions that have dedicated approaches to working with young people (Kurtenbach 2014; McEvoy-Levy 2006).

'Youth issues' have risen high on the international peace and security agenda after a number of influential studies showed a correlation between a country's instability and 'youth bulges' – especially large numbers of unemployed youth (Cincotta 2008; Urdal 2006). More recently, concerns have grown over the recruitment of young people into terrorist groups (Williams 2016). This prompted the international development community to invest large amounts of funding in youth employment programmes as part of peacebuilding interventions. The overwhelming emphasis on unemployed youth as a security threat has invited critique and many have pointed at the forms of political and social marginalisation that youth experience, and their sense of injustice about the distribution of economic resources (Honwana 2012; Sommers 2011; Mutisi 2012; Podder 2015). Yet there is little support for interventions that address young people's social and political marginalisation, through youth political citizenship, participatory governance and empowerment. One could arguably state that the policy message to young people is that they are welcome to contribute to a country's economic development, but are not expected to develop voice and agency and exercise full citizenship.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child put the foundations in place for youth participation, making the participation of children and youth an internationally recognised right. In December 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (UNSCR 2250), which emphasises participation of youth in peacebuilding *at all levels* of governance, in peace negotiations and in relevant interventions. The realm of local governance is an important arena for young people to get involved in peace and governance, as it may offer both formal and informal spaces and fora for their participation. It is therefore the right time to critically assess the possibilities for young people at the local level to engage in governance and peacebuilding.

There is, however, a paucity of literature on youth and local governance generally (McGee and Greenhalf 2011), and for fragile and conflict-affected settings in particular. There is furthermore a weak understanding of the specific relationship between young people and what they think of as 'the state' (Jeffrey and Dyson 2014). Many young people live in contexts of ongoing insecurity where space for social interactions is limited and political freedoms are restricted (Azmi, Brun and Lund 2013). Often, young people are very aware of the political aspects of their engagement, and of the potential risks (*ibid.* 2013; Oosterom and Pswarayi 2014). It is not clear, however, how this impacts their capacities for political engagements with governance actors. This paper addresses these gaps as it reviews existing literature on youth participation in local governance and peacebuilding from a range of fragile and conflict-affected settings, focusing on the politics and power dynamics that shape the ways in which youth engage in local governance processes through formal, state-initiated mechanisms, and also informally.

This paper recognises that governance, especially in conflict or post-conflict settings, is made up of a range of state and non-state actors and institutions that may overlap or interact, thus constituting 'hybrid' governance (Bagayoko, Hutchful and Luckham 2016). Various mechanisms have been employed in conflict and post-conflict settings to formalise youth participation, which are state-initiated and often state-led, and usually supported by regulatory frameworks (Cornwall and Schattan Coelho 2007). The paper considers these *formal mechanisms*, and reviews existing literature on National Youth Councils and quotas for including youth in local government frameworks. Young people may seek to influence both state and non-state authority through avenues outside the formal mechanisms created by the state, which we define as forms of *informal action*.

The paper will argue that formal mechanisms for involving youth in local governance are unlikely to be the most effective avenues for supporting youth inclusion in local democratic processes. Informal forms of youth action can generate insights about how youth organising happens, how young people understand peace, and what changes they want to see in governance in a broad sense of the term. However, informal youth actions need to be critically examined for how inclusive they are, and whose interests they serve. One main conclusion from the review conducted for this paper is that there is still a striking lack of research on the gendered experience of youth participation in local governance. A deeper understanding of young people's engagement in local governance requires further knowledge on three issues, which each require a dedicated gender analysis: first, how everyday processes of political socialisation evolve in violent contexts; second, the intergenerational power dynamics between young people and the adult generation, particularly at the interface between society and the local state; and third, the conditions under which young people channel their efforts into peaceful strategies that promote democratic processes, and when they take part in initiatives that are neither inclusive nor democratic.

This paper first elaborates on the policy context in section 2: the prioritising of young people as part of the international security agenda and through UNSCR 2250; and local governance as a realm of intervention for peacebuilding. Section 3 then discusses the opportunities, challenges and ambiguities of mechanisms that formalise youth participation in local governance. Section 4 discusses studies that looked at informal forms of youth action, youth initiatives and youth politics that are equally part of the local governance realm, although they are often overlooked. Section 5 further unpacks intergenerational dynamics as one of the key power dynamics at play when youth engage in local governance, and Section 6 presents the conclusions.

2 Policy context

2.1 Youth on the security agenda

The United Nations (UN) uses an age-based definition of 'youth' referring to youth as those in the 15–24 age group, whereas many African countries and institutions (including the African Union Youth Charter) stretch the age band and define youth as people aged 15–35. It is also common to see 'youth' as a social construct and as a pathway to adulthood. Generally, each society has defined social markers that mark the transition from youth to adulthood, which often describe the transition to a position of relative independence and autonomy. Social markers include a combination of marriage and starting a family, assuming certain caring responsibilities, and making contributions to the household (Abbink and Van Kessel 2005; De Boeck and Honwana 2005). In policy circles, these indicators are among the set of key transitions that youth are expected to make, alongside transitioning from education to paid work, and exercising citizenship (Hardgrove *et al.* 2014). However, in many contexts, chronological age does not at all map onto stages of the life course, and there is no

linear pathway for moving through these transitions to attain adulthood (Morrow 2013). Sommers (2012) describes the situation of unmarried, childless women who are in their late twenties as having missed the opportunity to attain the social status of 'adult' in the eyes of society, while the state defines youth as anyone up to the age of 35, and unmarried young women with children are regarded as prostitutes. It is thought that when transitions are 'blocked' and young people are stuck in 'waithood' (Honwana 2012), this creates a great sense of frustration (Kurtenbach 2014; Sommers 2012).

As mentioned, over the past decade, large numbers of jobless (predominantly male) youth came to be considered a security risk. A number of studies showed a correlation between large 'youth bulges' (where 60 per cent of the population or more are under 30 years old) and a country's instability (Urdal 2006). Referring to a citizen perception survey about what drives participation in rebel movements and gangs (Bøås, Tiltnes and Flatø 2010), the 2011 World Development Report (WDR) on conflict and security highlighted that high levels of youth unemployment, especially among young men, are a major 'factor' in the likelihood that a country experiences insecurity (World Bank 2011: 7–9). While this leaves room for identifying additional factors other than youth unemployment, policy actors tend to emphasise youth unemployment as a major factor for instability. According to the UN Office for West Africa (2005), youth unemployment 'fuels conflict and crime,' and therefore 'job creation [is] a key tool for conflict prevention'. More recently, the 'crisis of youth' has been addressed in interventions and debates that seek to *counter* violent extremism (CVE) or *prevent* violent extremism (PVE) (Venhaus 2010; Holmer 2013; Williams 2016).

Importantly, there is mixed and even contradictory evidence for a linear, causal relationship between youth unemployment and violence. National-level data on underemployment and unemployment do not adequately explain *which* young people participate in exactly *which kind* of violence (Cramer 2010; Dowd 2017). Many countries that have youth bulges have not experienced insurgencies or civil war, and the majority of young people do not participate in violence when faced with adversity (Sommers 2011; UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development 2016; Utas 2008). Critiques of approaches that focus on youth employment for peace warn against the risks of the securitisation of young people at the expense of building their relationship to the state (Munive 2010), and against an 'over-confidence in employment creation as the panacea for peaceful intergenerational relations' (Batmanglich and Enria 2014).

While UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security prioritises youth employment, it also promotes young people's political participation and thus could potentially address the imbalance in employment and participation-related funding. The resolution recognises that youth form the largest group of people affected by violent conflict and it emphasises the positive role they might play in peacebuilding and reconstruction, thus countering the narrative that projects youth as perpetrators of violence (Ortiz Quintilla 2016). Whereas previous resolutions have emphasised the protection of children and youth (Schnabel and Tabyshalieva 2013), UNSCR 2250 stresses the right of young people to participate in peacebuilding at all levels of governance, and that their voice should be supported in relevant institutions and interventions, including CVE. However, contrary to common UN definitions that define youth as people aged 15–24, UNSCR 2250 refers to youth as being aged 18–29, which risks excluding those that are in their formative years of political socialisation (Williams 2016). Another concern is that the UNSCR 2250 agenda might be overtaken by other security agendas like CVE or PVT (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, UNSCR 2250 may generate international momentum for thinking about young people's contributions to peacebuilding.

During conflict and in the aftermath of civil war, many issues are at stake that concern young people. In addition to the damaging impact on social infrastructure and services that will negatively affect the human development of all youth (Podder 2015), there are specific needs

around the disarmament and reintegration of young combatants (which may include reconciliation mechanisms) and survivors of gender-based violence (Mawson 2004; Schnabel and Tabyshalieva 2013). While recognising that all these issues are important, this paper is concerned with the opportunities and challenges for young people's participation in local governance, seeing this as a *potential* arena where young people may contribute to peace.

2.2 Peacebuilding and a 'turn to the local'

The growing focus on youth has been paralleled by efforts to use decentralisation as a mechanism for peacebuilding. As the results of national-level peacebuilding interventions were unsatisfactory and it became recognised that 'blueprints for peacebuilding' can overlook local realities, international actors started to include the local level in peacebuilding efforts (Leonardsson and Rudd 2015; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). Support to democratic decentralisation became one such area of intervention. It is believed that decentralisation offers potentially conflicting groups formal procedures and structures for relative autonomy, thus contributing to national unity and stability; it can also grant local authorities a formal role in conflict resolution at local level, and it can promote inclusion and popular participation (Leonardsson and Rudd 2015; Olowu 2003; Steiner 2007).

However, as Joshi and Schultze-Kraft (2014) note, there is still limited evidence that decentralisation actually promotes social inclusion, reduces conflict, and enhances state legitimacy. A number of factors are at play. Fragile and conflict-affected settings are characterised by the presence of state and non-state actors which exercise authority and establish forms of order, including through violence, and have varying degrees of legitimacy (Jackson and Scott 2008; Lister and Wilder 2005). Elite capture of local governments may strengthen patronage networks and patron–client relationships, which severely undermines any potential for conflict prevention and resolution through decentralisation (Schultze-Kraft and Morina 2014). Important lessons have been learnt, including that delegating authority and resources is not enough (García Villegas *et al.* 2011; Manning 2003, cited in Joshi and Schultze-Kraft 2014: 2), and the functioning of the local state needs to be seen in the wider social and political context. Further, decentralisation as part of peacebuilding remains a relatively state-centric approach through which local communities are expected to comply with donor programmes that are based on Western liberal ideas of universality (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013: 776). 'The local' is not supported in its local struggle for peace, and 'participation' and 'local ownership' are used as rhetorical devices to legitimise neoliberal understandings of statehood (*ibid.*). Thus, approaches need to start from what peace and insecurity mean from the perspectives of local populations and seek alignment, while taking into account that diverse perspectives exist.

Importantly, violence and conflict not only impact local state institutions but also the populations that are meant to interact with, make claims on, and demand accountability from them. The legacy of violence and past experiences with autocratic state actors may negatively impact on people's ability to make claims on state actors (Blunt and Turner 2005; Oosterom 2016; Steiner 2007; McGee 2014). In many places, insecurity and militarisation of social life continue after the end of conflict (Amzi *et al.* 2013) and in more repressive regime environments, the public sphere is experienced as unsafe (Thomson 2011). In such environments, a 'culture of fear' prevails and people refrain from interacting with state authorities in general or over certain, more politically sensitive issues (Oosterom 2016; Thomson 2011). This literature has not, however, focused on how violent conflict might affect the participation of young people, or addressed the power dynamics that hamper the effective inclusion of young people.

While framing 'youth' as being 'at risk' or being a 'risk to others' is undesirable, it is important to understand what growing up in volatile settings means for their trajectories as citizens, not

least because it shapes their capacities to take part in local governance. Youth is an important phase of life for political socialisation, and for the acquisition of (democratic) norms, values and behaviour (Kurtenbach 2014; Kurtenbach and Pawelz 2015). Post-conflict transitions and processes of democratisation may offer equal rights and avenues for participation that can, in theory, be empowering to young people (Kurtenbach and Pawelz 2015). At the same time, involving young people is far from straightforward. As capacities to engage in local democratic governance are 'learnt' over time and through exposure and experience, long periods of violent conflict will have limited people's opportunities to learn effective engagement strategies (Oosterom 2014; 2016). This means that extensive effort needs to go into building young people's confidence and their civic and political capacities before they are ready to engage in formal mechanisms. Furthermore, the local level is where many youth 'see the state' and experience forms of social and political exclusion on an everyday basis.

3 Youth participation through formal mechanisms

In post-conflict settings, formal avenues for youth participation are expected to open up as democratisation and transition processes start (Kurtenbach and Pawelz 2015; Kurtenbach 2014). With UNSCR 2250 in place, formal participatory mechanisms and processes for supporting youth participation may seem an attractive option to international donors. National youth councils or forums, youth parliaments, sector-specific consultations, and the inclusion of youth representatives in formal peace processes and local government structures are typical examples of these, and are considered formal mechanisms in this paper. Focusing on two of these mechanisms – youth councils and youth quotas – this section will show that valuable lessons learnt about citizen participation in formal mechanisms (Cornwall and Schattan Coelho 2007) are often cast aside. Youth councils and quotas in formal local government frameworks have been selected as these are commonly used instruments and also well-documented, whereas little evidence exists about mechanisms such as youth consultations for national or sub-national peace processes. Further, one donor-funded community-driven recovery programme that explicitly tried to improve local governance was reviewed for its impact on young people's participation, as well as interventions designed to strengthen young people's participation in local governance through service delivery.

3.1 State-led, formal mechanisms

While the participation of children and youth is a recognised right, and although they usually form the majority of a population, they are structurally excluded from decision-making processes based on legal and also socio-cultural grounds (McGee and Greenhalf 2011). Much like the discussion on citizens as 'users and choosers' or 'makers and shapers' (Cornwall and Gaventa 2000), youth participation is often narrowed down to youth being consulted as users of key services, rather than having a more influential, political voice (Checkoway and Gutierrez 2006; Percy-Smith 2010). Yet, youth political citizenship is the possibility for young people to have a 'real effect on the process, influence a particular decision or produce a favourable outcome' (Checkoway 2011: 341).[1] The bargaining and negotiating that occurs between youth and members of adult generations, whether adults or state officials, is a dynamic that distinguishes debates on youth participation from the more general literature on citizen participation.

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[1]   Modelled after Arnstein's ladder of participation, Hart (1997) developed the youth ladder of participation, which discusses the extent to which young people direct and take decisions and what extent adults have control in the process.

National-level institutions such **national youth policies** and **national youth councils** have attracted more visibility than local-level institutions. Several countries do have sub-national chapters of youth councils in place to channel youth voices from the local to the national level. Indeed, in various post-war contexts, national institutions have been created with the intention to address youth grievances and involve them in peacebuilding (Cubitt 2012). In Uganda, for instance, the incumbent regime used quota policies as a nation-building strategy after winning the guerrilla war in 1986, and created a national youth council as early as 1989. The new regime was well aware of young people's capacity for resistance when dissatisfied, and thus it wanted to present itself as an ally to the youth and unite them in one body, irrespective of tribe and ethnicity (Muriaas and Wang 2012). More recently, the Afghanistan National Youth Policy of 2014 (Government of Afghanistan 2014) and the Liberia National Youth Policy of 2012 (www.youthpolicy.org) explicitly mention the participation of youth at both the national and the local level to further peace and security. Often, however, governments pay lip service to such policies in the aftermath of war, overwhelmed by the demands of reconstruction (Podder 2015). Sierra Leone is a case in point, where a national youth policy was introduced in 2003 to support youth empowerment and participation, but youth employment was subsequently prioritised over young people's political participation (Cubitt 2012).

Research in stable settings with functioning democratic institutions has shown that youth councils offer viable avenues for young people to effectively participate in the planning of services, to review policies and take decisions over budgets earmarked for children and youth (Checkoway, Allison and Montoya 2005; Guerra 2002). The experience contributes to their political development as youth learn to mobilise for political action (*ibid.*). In fragile and conflict-affected settings, however, it appears that national youth councils have functioned primarily as vehicles for co-opting youth activists, have been reserved for young people linked to political elites, or have been hampered by political divisions (Cubitt 2012; Oosterom, Wignall and Wilson 2017; Traore 2011). While few national youth councils have been studied systematically, the existing evidence (see Table 3.1) suggests that youth parliaments and assemblies 'lack teeth' (*ibid.*: 31) as they fail to connect with formal political structures (McGee and Greenhalf 2011). Budgets of municipal and sub-national youth councils are often limited, the councillors are not involved in real decision- making processes by local governments or their recommendations are ignored (Cubitt 2012; Bangura and Specht 2012), even in issues relevant to youth (Racelis and Aguirre 2006; Sommers 2012). In Rwanda, even youth councillors themselves felt they were ineffective, while local governments considered them to be 'in charge' of the youth, organising and representing them (Sommers 2012: 81). In Nigeria, members of the National Youth Council are regarded by youth on the ground as representing the political status quo (Oosterom *et al.* 2017).

Table 3.1 Existing studies on youth perspectives on formal channels for youth representation in selected countries

Country	Known study*
Uganda	Effects of youth and gender quota (Muriaas and Wang 2012)
Sierra Leone	Discussion of National Youth Council (Cubitt 2012) and how the councillors are perceived (Oosterom *et al.* 2017)
Nigeria (Plateau State only)	Perspectives of Plateau State's Youth Council (Oosterom *et al.* 2017)
Rwanda	Perspectives of youth councillors at the local level (Sommers 2009)
Philippines	Review of municipal youth councils (Racelis and Aguirre 2006)

Note: * The list includes qualitative studies that may not have focused specifically on the functioning of national youth councils.

An important question for formal participatory mechanisms is that of representation (Oswald 2014; Cornwall and Schattan Coelho 2007). Interventions making provisions for youth inclusion have often uncritically assumed genuine youth representation, while 'youth' constitute a highly diverse social category. National and municipal youth councils face representation challenges as elite and urban youth councillors may have little interest in connecting with poorer, rural youth, and are unable to come up with policies that serve the interests of marginalised youth (Oosterom *et al.* 2017; Racelis and Aguirre 2006). A review of municipal youth councils in five cities in the Philippines showed that councils were organising activities that were either inaccessible or of little interest to the poorest, out-of-school youth, and marginalised youth felt intimidated by the better-educated youth councillors (Racelis and Aguirre 2006). Sommers (2012) finds that council members elected to the sub-national youth councils in Rwanda tend to be the better-educated youth, and while many are poor they are not among the destitute. The activities they organise therefore attract those who are better-off. One reason youth are resisting to organise in registered associations (which is what government wants) is that they distrust the better-educated youth leaders and fear being taken advantage of.

In several countries, **decentralised local governance frameworks** enable young people to stand for elections and become local youth councillors, and some countries have formally adopted youth quota systems. In Sierra Leone, democratic reforms have allowed youth candidates to be elected as local councillors and take part in ward development committees, which represented a step forward in terms of the opening up of political space following the war. However, in reality, it remains difficult for youth to be elected. Koroma (2012) describes how political parties refused to support young candidates in the 2008 local elections, and the youth who subsequently decided to run as independent candidates did not succeed. The ambiguity in the authority of chiefdom councils vis-à-vis elected councils has created confusion and friction between the two bodies, and elected councils have not offered youth the right forum to challenge chiefdom authority (Cubitt 2012). Also, tensions between youth members of parliament and youth councillors have stood in the way of effective youth mobilisation (*ibid.*). In Timor-Leste, youth have reserved seats in the local administration, the *suco* council, enrolled following independence from Indonesia. However, especially in rural areas, the characteristics of the customary governance system of *adat* – which prioritises seniority, patriarchy and hereditary authority – undermine effective participation of young people (Kurtenbach and Pawelz 2015). In Uganda, youth hold a fixed number of seats in parliament and at all levels of local government, elected through electoral colleges, alongside reserved seats for women and people with disabilities. A study by Muriaas and Wang (2012) shows that, especially in African contexts where much power is concentrated in the executive and presidency, quotas can become instrumental in consolidating the power of a government. As election candidates are expected to spend a lot of money on their campaigns, young people are inclined to go with the incumbent party that has the resources to sponsor them, and dependency on the party reinforces patronage. These examples illustrate how 'micropolitics' can interfere with the functioning of formal provisions for youth, and render those provisions ineffective.

3.2 Aid programmes supporting local governance

Of the **aid programmes** that focus on local governance in conflict and post-conflict settings, very few have specifically targeted young people. The Community-Driven Recovery (CDR) programme in Sierra Leone, GoBiFo, was a notable exception. Fitting with a 'turn to the local' in peacebuilding, CDR interventions are meant to have socio-political outcomes alongside development objectives, usually framed as promoting social cohesion and collective action, and increasing trust and legitimacy of state actors (Wong 2014; Mansuri and Rao 2004). As a general design principle, interventions create local development committees that decide over development grants, and they may also play a role in local dispute resolution. While it is

common for CDR programmes to include quotas for women, the GoBiFo CDR programme in Sierra Leone also included a quota for youth as members of the local committees.

A quantitative evaluation on the impact of GoBiFo shows no evidence of the empowerment of women and youth (Casey, Glennerster and Miguel 2012). Specifically, there was no change in the nature of their involvement and extent of their influence in other spheres of life, outside or beyond the lifetime of the programme. Most village development committee members were men older than 35, and members of chiefdom authorities. The study found a slight increase in positive attitudes that youth can be good leaders, but there was no evidence that this translated into more youth in actual leadership positions or their vocal participation in meetings. From the community meetings observed, adult males continued to dominate, with village heads and elders typically taking decisions. Although barriers to youth participation were not investigated, the evidence suggests that such barriers include the influence of socio-cultural norms and patterns of domination, as in the case of youth quotas in decentralised governance in Timor-Leste and Sierra Leone (described earlier).

International donors have funded programmes implemented by international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have taken a more 'indirect approach' to youth participation in local governance in fragile and conflict-affected settings. In each context, issues were selected that were considered not too politically sensitive and high risk for youth engagement, and then used as entry points for building young people's civic engagement with local government actors (Oosterom and Shahrokh 2016). This approach was sensitive to state perceptions of young people as a potential opposition force or violent insurgents, and therefore the issue of youth voice and empowerment had to be handled with caution. The My Rights My Voice programme and the Arab Regional Initiative, implemented by Oxfam GB and ActionAid respectively, actively built confidence and capacities of youth associations and networks to engage with local state actors, and promoted rights awareness through creative theatre and multimedia activities. This approach thus recognised that young people need civic and political capacities before encountering the state. Where programmes developed clear strategies for involving governance actors, and acted as brokers to open up and prepare state and non-state actors for youth participation, basic collaboration between young people and governance was more likely to occur. In Afghanistan, this involved a year of preparatory work by implementing partners to speak to customary and religious leaders, former Taliban elements and state officials at the local level (*ibid.*). Staff tried to persuade these actors that youth action was, for instance, not anti-religious or disrespectful of customary authority, and thus attempted to secure their buy-in. Learning from both programmes shows that gender equality needs dedicated strategies other than quotas, such as 'rules for deliberation' and support for male and female role models, otherwise young women can feel intimidated by male youth (*ibid.*).

To conclude, formal mechanisms for youth participation are not immune to some of the 'classic' participation challenges such as mechanisms having 'no teeth', weak representation and the exclusion of marginalised voices, and token participation. This section has also shown that the social category of 'youth' is often treated as homogenous and the power dynamics, social inequalities and hierarchies among young men and women are easily overlooked. The next section shows that similar dynamics also characterise informal forms of organising by young people.

4 Informal youth action and politics in everyday life

4.1 Individual and collective forms of informal youth action

A growing literature describes the ways in which young people are engaging in activities to further peace and development *outside* formal government frameworks, showing that young people are not just receivers and beneficiaries of policies and programmes but actively shaping their lives while navigating fragility (Vigh 2006). Studies from different fragile settings in Africa and Asia show how young people can take actions as individuals – taking up leadership roles and developing as political 'brokers' – and collectively, through networks and associations. This section reviews the literature and borrows some of the conceptual language developed for youth activism in stable settings (Jeffrey and Dyson 2014, 2016) to help explain what youth everyday politics may look like. Again, however, there is far less literature on gendered experiences of activism at the local level, or on the experiences of young female activists.

Research has addressed the range of motivations for young people's informal participation. Studies emphasise the importance of 'the everyday' as a site for action, resilience and resistance (Berents 2015), and that youth experience the immediate and longer-term ripple effects of fragility and conflict (Oosterom *et al.* 2017). Young people fear that a lack of mobility, work and educational opportunities may have negative implications for their ability to fulfil responsibilities associated with the transition to adulthood. These are therefore among the issues they are prepared to take action on. Importantly, their actions respond to, and are informed, by the forms of marginalisation that many youth experience, and thus emanate from the particularities of the social position of youth (Berents 2015; Jeffrey and Dyson 2014).

This self-awareness about their social positionality as youth works as a motivator, as young people (especially youth leaders) see youth as a period of action (Jeffrey and Dyson 2014: 201). Youth is a moment to reflect on the world and make change, a period of 'energy' that would likely be lost in adult life (Boersch-Supan 2012; Jeffrey and Dyson 2014, 2016). Youth describe themselves as the 'dynamos of community' and 'human resource man power' (*sic*) (Boersch-Supan 2012: 30), emphasising their 'energy' while the adults have 'experience' (*ibid.*), and see themselves as change agents (Turner 2015). At the same time, views on youth as a period of action are strongly gendered, with female activists in India, for instance, noting that their opportunities for participation might end as soon as they get married, because in-laws may not endorse their actions (Jeffrey and Dyson 2016).

Apart from taking on concrete issues like education and livelihoods, young people's organising may be motivated by their implicit critiques of the mode of governance they know. Often, young people are indifferent to or explicitly distance themselves from ways of working of formal local councils, politicians and political parties, and bureaucrats, seeing them as corrupt and self-enriching (Azmi *et al.* 2013; Durham 2008; Jeffrey and Dyson 2014; Boersch-Supan 2012), which motivates them to do things on their own. In some contexts, young people formed associations to escape patrimonialism and operate independently from patronage relationships in which strong leaders maintain strong, personal ties and networks to exercise authority (Diouf 2003), as well as the social norms and forms of customary authority that youth experience as constraints on their social mobility (Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010).

In a community in South Africa governed by customary authority, a youth association was formed in response to community grievances concerning the absence and inactivity of the

chief (Turner 2015). Rather than challenging the chief openly, the association organised open meetings to discuss gaps in service delivery, partnered with a range of actors (including traditional councillors and party members), and brokered with officials at the provincial level. In so doing, they practised the kind of governance they desired (*ibid.*: 131). While older generations were still fearful of authority – a legacy of the apartheid regime – young people wanted to demonstrate that engagement does not invoke violence. Their actions culminated in a mass demonstration over government failures and local corruption. The youth association eventually dismantled as its activities did not produce satisfactory government responsiveness. However, Turner (*ibid.*) argues that an important outcome of the youth actions was the modelling of new ways of interacting with state authorities and especially the chiefs, whereas in the past, local spaces for participation had been tainted by the fear of authority and, ultimately, violence.

Studies have also looked into individual forms of activism, ranging from more subtle support to community processes and politics to youth taking up informal leadership roles. Korzenevica's (2016) study finds that young people in Nepal sometimes purposefully engage in community work or other tasks to cover for their parents, to enable them to attend community and political meetings. Migrant youth living in towns even come home to perform such tasks, thus navigating a sense of responsibility towards their family, their aspirations for a life in towns, and their wish to contribute to community development at home. Based on a study among educated underemployed young men in Uttarakhand, northern India, Jeffrey and Dyson (2014) distinguish different forms of youth activism. Some young individuals work as brokers: they petition and negotiate with state authorities for improvements in local services, help local communities in their dealings with the local state, and may also be engaged in solving problems and disputes among local people. Others are more overtly political and engage in accountability actions, explicitly produce political critiques of governance, participate in public meetings and mobilise peaceful protest, and might stand for office. The authors emphasise that these young people deliberately act in a polite and civic manner in order to attain their goals, rather than taking violent action.

This section has shown that many young people take informal actions to change formal government processes, and to strengthen local governments' accountability and responsiveness. It also shows that young people act as political brokers and social mobilisers in a variety of ways. It is important to understand where young people are already taking action and what motivates them; it is clear from the examples reviewed that youth are as concerned about concrete issues as about the way governance is done, and they can offer critiques as well as models for new ways of governance. Because these actions often remain within the informal realm, they are often not recognised as forms of political engagement by external actors, while they offer important clues for what motivates young people to get organised, and how they go about it.

4.2 Political socialisation and learning citizenship

Which political ideas and which forms of political behaviours have young people learnt when they grow up in conflict-affected or repressive settings, when they have never witnessed a functioning democratic state? Azmi *et al.* (2013) argue that young people's political agency needs to be seen in relation to the possibilities they find when civic space is restricted due to violence or state repression. Their study in eastern and northern parts of Sri Lanka, where the war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government of Sri Lanka was fought, shows how youth have grown up to learn which spaces are safe and which are not, and that they need to adopt different strategies within those spaces (*ibid.*). After the end of the war in 2009, social life continued to be militarised due to the many checkpoints and the presence of the state military, ongoing insecurity, and restricted freedom of speech. When youth encounter the military, many will be silent to stay safe and to avoid being associated with the military or police. Instead, many young people perform roles that

are acceptable as 'good citizens' and participate in youth groups, help arrange funerals, organise sports activities, and join anti-alcohol campaigns, for instance. Very few will develop a vocal presence in public spaces, deterred by the militarised environment.

Yet even in these challenging settings, instances of youth mobilisation have happened, and the existing studies point to a number of enabling factors. In Sri Lanka, university students were the more vocal activist youth, enabled by the many social networks in universities and their status as educated youths (*ibid.*). In Turner's (2015) study on South African youth, the leaders of the association comprised youth in their twenties and thirties with prior experience in local initiatives, student organisations and labour unions. They were aware of their rights and not afraid to confront authority. Importantly, they used this experience to pursue public, rather than self-serving, interests. Where instances of political action have been successful, this leaves an imprint on their collective memory, which breeds confidence for further action as well as learnt tactics for engagement (Jeffrey and Dyson 2014). Or in the case of Turner's (2015) study in South Africa, young people decided to take a different approach after a previous youth association's more confrontational tactics had not worked. These examples underline the importance of prior experience with youth organising, and the networks through which forms of action are learnt and protected, as indeed earlier studies on effective citizen participation have shown (Gaventa and Barrett 2012).

In Sierra Leone, before the Ebola crisis, Boersch-Supan (2012) observed the prevalence of a human rights discourse among youth, which has developed as the result of both internal and external processes. The war effected a slow change in social norms, whereby power held by customary chiefs (which are part of the formal decentralised governance system, see Tom (2014)) was no longer acceptable and legitimate, while international actors were also heavily promoting a human rights discourse. Young people were using a notion of rights to be included in decisions over how community labour was organised by the chiefs, for instance, and no longer accepted that chiefs were simply 'ordering' them. However, Boersch-Supan noted that the questioning of authority of chiefs only happens in places with relatively strong youth organisations. Tom (2014) showed that chieftaincy authorities still possess symbolic, coercive and material powers that override young people's efforts to stand up to chiefs by using a human rights discourse. Sometimes, chiefs even use 'human rights sensitisation' against young people by saying that youth are 'disturbing 'peace in the chiefdom' (2014: 333).

More than studies on formal youth participation, studies on everyday forms of youth action and mobilisation have pointed to the importance of households and families in which young people are embedded. Korzenevica's (2016) study on youth in Nepal, for example, points at the significance of households and families for young people's action. According to Thorsen (2013: 206), households 'are sites of both joint and separate interests'. They are also the primary institutions for political socialisation (Kurtenbach 2014) and 'the place for the expression and articulation of political motivations' (Korzenevica 2016: 21; cf. Smith 2009). In many conflict and post-war contexts, the household is the intimate sphere where people dare speak about politics, when the public sphere is still experienced as insecure and militarised (Azmi *et al.* 2013). Zimbabwean youth, for example, said that family members were important in helping them to learn to navigate political actors and stay safe in a volatile situation, including by being silent on sensitive issues (Oosterom and Pswarayi 2014).

Different trajectories of political socialisation in these contexts may be an important part of the explanation of how young people come up with different responses to insecurity and marginalisation, but this has received very little attention. Studies reviewed here suggest that in order to prepare young people for participation in local governance, efforts should not just go into training the individual on knowledge of systems, but build experiential knowledge, discuss norms about authority and legitimacy, and also involve parents to ensure that young people feel supported. The following section addresses forms of informal youth action that

are also responses to insecurity, but are very different from the 'youth activists' and youth associations described above.

4.3 'Ambiguous' forms of youth action

All of the above examples of everyday youth actions are relatively positive cases of young people seeking to change and develop their communities. This reflects a trend in the literature on youth and conflict that emphasises young people's agency in contexts of violent conflict, as opposed to a perceived passivity as victims. However, this has led to rather normative definitions of agency that stress the 'ability to influence processes or structures', doing something 'productive' and making improvements to one's life (Bordonaro and Payne 2012). However, young people's agency may be more 'ambiguous': when coping with conflict environments, youth are having to choose between sup-optimal pathways and make choices that are potentially harmful to their own health and wellbeing (*ibid.* 2012; Seymour 2012). This section reviews some of the literature which looks at forms of youth action that are not necessarily democratic and inclusive, or which, as part of hybrid governance institutions, might interfere with local democratic processes. Specifically, it will look at exclusionary practices embedded in youth actions, youth involved in patronage relationships, and vigilantism. Where possible, gendered experiences are addressed, but few studies have addressed gender dimensions of forms of coping that are deemed negative.

The issue of youth diversity, especially inequalities and political divisions, and the associated challenge of representation, is as apparent in everyday youth action as it is in measures promoting formal youth participation. Young activists may work to attain certain social goods but nonetheless reproduce or even exacerbate divisions between better-off and more marginalised groups. The educated unemployed male and female activists Jeffrey and Dyson (2016) wrote about addressed concerns that were irrelevant to very poor youth belonging to lower castes in India. Young male activists have been seen to reproduce conservative ideas about young women, and their actions have endorsed behaviour considered appropriate for young women, disciplining deviant behaviour (Jeffrey and Dyson 2014). In fact, the rather masculine notions of joined struggle and comradeship that motivate young males to get active can inhibit the participation of young women (*ibid.*). Furthermore, political loyalties can divide youth in their attempts to change local governance, as Dawson (2014) illustrates with her case in a South African township. Von Hellerman (2010) wrote about the different roles played by youth in challenging excesses of patrimonial rule by the governing chief of the town of Udo, in Niger Delta. Many youth played a prominent role in the protests when people had grown extremely dissatisfied with the level of extortion and predatory practices by their chief. Other youth, those belonging to the chief's quarters and constituting the Youth Association of his council, enforced these practices – for instance, at road blocks to levy fees. The chief was eventually forced to leave and a group of chiefs belonging to a younger generation took over the governing of the town, supported by 'their' youth who formed a new youth association with youth from all quarters, except those belonging to the ousted chief.

The possibility that patron–client relationships are strengthened through local governance in conflict and post-conflict settings is a known risk (Schultze-Kraft and Morina 2014), and some studies have shown how this applies to young people. Engaging in patronage relationships is not necessarily opportunistic behaviour: Seymour (2014) noted how trying to get a patron was just one survival strategy employed by young people in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as the most common support mechanisms available to youth (e.g. financial assistance from parents and relatives) had deteriorated as the result of conflict. While young people challenged patronage practices of leaders in some places (Turner 2015), they backed new leaders with the expectation that these would act as their patrons in others (Dawson 2014), leading Pratten to conclude (2006: 720) that 'they challenge clientelism and yet demand cooption' and fight to have their share in patronage.

In a study of a South African township, Dawson (2014) showed that young men were the visible mobilisers of protests against a local councillor whose legitimacy was questioned as she allegedly gave out favours to clients. However, these young men were brokering on behalf of (adult) others who aspired to her position. Youth leaders are known to have developed patronage practices themselves (Boersch-Supan 2012), and some are so strongly integrated into elite family networks of chiefs that they help reproduce elite power in resource distribution (*ibid.*). Even in places where organised youth actions are aimed at escaping adult control and patrimonialism, youth associations are enmeshed with patronage networks (Boersch-Supan 2012; Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010). In Sierra Leone, post-war associational life such as in bike rider associations and small youth cooperatives have developed links to chiefs and commercial elites as their patrons, and their youth leaders are invited to local chiefdom councils. The functioning of these associations thus remains guided by mutual obligations between patrons and clients (Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010).

The existence of hybrid political and security systems has been discussed especially for the African context (Bagayoko *et al.* 2016; Meagher 2012), where security functions, taxation, and a range of services are carried out by both state and non-state institutions like customary and religious authorities, and in the context of fragile and conflict-affected states also by armed groups. Again, few studies have analysed the specifics of youth involvement in hybrid governance institutions. While functions are carried out by adults and youth alike, it is likely that youth, especially young men, take up specific roles in the everyday enforcement of order and as brokers between authorities and 'the people' (Dawson 2014; von Hellerman 2010). There is also evidence that the participation of young men in hybrid security institutions is part of their upbringing and socialisation to become 'good men' (Oosterom 2017).

Vigilantism is an example of a non-state security institution that may have antagonistic or symbiotic relationships to state security institutions, and is strongly associated with youth involvement (Sen 2012; Meagher 2007). In Nigeria, vigilante groups exist in all parts of the country, but take different forms. They have historical roots and need to be understood as part of local political economies (Meagher 2007; Pratten 2008). Various studies show that beyond community policing, their activities extend into other realms of local governance. Vigilante groups in Akwa Ibom state, for example, actively engage in local governance by monitoring local government expenditure and checking the compensation payments to chiefs (Pratten 2006). In large cities like Lagos, organised groups of 'area boys' organise access to and control over economic resources and distribution by collecting illegal levies and taxes from private and commercial transporters, builders and other enterprises, and visitors to 'their' area (Gore and Pratten 2003; Ismail 2009). In Jos city, capital of Nigeria's Plateau state, vigilante groups do not only patrol the streets and locate crime suspects, but also intervene and help to settle disputes involving people belonging to different ethnic groups to prevent escalation of inter-ethnic conflict (Oosterom *et al.* 2017).

In a study on youth everyday action in Plateau state, many young people highlighted that local vigilante groups contributed to security in their neighborhoods and were considered an important avenue for young people to contribute to peace in their communities (Oosterom *et al.* 2017). The legitimacy that vigilante groups enjoy in Plateau state must be understood against a background of a failing and corrupt police force and other state security actors in Nigeria. While they are partly a product of fragility, they can also be part of conflict dynamics by cementing social divisions and siding with political actors. For instance, as Christian–Muslim relations grew tense in the context of Nigeria's Middle Belt region following escalation of ethnoreligious violence in Jos in 2002, Christian vigilante group members in Kadoma state started policing inter-ethnic relationships, and stopped Christian females from starting relationships with Muslim men (Higazi 2008). While groups were ethnically mixed prior to the 2002 crisis, they now started mobilising along ethnoreligious lines (*ibid.*).

This section has shown that young people engage in everyday actions and politics, although the existing literature has prioritised the role of young men. They respond to everyday challenges, sometimes out of the need to survive in deeply insecure environments, sometimes motivated by the wish to change the way in which politics is done and out of an awareness that youth can drive change. Everyday engagements contribute to a process of political socialisation that youth undertake on their paths to adulthood. At the same time, in having to respond to the challenges of living in contexts of fragility, young people also take action that is not necessarily aligned with democratic local governance. It is argued that international aid agencies prefer to see a particular kind of 'youth empowerment' that is disciplined and well-mannered (Durham 2008, cited in Tom 2014). Certainly they are uneasy with forms of collective organisation that are unruly, may influence others through force, and are not congruent with liberal democratic values. These examples of youth action are likely to be considered 'ambiguous' from the perspective of actors who promote local democratic governance, while they are legitimate and an attractive avenue for youth engagement from a youth perspective. This underlines the need to understand a wider spectrum of forms of youth action, and how they are part of the wider context of hybrid governance.

5 Intergenerational power dynamics

This section elaborates on intergenerational power dynamics, which appear as a key dynamic in formal mechanisms for youth participation as well as informal forms of youth action in the everyday, and therefore merit further attention. As mentioned, the interface between youth and adult generations and the bargaining that occurs is what makes youth participation different from citizen participation. In different studies on youth participation in the global North, the presence of supportive adults who mentor youth and help facilitate a process but then step back to leave enough room for youth to make their own decisions is highlighted as a contributing factor to the success of participatory mechanisms (Checkoway *et al.* 2005). Yet examples from fragile and conflict-affected settings show how young people often experience the adult generation as a major obstruction to enjoying full citizenship and making the transition to adulthood (Kurtenbach 2014). In different contexts, it is usually the adult generation that determines access to state institutions, and adult customary authority can decide over access to assets such as land, but also institutions like marriage, and customary governance political institutions (Boersch-Supan 2012). Whereas the social positionality of youth can be a source of motivation for youth action, as mentioned above, their positionality thus also generates specific power dynamics.

As with the existing literature on citizen participation in local governance, the literature on youth participation highlights that what happens at the interface between the local state and society shapes the opportunities for young people to participate (Joshi and Schultze-Kraft 2014; McGee and Greenhalf 2011). In a study on youth and political violence in the southern region of Zimbabwe, youth could list ten degenerative terms in English and vernacular, describing young people as lazy, idle, thieves, thugs, criminals and drug users (Oosterom and Pswarayi 2014). Older generations sometimes blame youth for the continuation of insecurity after the end of a conflict (Kurtenbach and Pawelz 2015). Local state officials often also exhibit such views (McGee and Greenhalf 2011: 30; Sommers 2012). For Rwanda, Sommers (2012) describes the frustration expressed by local officials that youth do not take on board what they felt was well-informed advice, and refuse to come together in registered associations despite the awareness among officials that persistent high levels of distrust in communities hampers young people's collective action. In Guatemala and other countries, state actors perceive young people to be the drivers of gang violence, and negative stereotypes of violent, criminal youth overshadow the implementation of policies that enable youth participation (Kurtenbach and Pawelz 2015). In many cases, government officials lack the knowledge as well as social and facilitation skills to interact with young people, engage

them in governance and contribute to their citizenship learning (McGee and Greenhalf 2011; Ochieng and Ochola Anyango 2011; Traore 2011). Instead, their mode of interacting with young people tends to be directive, dominated by instructions and orders (Sommers 2012: 78). Such perceptions and discourses not only discourage young people from using formal avenues for participation, they also limit the chances that young people are listened to or can make any meaningful contribution within such spaces.

In many post-conflict societies, there is an issue around the mechanisms through which adults legitimise the dominance of adult authority. In various contexts, adults maintain control over political institutions based on claims over their participation in armed struggles, which allows them to ignore or block the voice of young people (Kurtenbach and Pawelz 2015; Oosterom and Pswarayi 2014). The term 'born-free generation' refers to the generation born after the end of apartheid in South Africa, and to the generation of young people born after the liberation war fought in Zimbabwe. In both countries it is effectively used to delegitimise the voices of young people who did not participate in the struggle (Oosterom and Pswarayi 2014). More generally, in many societies, social norms require young people to listen and be subservient to adult authority and adults interpret any form of criticism or even alternative viewpoints as disrespect. For young women, these norms are often reinforced by gendered norms about the behaviour of women in the public sphere. Also in the realm of formal local government, masculine political cultures that seem 'defensively patriarchal', as Ahikire (2007: 118) writes of Uganda, where there are quotas for women and youth representation at every level of local government. However, she observed that in local election campaigns, female candidates 'had to prove that they were "real" women despite the fact that they sought public office' (*ibid.*) by kneeling and begging for votes. Women attending local council meetings are expected to speak last, and young women not at all.

This literature suggests that a viable intergenerational contract needs to be in place, including between customary authority and youth, before young people can have any meaningful engagement with local governance institutions. In different societies, both young and adult generations are in agreement that a division of labour and roles exists between adults and youth, and that youth carry out certain tasks as part of their social trajectory to adulthood (Boersch-Supan 2012; Oosterom 2017). However, such an intergenerational contract can break down in the wake of conflict. For instance, in Liberia, the war changed perceptions of how much young people should contribute to the household (Munive 2010; Podder 2015). In northern Uganda, the legitimacy of customary authorities like chiefs and elders eroded during the conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army and the government of Uganda (Dolan 2009; Finnström 2003; Oosterom 2016). Here, young people feel the elders cannot play an advisory role as their knowledge is not relevant to some of today's challenges, although they find them still useful for resolving disputes over land borders (for instance). In Sierra Leone, young people no longer accepted the terms of the social contract between them and customary authority after the civil war, resisting the power of chiefs. They feel they are insufficiently included in decision-making and in the management of communal labour, presided over by chiefs. They feel that the 'learning' is one-way: they are expected to take advice from elders yet elders are not receptive to the views of youth (Boersch-Supan 2012).

In the Kerio valley area of northern Kenya, affected by violent conflict in relation to (commercial) cattle-raiding, elders no longer enjoy the same level of respect among young people, partly because the elders are believed to be involved in commercial raiding themselves (Elfversson 2016). Although elders were previously important in brokering peace between raiding groups in the past, the partial erosion of their legitimacy as well as the scale of commercial raiding is limiting their role in peacebuilding. As Elfversson (2016: 482) explains, in a peace process led by elders in the early 2000s, community-level consultations involving women and youth had to be organised prior to the inter-group negotiations conducted by elders to lend legitimacy to the process.

To conclude, these examples suggest that adults and adult leaders are not evidently taking up roles such as youth facilitators and mentors, or are not accepted as such, in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Intergenerational power dynamics often pose a major constraint to young people's engagement in local governance and peacebuilding. Yet, this is a power dynamic that has received relatively little attention with regards to local governance. In these settings, efforts are required to enhance mutual understanding and put a new intergenerational contract in place.

6 Conclusion

A policy discourse that stresses the potential of young people to contribute to peace and security is a welcome departure from dominant discourses that have emphasised young people being 'at risk' or a 'risk to others'. The adoption of UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security may prompt an international response to support different forms of youth participation in national and local peacebuilding processes. However, important lessons about citizen participation and local governance in conflict settings may be cast aside. This paper has highlighted the following issues that are central to understanding how young people are part of – and take part in – local governance in fragile and conflict-affected settings, issues that need to be addressed in any approach seeking to support young people in local governance and peacebuilding.

- There is a risk of seeing 'youth' as a homogenous category, overlooking important power inequalities among youth, especially based on gender and socioeconomic status, but also based on political loyalties, with huge implications for youth representation in political institutions.
- Among donors there may be an inclination to focus on formal measures for youth inclusion and participation, through institutions such as national youth councils, even though these are known to have major flaws, including 'lacking teeth' and sometimes excluding marginalised youth.
- Young people are engaged in a wide range of informal actions in everyday life (brokering between communities and local state actors, protesting dysfunctional state institutions, providing security) to further the peace and development of their communities, although operating from within a landscape of constraints and sometimes in the margins. Yet they offer important insights for identifying what young people's priorities are in these contexts, and what forms of organising work for them.
- Young people's actions are not necessarily democratic and inclusive, especially when they are part of hybrid governance institutions. It seems easier to enhance the kind of youth associations considered 'benign' in the eyes of external actors and work with them on gender equality and inclusion – although in practice this is often still a challenging task. It is far more complicated to decide on an approach to the more 'ambiguous' forms of youth organising such as vigilante groups.
- Intergenerational dynamics are part of the power dynamics that shape local state–society relations as most state officials belong to the adult generation that may disregard young people. Also, within local communities, age-based hierarchies exist. Expectations and norms about the role of the adult generation – what it is meant to do for youth and what youth are expected to do in return – have often changed in conflict-affected settings. Trust between generations has often broken down, but some degree of receptiveness to young people and mutual understanding is needed for collaboration to happen across generations.

There are still major gaps in knowledge that merit further research. Above all, there is still a weak understanding of gendered experiences of participation in local governance by young women. The phrase 'women and youth' in practice often means 'adult women and male youth', and thus more work needs to be done to understand the experiences of young women. There is limited understanding of the conditions under which young people opt for more or less violent forms of action, and for more or less democratic forms of youth organising, and little understanding of which conditions allow them to become inclusive and manage to bridge social and political divisions. Different processes of political socialisation in violent contexts might account for young people making different choices when engaging in local governance, but it is not at all clear how socialisation happens in these contexts, and which factors contribute to building the political capacities of young people to negotiate with state actors and take up positions of leadership. Finally, while this paper has presented some evidence for the importance of intergenerational power dynamics, this too needs further research – for instance, into how these dynamics work in conjunction with social norms, and gender dynamics. This knowledge is of vital importance for actors seeking to support the participation of young women and men in local governance and peacebuilding.

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