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2025 Peacebuilding Fund Thematic Review on Youth, Peace and Security

Erica Gaston, Imane Karimou, Luisa Kern and Emma Bapt

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About the authors

The project director and lead author was Erica Gaston. The investigation of three of the four main research cohorts was led by a team of youth researchers: Imane Karimou, Luisa Kern and Emma Bapt. Each of these co-authors drafted four linked reports that expand on the information and analysis gathered with respect to the four main cohorts described in this report. Four additional youth researchers also contributed to the research, project reviews, interviews and analysis: Marie Roepsch, Dalia Attallah, Marc Werner and Raphael Bodewig. Jack Durrell and Tess Pilkington provided copy-editing and communications support.

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Erica Gaston, Imane Karimou, Luisa Kern and Emma Bapt

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List of acronyms

ACCORD	African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
APPR-RCA	Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic
AU	African Union
CAR	Central African Republic
CSO	Civil society organization
CPS	Climate, Peace and Security
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRF	Immediate Response Facility
ITC	International Trade Centre
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PBC	Peacebuilding Commission
PBF	Peacebuilding Fund
PBSO	Peacebuilding Support Office
ProDoc	Project document
PVE	Prevention of Violent Extremism
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, or the UN Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNU-CPR	United Nations University Centre for Policy Research
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WHO	World Health Organization
WFP	World Food Programme
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
YCON	Youth Citizen Observer Network
YPI	Youth Promotion Initiative
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security

Executive summary

The landmark Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) recognized the "important and positive contribution of youth in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security" and set out five pillars for youth involvement. It urged Member States to encourage young people's inclusive representation and participation in local, national, regional and international decision-making, as well as in mechanisms for conflict resolution and prevention, efforts to counter violent extremism, supporting peace processes, disarmament and reintegration, and other peacebuilding efforts.[1]

Since 2015, many parts of the United Nations (UN) system, as well as regional organizations, Member States, civil society organizations (CSOs) and other actors have put significant effort behind advancing the YPS agenda, among them the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), which has given substantial support to engaging youth in peacebuilding programming and in conflict prevention. In addition to a specific funding modality known as the Youth Promotion Initiative (YPI), which was introduced in 2016, the 2020–2024 PBF Strategy set an internal annual target for 25 per cent of funding to support empowerment of women and youth.[2] Between 2018 and 2024, through 167 projects across 48 countries and territories, the PBF invested more than $311 million towards the implementation of the YPS agenda.[3] This Review considers how this type of programming contributes to advancing the YPS agenda, in particular the participation pillar, by drawing best practices or lessons learned from 41 PBF-supported projects approved from 2018 to 2022.

Impact of youth-focused programming on the advancement of the YPS agenda

The projects demonstrated numerous ways that peacebuilding programming can help advance the YPS agenda. The initiatives within them helped expand space for youth participation and engagement in decision-making at local, national and regional levels by establishing or supporting youth councils or other representative bodies; by fostering linkages and dialogue with key stakeholders; and creating channels for youth input and engagement on a range of issues. Several projects fostered youth networks or YPS coalitions or facilitated the development of National Action Plans on YPS or other national strategies or policies on youth. Peacebuilding programming also helped support the active engagement of young people in key peace and security processes, including youth inclusion in post-conflict transition processes, involving youth networks in conflict monitoring and local mediation, and involving youth in emerging programming related to Climate, Peace and Security (CPS).

In addition to taking forward key YPS objectives, the projects provided further evidence of how youth involvement can meaningfully advance peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Young people who took part in local councils or dispute resolution bodies proved able to help mediate and defuse local sources of conflict and tension, resulting in lowered rates of violence and increased prospects for conflict prevention in these communities. They did so not just by dealing with disputes between youth, but also by helping to address and forestall broader community disputes and tensions. Young people brought different viewpoints and bases of knowledge, such that when included, they tangibly improved efforts to address root causes and drivers of conflict. For example, in projects focused on the management of natural resources and the nexus between conflict and environmental stressors, young people were often the first to understand the impact of climate change, and to both propose and embrace new technologies, techniques and community management strategies to help mitigate its effects.

Although in some countries the space for youth engagement was quite closed, in others, engagement via youth proved to be a neutral meeting ground, with certain groups of youth able to engage despite local or regional faultlines. Youth exchanges were the vanguard of efforts to encourage regional peacebuilding and reconciliation in the Western Balkans. Youth were seen as peacebuilding intermediaries in Somalia, able to bridge clan lines in ways that other sectors of the population could not, to broker cooperation and reduce intercommunal conflict. Although they faced challenging contexts, projects like the one supporting a conflict monitoring network in Sudan showed that youth have a role to play not only in prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding, but also in helping mitigate and manage the effects of ongoing conflicts.

Learning on best practices and key strategies

The projects illustrated a number of best practices, and also provided valuable lessons on how to navigate some persistent issues in youth-focused peacebuilding. Many of the challenges that these projects responded to – discrimination or stigma against youth, high levels of youth poverty or unemployment, or lack of educational opportunities – exist on such a large scale that they can be

difficult to tackle through small-scale programming. To even try to catalyse larger and more sustainable changes, as PBF support is often intended to do, may require significantly longer duration than is typical in PBF-supported projects (just over 24 months in this sample).

Given the scale of the challenges, each individual youth-focused peacebuilding project must be thought of as part of a larger chain of youth engagement and empowerment. One project might help lay the foundation for youth empowerment by investing in youth capacities and networks, or nudge forward incremental gains in involving young people in dispute resolution or local community discussions by building on past programming or successful local models. Then, where windows of opportunity arise, these past investments in youth capacities and incremental gains can be built upon for more substantial gains and successes. For these reasons, the PBF, or other funding partners in this space, should not be hesitant to support iterative or sequential programming, which can achieve discrete project results and catalytic effects within any given project, but also build on past investments to ensure greater continuity and sustainability.[4] The findings suggest that supporting this iterative and sequential approach can be particularly important in trying to scale up youth participatory mechanisms and initiatives from a local level to a national or regional level.

The projects also illustrated how particular project components and strategies can help in overcoming some of the barriers to youth participation. Individual empowerment was incredibly important, with many projects supporting young people's ability to be knowledgeable, active participants. However, equally important were investments in platforms or networks for supporting young people to engage collectively. These mechanisms and platforms helped surmount access barriers and anchor youth voices within broader decision-making spaces, ultimately allowing efforts towards individual transformation and advocacy to become more than the sum of their parts.

Attention to young people's socioeconomic needs and vulnerabilities, and enabling opportunities for young people to showcase what they can do, also featured as some of the most successful strategies. Addressing young people's socioeconomic vulnerabilities can be a prerequisite to their participation in other arenas, both because it helps address youth needs, freeing them to then take action elsewhere, but also because it affords youth a more equivalent status and position to engage with credibility. The projects dealing with climate and other environmental peacebuilding issues proved to be a particularly strong example of the importance of socioeconomic considerations and livelihood strategies. Many of these projects focus on land issues and natural resources, which sit at the core of community concerns. Involving young people in such work enabled them to have an impact on critical issues for their community, on their own livelihoods and economic futures, and on issues viewed as root causes of conflict. Yet, although there are many natural synergies between YPS and CPS, so far the level of programming in this space is limited. Given how promising this is as an area for youth engagement, and how much young people can bring to CPS, there is much more room for investment.

The idea of allowing young people to showcase what they can do went beyond the realm of climate and environmental programming, however; whether it was allowing youth to establish community service initiatives, resolve local disputes, act as messengers of peace, or design their own peacebuilding campaigns, projects that showcased youth's ability to contribute appeared far more effective at dismantling stigmas and stereotypes than intervention strategies premised on simply communicating youth's potential. Such approaches also limited the risk of tokenistic youth involvement in programmes, and helped carry forward the key goals underlying the participation pillar of the YPS agenda.

This Review also paid attention to emerging practice on intersectional work, and to strategies for the protection and inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable youth. Many youth activists, civil society partners and UN entities have been pushing hard to strengthen such considerations and mainstream them across all youth programming. Nonetheless, the project experiences and expert interviews suggest that fully seeing through commitments for diverse engagement and the protection needs of certain youth are outstanding challenges for the field. Interlocuters noted accessibility concerns, many of which could be addressed by additional budget provisions or more extensive preparation. Many also called for more structural measures – with safeguarding measures built into budgets, protocols and project design modalities – as a way to reinforce the rhetorical support for this area.

In terms of partnerships with young people and youth organizations, new models for grant-giving and co-partnership in implementation of projects have enabled more local organizations, including those led by young people, to lead on YPS initiatives. This includes models of seed-funding and subgrant-giving that have allowed young people to take forward their own initiatives, as well as efforts to involve young people more in everything from

project design to monitoring and evaluating projects. However, a general issue in the field (not specific to work supported by the PBF) is that there is still insufficient youth input and ownership over the design and implementation of peacebuilding programming, and only a small trickle of funding towards YPS goes directly to youth organizations.

Recommendations and next steps

The Review pointed to the importance of youth-focused and youth-led programming in peacebuilding as well as the PBF's leading role in this respect. In the interviews, a large number of the implementing partners and representatives of UN entities observed that youth inclusion is considered almost a necessary element within any programming proposed for PBF funding, signalling the priority that has been given to this area. Nonetheless, those interviewed suggested a number of additional steps to strengthen youth programming and advancement of the YPS agenda, both via work supported by the PBF and by strategies or practices taken up by other practitioners or funding partners.

- **Create opportunities for youth to lead, and to showcase their abilities.** Whether involving youth in community planning, renovation or other public works, or giving youth the chance to spearhead conflict resolution or community awareness, allowing youth to "show by doing" is important in dismantling stigmas and barriers to further participation.
- **Consider socioeconomic needs and components in nearly all youth peacebuilding programming.** Socioeconomic concerns were so central to youth exclusion and vulnerability, and economic participation proved to be such a lynchpin for other forms of youth participation, that it would be hard to have strong catalytic effects and impact without some attention to these issues.
- **Invest in platforms, structures or networks of youth,** including youth councils or representative bodies, youth activism platforms or networks, and youth-led organizations. Identifying more routes to financially support youth-led organizations to build a track record, potentially through small-to-medium grants that also involve capacity development, would over time lead to a more youth-driven YPS field.
- **Consider more flexible and localized funding modalities, including seed-funding and subgrant modalities.** These can be more accessible to youth organizations, as they often allow more flexible and locally adapted proposal processes. To empower youth organizations, it is also important to build in capacity-building support for project management and budgetary training.
- **Consider opportunities for sequential funding.** Given the incremental or sequential nature of the field, catalytic funding mechanisms like the PBF could potentially support synced or sequential funding strategies so that project teams have an opportunity to build on past successes, or create pathways for scaling catalytic change where successful models are identified.
- **Ensure that project timelines and budgets allow sufficient time for engagement and sensitization on the project at the outset.** This is necessary for overcoming stigma, gaining support and greater engagement from local stakeholders, and ensuring sufficient trust from the youth involved.
- **Build from adequate local foundations when considering national or regional youth platforms or strategies.** Otherwise, there is too high a risk of the national or regional mechanisms and initiatives not coming together or doing so only in a tokenistic way.
- **When considering cross-border or regional programming, ensure sufficient partnership support and interest among key stakeholders at all levels, and a strong fit between the theory of change and the cross-border or regional modality.** Otherwise, given the heavy implementation costs involved in cross-border projects, there is a risk of burdening what might otherwise be highly productive national projects, or of the cross-border or regional elements falling by the wayside.
- **Increase duration and/or start-up time for certain project modalities.** Given the additional administrative and transactional complexity of cross-border or regional projects, it may be necessary to increase the maximum duration of these projects, or at least allow such projects a pre-start-up period before implementation begins.
- **Support the piloting of youth-centred CPS programming in more areas,** specifically paying attention to young people's role in climate adaptation, as well as in other environmental and natural resources-related conflict prevention. Within these projects, invest in greater monitoring, evaluation and learning, and more longitudinal studies of youth-centred CPS work to fill the gap in current learning.
- **Continue to prioritize YPS commitments to diverse youth inclusion,** enabling those from all genders, ethnic and religious identities, and different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds to participate equally in peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives. This requires not only a continued emphasis on mainstreaming diverse inclusion across all programming (not limited to youth programming), but also continued support for

developing intersectional approaches, and for more innovative outreach strategies.

- **Supporting an intersectional approach will require allowing for greater investment of staff time and resources,** including more time at the outset of the project for outreach, trust-building and development of safeguards, and sufficient budget and planning time to facilitate access and other accommodations. Additionally, implementers may have to put additional efforts into outreach to participants, their families and surrounding community figures, to ensure a sufficiently open and safe space for inclusion of previously marginalized youth. To reinforce "do no harm" and protection standards, part of the project budget could be earmarked for responding to protection risks or threats that might arise.
- **Consider developing a "road map" and checklists of best practices on inclusion and protection standards.** Practitioners might consider developing checklists with simple reminders or a repository of practical tips, such as lists of accessible and secure venues and transport options, to help preserve institutional memory and remind staff of potential accommodation options for diverse youth. A road map at the start of the project could help activate use of these checklists.
- **Establish clear, transparent participant selection criteria.** This promotes inclusivity, establishes a foundation for building trust and mitigates the risk of selection bias from implementing partners.
- **Encourage more effective appraisal of YPS results** by supporting collection of data on indicators that go beyond activity counts, as well as greater data tracking of participants or beneficiaries by both age and other identity markers.
- **Develop means for greater transparency and tracking of funding that goes to youth-led or youth-focused organizations,** similar to recent efforts of the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) to collect subgrantee funding data. Consistent efforts by a wide range of UN entities, Member States, other funders and implementing partners would be needed to begin to fill the blanks in this "data-poor" field. Within PBSO's aggregated data tracking on subpartners, more consistent coding of the subgrantee categories (including of youth), enabling coding of an organization by more than one category as appropriate (e.g. a CSO working on women and youth), and consolidated tracking at the conclusion of the project, rather than iterative tracking, might yield more usable databases that can enable identification of the share of funding going to youth organizations.
- **Include youth directly in monitoring, learning and evaluation exercises.** This will help enhance accountability and increase young people's influence in shaping youth programming, as illustrated in two projects in this Review (Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329 and CAR PBF/IRF-334).

1. Introduction and background

The landmark Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) recognized the "important and positive contribution of youth in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security" and set benchmarks and key goals for the YPS agenda. These are commonly grouped into five pillars: (1) encouraging the participation of young people in all parts of the peace and security spectrum, including in local, national and regional decision-making and peacebuilding; (2) involving youth in the prevention of violence and conflict; (3) involving youth in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR); (4) ensuring the protection of young people in armed conflict; and (5) a partnerships pillar highlighting the need to consult and partner with young people on peace and security goals and activities.[5]

Shortly after resolution 2250 was passed, an independent report titled *The Missing Peace* conducted a wide survey of youth and helped identify steps for advancing the YPS agenda.[6] Among the many recommendations, the progress report stressed the need to invest in young people's capacity, agency, and leadership through both training, funding and network-building, and to encourage inclusive and diverse youth participation (i.e. from all backgrounds) in all parts of the peace and security spectrum, including in peacebuilding.[7]

Since 2015, many parts of the United Nations (UN) system, as well as other regional bodies, Member States, and civil society organizations (CSOs) and others have put significant effort behind advancing some of these goals.[8] In 2020, the Secretary-General's inaugural report on YPS noted efforts by Member States to translate the YPS agenda into national action by adopting relevant policies, allocating financial resources, and developing road maps or National Action Plans for advancing YPS.[9] The report announced a new UN Youth Strategy, greater support for youth focal points in UN Country Teams, missions and other entities, and identified a need for greater funding and "accessible resourcing for organizations led by and focused on young people".[10] Regional and subregional organizations have been leading the way in adopting frameworks or policies that would advance youth empowerment and/or the YPS agenda.[11] Most recently, in 2024, *The Pact for the Future*, adopted by consensus before the seventy-ninth session of the General Assembly, dedicated a section to youth. Member States committed to strengthening meaningful youth participation at national and international levels.[12]

While some progress has been made in advancing the YPS agenda, a number of barriers persist, ranging from stereotypes against young people and intergenerational mistrust, to structural barriers such as high levels of poverty and unemployment among youth, and the political disenfranchisement of young people across a range of contexts.[13] Secretary-General reports on YPS and other high-level policy briefs have called attention to persistent gaps in young people's representation in decision-making and lack of opportunities for youth, and emphasized the need for greater funding and financing of YPS priorities.[14] Studies evaluating progress on the YPS agenda have highlighted the still-limited financial resources for youth initiatives and youth organizations, the limited role and space for youth in peacebuilding, and a lack of awareness among many policy stakeholders of the importance of the YPS agenda.[15]

An important source of funding for strengthening young people's engagement in peacebuilding and conflict prevention is the PBF. Between 2018 and 2023, through 161 projects across 48 countries and territories, the PBF invested more than $291 million towards the implementation of the YPS agenda.[16] In 2016, a competitive call for peacebuilding work focused on youth themes, known as the Youth Promotion Initiative (YPI), was introduced within the PBF and continued until 2024.[17] YPI funding increased from $2.7 million in 2016 to $30.5 million in 2023,[18] making it one of the largest funds available for youth programming. Beyond the YPI, there have been efforts to mainstream youth promotion in all PBF-supported work. The 2020–2024

The Peacebuilding Fund

The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) was established in 2006 by the Secretary-General at the request of the General Assembly and the Security Council as the primary financial instrument of the UN to sustain peace in countries at risk of or affected by violent conflict. The PBF provides funds to UN entities, governments, regional organizations, multilateral banks, national multi-donor trust funds and civil society organizations. From 2006 to 2024, the PBF allocated more than $2 billion to 74 recipient countries and territories. The UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) was established in 2005 to assist and support the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) with strategic advice and policy guidance, to administer the PBF and support the Secretary-General in coordinating UN entities in their peacebuilding efforts.

Five pillars of YPS
Participation: Inclusive youth representation in decision-making and negotiation processes at all levels; also that the Security Council consult with youth groups and integrate youth-related concerns.
Protection: Parties to armed conflict and Member States to respect and protect young civilians' human rights, especially regarding sexual and gender-based violence and mass atrocity crimes.
Prevention: Youth from diverse backgrounds supported to conduct activities around violence prevention; also stressing socioeconomic development and quality education for youth, as well as social cohesion and intercultural dialogue.
Partnerships: Partnerships with international organizations and local and non-governmental actors to support young people in peace and conflict contexts; highlighting the PBC role in providing recommendations related to young people's radicalization and violence.
Disengagement/Reintegration: All stakeholders engaged in DDR work to integrate the needs of young people impacted by armed conflict; with a focus on youth employment, education and capacity-building.

PBF Strategy set an internal annual target of 25 per cent investment into empowerment of women and youth.[19] Demonstrating how far such efforts have come, many of those interviewed for this Review observed that youth inclusion is considered almost a necessary element within any project proposed for PBF funding.

This Review has been commissioned to examine some of the results from these youth investments by identifying best practices or lessons learned from a sample of youth-focused projects approved for PBF funding between 2018 and 2022. Although the analysis will focus on learning from the 41 projects selected, the larger objective is to contribute to learning on how peacebuilding programming is helping to advance the YPS agenda.

This Review is focused on the participation pillar, although the project analysis also contributes to insights on the other four pillars. Advancing young people's participation is an important focus because this pillar can be seen as both an end in itself and a means to achieving the other four pillars.[20]

In 2021, the Secretary-General's report *Our Common Agenda* identified removing "barriers to political participation" as one of the key goals, arguing that "[d]elivering on the priorities of young people and meaningfully including them in decision-making are investments that will deliver immediate returns, as well as build human capital and social cohesion for the longer term."[21]

Advancing youth participation was also stressed by many of those consulted as a foundational step for advancing other parts of the YPS agenda. Several experts noted that because of the wholesale exclusion of young people from most local, national, regional and international decision-making spaces, discussions of YPS often never get beyond youth-only spaces. One advocate observed wryly that the problem is not only that there is this massive "elephant in the room" in terms of youth exclusion from decision-making spaces, but that in most cases, the "elephant is not even in the room at all" to be able to make the point.[22]

The projects selected cover a wide range of programming related to youth inclusion in peacebuilding, ranging from projects that seek to involve youth in fostering local dialogue and reconciliation, to those focused on conflict prevention and early warning mechanisms, to those focused on youth empowerment and participation in decision-making more broadly. The chapter that follows will first discuss the lessons learned and effects of these projects, drawing from examples across the 41 projects. Special sections will then examine projects working with national youth bodies and platforms (3.A); regional and cross-border programming (3.B); youth programming related to climate, peace and security (CPS) (3.C); and intersectional programming (3.D). The penultimate chapter considers a number of cross-cutting issues and challenges, including as relates to protection and "do no harm" considerations, funding and partnerships with youth organizations, sustainability strategies and challenges, and any evidence of catalytic effects. The concluding chapter will summarize observations on best practices and trends in programming, as well as any outstanding gaps or challenges in the field, and ways that the PBF and other entities working in this field could advance YPS goals more effectively.

While this Review does not attempt to assess all aspects of the YPS agenda, it offers important contextualization of how YPS goals might be taken forward within peacebuilding work. The findings highlight some important results of investments in youth-focused peacebuilding so far, including ways that inclusion strategies have contributed to youth empowerment and advancement, as well as how this has strengthened peacebuilding outcomes and improved

prospects for conflict prevention. However, the research also points to some persistent hurdles to full youth inclusion, and underlines the difficulty of this type of work. To continue this progress will require greater efforts to dismantle these barriers, to recognize the leadership that youth have already demonstrated in peacebuilding and conflict prevention, and to enable further opportunities for them to take part in peace and security.

Methodology and research design

This Thematic Review on YPS is commissioned by PBSO in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The Climate Security Mechanism and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also provided some support, as a follow-on to youth-related findings in the 2023 *Climate-Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review*. The Review partners provided feedback at multiple stages of the research process, alongside a Peer Reference Group.[23]

Objectives and scope: The objective was (1) to take stock of a sample of 41 youth-related projects approved for PBF funding between 2018 and 2022, to identify any best practices or lessons learned, specifically with regard to the participation pillar; and (2) to use this programmatic learning to provide actionable recommendations for how the PBF, PBSO as well as other UN and CSO partners can continue advancing the YPS agenda. This methodology and scope does not allow for a full consideration of all peacebuilding work related to the YPS agenda, nor even to the full range of youth programming supported by the PBF. Further details on selection of projects, research questions, and other methodological data, are included in annex 2.

Research overview: The key research tools were:

- **Analysis of 41 projects** according to a cohort methodology, including document review and project interviews. Table 1 provides an overview of the cohorts, with a full list of the projects in annex 1.
- **Field research** in the Central African Republic (CAR) (February 2024), and in The Gambia and Guinea (both June 2024) to support project analysis and provide country contextualization.
- **Background research** and expert interviews on trends and challenges in youth-centred peacebuilding.
- **Analysis of funding for youth organizations,** as tracked by PBSO (in 2022 and 2023) and as provided by project implementers for the 41 projects examined.

Following an initial inception period from December 2023 to March 2024, the primary phase of research took place between April and August 2024, with additional follow-up inquiries in the Fall of 2024.

Interviews: A total of 181 interviews were conducted, with those involved in implementing or developing these 41 projects, with other UN staff or experts on YPS programming, and young people involved in or impacted by the projects, or involved in YPS programming globally.

Youth participation in research: Although young people were interviewed throughout the research stages (particularly during the field research), the primary goal of this research was not to do a perception survey of youth views on YPS in peacebuilding. Nonetheless, given the theme of this Review of "youth participation", young people were involved in a participatory manner throughout the research. Most of the interviews, project review and initial analysis were led by youth researchers, and the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR) and UNFPA jointly supported a youth research fellow in the regional office of UNFPA in Senegal from April through August 2024 to gather broader insights on programming for this Review. Three of the four linked cohort studies (published separately) are authored by youth researchers.

Project document (ProDoc) review and data limitations: This Review was not resourced to allow for a full assessment of each project. The research team relied on qualitative interviews and existing documentation, including the midterm and final reporting for each project, and any other existing project materials. While independent evaluations are not mandatory in all PBF-supported projects,[24] these were reviewed in the 22 projects where they were available. In the selection of projects, preference was given to those with more data available. Notwithstanding this, there were significant data gaps and limitations across all the projects considered, with limited tracking of age-disaggregated data of the participants or "beneficiaries" (both terms are used),[25] or of indicators beyond activity and output tracking. These issues, and the impact for evaluating YPS objectives and progress, are discussed further in section 4.H.

2. Strengthening youth participation in peacebuilding: key strategies, practices and lessons learned

The 41 projects in this Review span 33 countries and territories, 7 geographical regions, and a range of peacebuilding and conflict contexts. Reflecting overall geographical trends in PBF support to youth-focused peacebuilding,[26] the greatest number of projects were in West Africa (39 per cent), followed by Central Africa (20 per cent). However, the sample also includes a spread of projects in other regions and four regional or cross-border projects, which are projects implemented in more than one country simultaneously but as part of the same project. Twenty-six of the 41 projects were awarded through the YPI; the other 15 through the regular eligibility process or other immediate response windows (see annex 1 for details).

The projects examined illustrate a wide spectrum of youth programming related to expanding and deepening youth participation in decision-making, peacebuilding and conflict prevention work, at local, national and regional levels. Many of the key pillars and focus areas of the YPS agenda are reflected in the projects examined in this Review, including:

- Projects that advance youth inclusion in local decision-making bodies, conflict resolution and peacebuilding (e.g. Niger PBF/IRF-462, Mali PBF/MLI/C-1, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) PBF/IRF-262, Chad PBF/IRF-263);
- Projects that involve youth in peace and security processes, including conflict monitoring, transition processes, and reconciliation and reintegration (e.g. Sudan PBF/IRF-471, CAR PBF/IRF-334, CAR PBF/IRF-467);
- Projects that support National Action Plans or policies on youth or on YPS (e.g. Yemen PBF/IRF-270, South Sudan PBF/SSD/A-5, Guinea PBF/GIN/B-12, The Gambia PBF/GMB/D-1);
- Projects working to promote more diverse participation and inclusion (e.g. Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329, El Salvador PBF/IRF-381, El Salvador PBF/IRF-414);[27]
- Projects that respond to youth vulnerabilities and needs, including through socioeconomic support (e.g. Sierra Leone PBF/SLE/D-3, Mauritania PBF/IRF-441, Côte d'Ivoire PBF/IRF-259, Chad PBF/TCD/A-1).

41-project sample at a glance

Geographical distribution:
- West Africa: 16 projects (39%)
- Central Africa: 8 projects (20%)
- East Africa: 5 projects (12%)
- Asia and the Pacific: 4 projects (10%)
- Latin America: 4 projects (10%)
- Middle East and North Africa: 3 projects (7%)
- Eastern Europe: 1 regional project (2%)

Average project duration: 24 months

Average funding per project: $1.82 million[28]

Direct implementing partners: 25
- UN entities: involved in 32 projects
- CSOs: involved in 12 projects

Annex 1 contains the full list of all 41 projects.

The cohort methodology allowed for greater examination of some of these key areas, and cross-comparisons of similar strategies happening across different geographical and peacebuilding contexts. The first cohort focused on youth inclusion in local conflict prevention and peacebuilding; the second on national or regional youth platforms, bodies and empowerment strategies; the third on youth programming from an intersectional lens; the fourth on youth engagement in CPS-related programming. Table 1 provides an overview of some of the key issues or questions involved in each cohort.

Across all four cohorts, a number of common strategies and practices for encouraging youth participation and engagement emerged. Many were oriented around tackling some of the barriers to youth participation and involvement in decision-making and peacebuilding, such as exclusion and limited access to such forums, socioeconomic barriers, intergenerational mistrust, and negative stigmas or stereotypes of youth. The remainder of this chapter will discuss some common strategies and tools deployed, as well as lessons learned and insights into how to best apply some of these strategies.

Table 1: Overview of four cohorts	
Cohort 1: Youth in local or community-level decision-making, peacebuilding and conflict prevention	
12 projects, in CAR, Chad, Colombia, DRC, El Salvador, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Tunisia, Uganda, Burundi	This cohort focuses on efforts to increase youth involvement or participation at a local or community level. Projects did so by supporting youth engagement in local councils, linking them with formal or informal decision-makers, or involving them in local dispute resolution and conflict prevention mechanisms. Many also sought to address barriers to youth participation, including addressing socioeconomic and livelihood needs, helping young people overcome access issues and countering negative stereotypes against young people through intergenerational dialogue, awareness-raising, and community sensitization.
Cohort 2: YPS strategies and youth empowerment at a national or regional (cross-border) level	
10 projects, in CAR, The Gambia, Guinea, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Yemen. Cross-border/regional projects: Western Balkans,[29] Burkina Faso-Mali, Gabon-Chad-Cameroon	This cohort explores youth participation and advancement of the YPS agenda at a national and regional level. Several projects involved support for national YPS action plans and mechanisms, and/or built the capacity of or space for national youth mechanisms such as youth parliaments and National Youth Councils. Several also illustrated different ways of realizing the YPS goal of involving young people in peace and security processes, for example, as monitors of transition processes or conflict violations, or through their involvement in early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms. Several projects were designed as cross-border or regional projects, testing the role of youth in regional and transnational peacebuilding and conflict prevention.
Cohort 3: Youth inclusion and participation in peacebuilding through an intersectional approach	
8 projects, in CAR, El Salvador, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Somalia, Sri Lanka	This cohort identified projects that appeared to adopt intersectional strategies or models, taking into account the varying and layered gender, ethnic and religious backgrounds, sexual and gender orientation, education levels and disability status of the young people in question. Inclusion of diverse youth, adapting and developing accommodation strategies, and addressing the often layered vulnerabilities and protection risks were prominent themes in these projects. Several of the projects also demonstrated that taking an intersectional perspective might increase project reach and impact, where youth from diverse backgrounds were better positioned to reach across conflict lines and address intercommunal tensions.
Cohort 4: Youth in Climate, Peace and Security, and environmental peacebuilding	
12 projects, in Burkina Faso, CAR, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Honduras, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Somalia	With a focus on youth participation and engagement in CPS or other environmental peacebuilding, most of the projects in this cohort worked to include young people in the management, use or preservation of land and natural resources. Strategies included supporting youth clubs, youth participation in local decision-making forums, and youth engagement in dispute resolution around land, as well as many projects focused on livelihood needs, such as supporting young people to take part in "green jobs" (including in environmental protection) or sustainable livelihoods. One project paid particular attention to youth in climate adaptation strategies, while others dealt with this issue indirectly.

Note: Two projects were considered under more than one cohort. These were: El Salvador PBF/IRF-414 and Somalia PBF/IRF-433. A full list of the projects considered in each cohort can be found in annex 1.

A. Expanding access to local peacebuilding and decision-making

A prominent barrier discussed in the YPS literature is young people's lack of access to key decision-making space. To help overcome this barrier, projects across all four cohorts sought to give a platform to young people, and to involve them in local decision-making, peacebuilding, and conflict prevention mechanisms and initiatives. Many of the project activities sought to do this by creating or strengthening youth-specific mechanisms – for example, creating local youth councils in Guinea (PBF/IRF-264); reinforcing and expanding local peace committees that involved young people in local conflict mediation in DRC (PBF/IRF-262); expanding social clubs that enabled youth participation in natural resources decision-making in Mali (PBF/MLI/C-1); and creating local grievance mechanisms to allow young people to raise concerns in a peaceful manner in Colombia (PBF/IRF-455). In others, the focus was more on linking young people with local decision makers (Uganda PBF/IRF-303, Somalia PBF/IRF-433), or bringing young people into existing community-based mechanisms for decision-making or dispute resolution (Honduras PBF/IRF-435, Solomon Islands PBF/IRF-472, Chad PBF/IRF-263, Chad PBF/TCD/A-1).[30]

Youth inclusion contributing to violence reduction: The degree to which these projects achieved meaningful youth inclusion and participation in local decision-making spaces and conflict prevention efforts varied. Yet where youth were included, there were strong dividends in terms of violence reduction and conflict prevention. One of the strongest examples was a project in Guinea (PBF/IRF-264) that sought to increase youth participation by forming local youth councils within the municipal councils in 20 conflict-prone communes. These communes had been identified as having a higher risk of violence, and with young people potentially being a significant factor in community tensions.[31] Initially, youth participated in these councils almost as interns, but gradually they took on a more significant role – including helping carry out local surveys and data collection, providing feedback on local development plans, fielding community complaints, and identifying other sources of tensions and suggesting measures to manage or resolve them.

> "The violence that used to occur significantly decreased … because youth … finally had a voice in decisions that affected them." — local partner in Guinea

By the conclusion of the project, in 18 of the 20 communities, mayors reported significant reductions in communal tensions and improved social cohesion, attributing this predominantly to the inclusion of youth.[32] There were marked declines in violent protests and altercations between young people from different communities, which local authorities attributed to the project's efforts to enable legitimate and peaceful means for young people to voice their concerns. One interlocuter observed: "We really saw young people calming down; the violence that used to occur had significantly decreased. It was, in part, because they realized they were being heard and that they finally had a voice in decisions that affected them."[33]

In the mining community of Kolaboui, the Mayor reported no major incidents over the prior 11 months, attributing this stability largely to efforts to keep young people informed and involved.[34] This idea that informing and involving youth could contribute to violence reduction was seconded by one of the youth council members in Kolaboui. He noted that before the project, young people knew nothing about what was happening in the community, but that this began to shift with their engagement in the project. His broader lesson on youth engagement and conflict prevention was that "at a minimum we have to be informed… even just knowing helped in calming things down".[35]

Youth inclusion de-escalating tensions: The contributions of young people to conflict prevention could also be seen in the way that the youth representatives in these councils helped manage community tensions. For example, in one commune that had been prone to tensions between communities and mining companies, youth gradually took on the role of intermediaries, managing complaints between community leaders and mining companies. In others, they acted as intermediaries and "peace ambassadors" with their peers. As one of the former youth council members described their role, "We consulted with the youth and discussed their concerns with them. We told them about the new youth council and how that provided them with resources for peaceful ways to have their grievances heard."[36] They were widely lauded for their efforts, and leading representatives of the commune even "expressed regret for not involving them sooner".[37]

Another powerful example of how enabling youth access to decision-making forums can help de-escalate highly tense situations was provided through a project in Colombia (PBF/IRF-455). During 2019 and 2020, the country experienced a wave of protests. Hundreds of thousands of Colombians, among them a substantial number of young people, took to the streets protesting against income inequality, corruption

and police brutality, and proposing economic and political reforms. While most protests were peaceful, some violent incidents occurred, leading to curfews in key cities.

Local and national authorities initially attempted to address the situation through repressive law enforcement as well as through dialogue since those youth were seen as instigators of these protests, but the latter approach was stymied by the lack of any real channels of communication with the protestors, particularly the youth population. This failure to effectively engage youth highlighted the absence of peaceful grievance mechanisms. As implementing partners explained, "Many young people felt that taking to the streets was their only option to voice their concerns."[38] To try to respond to this gap, the project team established local youth assemblies, which gave young people the opportunity to design advocacy strategies focused on issues like inequality in employment, education and politics, and other grievances. These assemblies presented their proposals and collaborated closely with mayoral offices.

This impact was especially notable for marginalized Afro-Colombian youth involved in the project. Afro-Colombian youth are disproportionately affected by gang violence in Colombia and are even less likely to have any means to engage or communicate with governance structures than other groups. A young Afro-Colombian woman, who knew people in gangs but was not a member, joined the project and later shared that the personal training and empowerment she received was crucial in enabling her to pursue political science studies and eventually engage in national politics.[39] She also led advocacy efforts in her community, encouraging other young people to work with the Government and "choose a path of peace instead of violence".[40] Implementing partners recognized that "individual empowerment alone is not sufficient and that systemic change is needed", but nonetheless pointed to this example as an illustration of the gains that could be made in youth empowerment.[41]

Young people bring different perspectives, mediation advantages: An additional benefit observed across many of these youth inclusion projects was that young people brought with them different perspectives, vantage points and sources of knowledge. In several of the projects – for example in DRC (PBF/IRF-262) and Chad (PBF/TCD/A-1) – a significant source of the local tensions or conflicts involved youth.[42] Given this, involving youth in helping mediate local disputes seemed an obvious way to leverage their knowledge of the issues and disputants, or simply the differing perspectives and credibility that youth might bring to an issue. In that sense, young people are well-positioned to act as insider mediators, particularly at the local level, where they often have existing relationships with those involved in conflict or may themselves be implicated in conflict dynamics.[43] Implementing partners recalled one official telling them, "It was often the youth who were sent to instigate conflict, yet they were absent from mediation. When they became involved, we saw a real decrease in intercommunal conflicts."[44]

In the project PBF/IRF-414 in El Salvador, young people were integrated into existing Municipal Committees for the Prevention of Violence. This collaboration, and the ideas that young people brought with them, led to the rethinking of violence prevention strategies, with a focus on enhancing respect for young people's human rights and reducing their vulnerability to violence, contributing to a notable decrease in youth-related violence in the targeted areas.[45]

B. Overcoming intergenerational mistrust and stigma

Another common barrier or issue raised was that of intergenerational mistrust, which was often reinforced by stigmas against youth. Young people said that even when they obtain access to key decision-making spaces, stereotypes against youth could prevent meaningful participation. One young former peacebuilder in DRC described her early interactions with political stakeholders at the national level: "Mindsets are really stubborn; no matter what you do or say, you will always be seen as just a young girl in their eyes."[46] Although stereotypes about youth are a persistent challenge in the field, it is important to note that intergenerational mistrust is not a one-way issue: young people were sometimes equally sceptical of authorities and institutions and wary of engaging.[47]

Consultation at the outset key to overcoming mistrust: Because intergenerational mistrust was such a widespread issue, most practitioners emphasized the need to have a substantial trust-building and consultation phase at the outset of youth projects. This typically involved substantial engagement with key stakeholders, including government officials, community elders or others in positions of power, so that they might become more comfortable with the idea of engaging with youth, as well as intensive consultation with the youth communities involved. In addition to helping alleviate youth concerns and increasing the prospects of diverse youth participation, the latter could be seen as advancing youth partnership goals.

At the start of the project in Tunisia (PBF/IRF-288), implementing partners invested substantial time and effort

Involving young people in local youth councils in the project PBF/IRF-264 in Guinea helped decrease risks of violence and laid a foundation for later mobilization toward a national youth action plan, as illustrated in the project PBF/GIN/B-12. Photo provided courtesy of UNFPA Guinea.

in reaching out to local authorities to solicit their input and engagement in the project. This was important because there were sensitivities and concerns about engaging with young people, in part because of stigmas in the community about young people, according to implementing partners.[48] There was a similar level of investment in initial outreach and trust-building in the context of the project PBF/IRF-330 in Somalia. Implementing partners organized round tables between elders, State authorities and youth leaders to facilitate exchange and counter elders' resistance to youth inclusion. There was also an effort to flip the narrative that youth were not prepared to navigate the traditional decision-making mechanisms to the advantage of young people, by encouraging elders to take on a mentorship role with young people involved.[49] Implementing partners also hosted advocacy sessions for young people.

The need to work with key community figures and create a supportive environment to engage young people (especially marginalized groups) was underscored by lessons from the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka. Implementing partners voiced regret that they had not properly informed relevant stakeholders, particularly religious leaders, about the project and its goals, which could have alleviated their reluctance to work with the young women involved.[50] In subsequent projects, the organizers held meetings with the relevant stakeholders where the young women participants could introduce themselves.[51]

In addition to intensive consultation at the outset of the projects, many project activities were oriented around addressing intergenerational mistrust, stigma and related barriers throughout the project life cycle, for example through facilitating intergenerational dialogue (Solomon Islands PBF/IRF-472, Chad PBF/IRF-263, Somalia PBF/IRF-330), or through positive messaging in media and community sensitization campaigns (Uganda PBF/IRF-303, CAR PBF/IRF-468, Tunisia PBF/IRF-288).

In the project PBF/GMB/D-1 in The Gambia, one of the key objectives was to facilitate greater involvement of young people (and women) in national processes and reforms. To do this, implementing partners worked with communities and young people to develop outreach and sensitization campaigns for national and local leaders in three regions (Lower River Region, Central River Region, Upper River Region) on the benefits of involving youth and women in decision-making processes, including legal and transitional

reforms.[52] Building on this initial outreach and sensitization, the national partner of UNICEF, the National Council on Civic Education, then organized regional dialogues that brought together local authorities, police, ministry representatives and young people in all three regions to foster dialogue and improve trust between young people and local and national authorities. These platforms were said to be useful in changing perceptions, specifically for improving the relationship between youth and security forces.[53]

The project in Tunisia (PBF/IRF-288) illustrates how youth engagement, trust-building, intergenerational dialogue and media sensitization strategies can complement each other. One of the core issues identified at the start of the project was that the elder generation was sceptical of young people's ability or interest in contributing, due to prevailing stereotypes about young people, especially those in economically marginalized southern regions, as "lazy, illiterate, or unskilled".[54] To address these issues, the project team involved media representatives in stakeholder workshops and provided targeted training on youth-sensitive media reporting. This media engagement was complemented by support for intergenerational dialogue. The project facilitated dedicated workshops and consultations where young people could engage directly with community elders, which was viewed as necessary to overcome the latter's scepticism about youth participation.

Shifting stereotypes by allowing youth to prove themselves: In addition to these sensitization and dialogue strategies implementing partners in the Tunisia project, and in other related work also emphasized that allowing youth to prove themselves was one of the strongest ways to counter youth stigmas. The project set aside funds to directly support 107 youth-led local development projects. These proved to be a powerful way to counter existing stereotypes because they went beyond simply messaging about young people's potential contribution to the community, by allowing them to show what they could do. A notable example was a youth-developed cellular phone application to track household waste collection, which local residents significantly appreciated.[55]

Intergenerational dialogue as a catalyst for community change: The projects that were focused on community dialogue and trust-building strategies also illustrated another important contribution of youth-centred peacebuilding work. Where such dialogues were able to strengthen young people's position and agency, they could create new avenues for peacebuilding or strengthening social cohesion within the community. For example, the implementing partners in the project PBF/GMB/B-2 in The Gambia noted that young people acted "as ambassadors to talk to the elders", who were more pessimistic about resolving tensions.[56] In several projects, young people were found to be better positioned to raise certain conflict issues or dynamics with elders or to broker solutions. In some cases this was because youth were seen as more neutral than elders who were already deeply embedded in existing intercommunal conflicts.[57] In others, it was because youth were involved in local disputes and tensions, and so were better positioned to seek a resolution, in partnership with others in the community. In one of the projects in Somalia (PBF/IRF-433), it was a bit of both. Because of their status in the community, youth were more able to cross clan lines and engage with other (competing) communities, potentially helping to bridge differences and overcome intercommunal competition and mistrust, which was the larger goal of the project. However, young people in these communities were also often directly linked to conflict drivers. As a result "the role that young people can play to either sow tension or promote conflict is quite strong", one of those working with these communities observed. They added: "Young people can be agents of chaos … But as well young people have significant potential as agents of peace, as peacebuilders."[58]

> "Young people can be agents of chaos … But as well young people have significant potential as agents of peace, as peacebuilders." — local partner on the impact of youth involvement in Somalia

Another virtue of these intergenerational dialogues was that by resetting the relationship between youth and the elder generation, they could re-set community relations and open new avenues for conflict resolution. For example, one of the projects in Chad (PBF/IRF-263) tried to bridge the gap in trust and collaboration between young people and others in the community by establishing an intergenerational community platform for conflict prevention and management. It culminated in the adoption of an intergenerational charter (*"charte intergenerationnelle"*) where both young and old committed to duties and responsibilities, with an emphasis on mutual accountability.

Additionally, the project facilitated the creation of youth umbrella associations, which came to work closely with administrative and traditional authorities to peacefully resolve disputes and lead prevention campaigns.[59] The youth associations helped reduce intercommunal tensions in the Nya Pendé and Barh Sara regions and strengthened social cohesion.[60] By allowing youth to showcase their ability to contribute to conflict reduction, these campaigns transformed how local leaders perceived and interacted with the younger generation.[61]

Box 1: Sport, arts and culture as avenues for peace and youth inclusion

A common activity across many of the projects was to facilitate sport, arts or cultural events as a way to encourage cooperation and intergenerational dialogue, break down boundaries and contribute to social cohesion.[62] Implementing partners of a project in Niger (PBF/IRF-462) organized cultural events and culinary competitions.[63] Projects in Colombia (PBF/IRF-455) and Uganda (PBF/IRF-303) supported arts and music as forums for generating discussion about peacebuilding and encouraging youth expression.[64] In Uganda in particular, a local artist's song about bringing peace to the community topped the charts and became one of the most effective ways to spread messages of peace to youth.

Practitioners said sporting events could be particularly effective in building trust among participants and the broader community.[65] In the project in Liberia (PBF/LBR/D-15), sporting events helped reassure youth about the intent of the project, while in Sierra Leone (PBF/SLE/D-3), a football gala was organized to bring together youth from different cliques and gangs, so that they could see themselves as partners in community development.[66]

In The Gambia, the community of Sambang was so divided that they maintained separate football teams. As one trust-building activity, the project PBF/IRF-342 helped form one "Sambang United" team. The spirit of cooperation, both on the field and in the stands, gained even more momentum when this united team began winning their matches.[67] Sporting and artistic events can also be a space for raising and working through issues. In the same project in The Gambia, youth took oaths renouncing violence after being shown a series of powerful short films.[68]

Overall, the message from implementing partners and YPS experts was that peacebuilding through arts and sport are not to be underestimated and can have as much of an impact as more traditional conflict prevention and mitigation strategies.

The project PBF/IRF-342 in The Gambia used a range of sport and artistic activities to encourage trust-building between two previously divided communities, and also to bridge intergenerational gaps and encourage youth inclusion. Photo provided courtesy of International Trade Centre (ITC).

Facilitating intergenerational dialogue or other opportunities for young people to engage is something that many youth activists have argued for in different country contexts. This was a prominent theme in a focus group discussion that UNU-CPR held in CAR with youth activists. One individual noted that because they felt excluded from most political or civic conversations, youth looked for these opportunities for dialogue as an entry point.[69]

However, intergenerational dialogue is not a silver bullet. The project results suggest that for intergenerational dialogue to gain traction, it needs to be based on a firm foundation, with sufficient investment and support from a range of stakeholders in the communities in question. Taking time at the start, through consultations and outreach to different stakeholder groups, can help increase that level of engagement, but some environments will still be challenging. As is discussed further in section 4.D, some environments are not as permissive as others and may not be ripe for such dialogues to gain traction. In addition, because stigmas and perceptions are slow to change, particularly when rooted in structural power imbalances, even a successful intergenerational dialogue may only be able to achieve incremental advancement in the course of a single project.

C. Strengthening youth capacities and platforms

A common thread across many of the projects was the need to support youth capacity to engage. This could include capacity-building in terms of knowledge and skill development, but equally applied to enabling youth capacities to engage in the sense of supporting youth platforms, networks or other empowerment activities beyond simply knowledge acquisition.

Improving young people's knowledge and awareness – whether of YPS objectives; social, political or economic issues, including climate change and environmental protection; or even simply local dynamics and civic principles or rights – were core to the theories of change in many of the projects examined. In the project PBF/IRF-446 in Burkina Faso, for example, the key strategy for addressing lack of youth inclusion in land management and decision-making was to make young people more ready and capable of engaging in the future by improving their understanding and skills in relation to the management of natural resources.

In project PBF/GMB/D-1 in The Gambia, one of the key components was to strengthen young people's awareness and understanding of political and civil rights, specifically for youth who were out of school and marginalized. The rationale, as framed by one of the implementing partners, was that it was necessary to build "that critical thinking of youth around their role and responsibilities as citizens", particularly "those who are completely excluded from the national discourse", which might prevent their engagement in future violence.[70]

Other projects focused more on equipping young people with specialized skills and capacities in conflict resolution. In the project PBF/IRF-384 in Sri Lanka, youth parliamentarians and young aspiring leaders were supported through a range of capacity-building programmes on peacebuilding and conflict resolution as well as on health and socioeconomic issues. When political turmoil erupted in May 2022 – marked by pro-government supporters attacking peaceful anti-government protest sites in Colombo[71] – young people trained through the project were equipped with the knowledge and capacity to effectively respond in real time. As one project partner familiar with these trainings noted, the "conflict management module was helpful for that because it allowed young people to peacefully voice their concerns and opinions on the political situation in the country. They spoke of being constructive, making a change."[72]

While many projects focused on improving youth awareness and knowledge, in others the emphasis was more on strengthening youth capacity to act. This could be through creating or strengthening youth networks, social clubs or solidarity groups, or investing in youth organizations and activists, both individually and collectively, so that they would be on a stronger footing to take YPS goals forward. In the project in Sudan (PBF/IRF-471), there was already an active youth contingent across the country's 18 states, which were brought together under a national youth network.[73] As the implementing partner described it, the project witnessed a transition "from individual youth activists to organized youth groups, and now to a comprehensive youth network" countrywide.[74]

One strategy that was deemed highly successful in several of the projects was to set up mentoring programmes and opportunities. For example, in the project PBF/IRF-298 in Niger, women who were recognized in the community as leaders were recruited to support younger participants and serve as role models of leadership. The project PBF/GMB/D-1 in The Gambia also had a mentorship component, where female politicians (and at times former project participants) supported and advised young women running for office. Such mentorship programmes could open doors and

address access barriers in the course of the project, while also contributing to sustainability of project effects by embedding the young people involved in relevant and active decision-making networks. In other cases, such as in the project PBF/IRF-384 in Sri Lanka, involving mentors in programming helped address protection concerns as they provided personal guidance to youth informed by their own experiences with gender-specific protection risks (these issues are further discussed in chapter 4 under "Protection and do no harm").

Another example at the organizational level is the establishment of a youth-led organization known as Peace Hub, through the project PBF/GMB/D-1 in The Gambia. Peace Hub has become a leading civil society voice in the country on peacebuilding issues and a key contributor to the ongoing development of the National Action Plan on Youth in The Gambia, in addition to serving as the country's national YPS coalition.[75] Since its launch, Peace Hub has gained high visibility in The Gambia, as well as regionally and internationally. The founder of Peace Hub was a beneficiary of the training under a previous PBF-supported project in The Gambia and noted that this past project work "put us on the stage to influence not only national policies but supporting regional and global initiatives to advance YPS".[76] He argued that the capacity-building work of youth empowerment projects supported by the PBF "are a springboard for youth in The Gambia to get closer to authorities making bigger decisions, for example engaging with National Assembly members".[77]

These examples illustrate the pathway of youth empowerment and engagement that can result from project activities that focus on youth capacity-building, giving young people the skills, visibility and platform to enable them to have an impact at the national, regional and international levels.

Ultimately, whether focused on knowledge acquisition or fostering skills for engagement in peace and security spaces, the demand for capacity-building was a recurring theme among young people interviewed.[78] Young people tended to welcome project components that provided skill-building or opportunities to improve their capacity and position to act, ranging from rights awareness to capacity-building that would support entry into particular fields (e.g. "green jobs"), and enhancing awareness and understanding of civic responsibilities.

Box 2: Youth inclusion in peace processes: a case study from the Central African Republic[79]

The project PBF/IRF-334 in CAR offers insights into how the PBF can be an important financing mechanism for youth inclusion in peace processes, an outcome that could enhance the durability and social buy-in of such processes.[80] On 6 February 2019, the CAR Government and 14 armed groups signed the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (APPR-RCA) in Khartoum, envisioned to bring to a close the civil war that had been ongoing since 2013.[81] There was no effort to include youth voices or representatives (nor that of women) in these peace talks, despite the fact that 72 per cent of the population of CAR is under the age of 35 and young people played a prominent role in the conflict and in the pressure to bring it to an end.

However, while youth were excluded from the Khartoum peace talks, the APPR-RCA did envision a follow-on national reconciliation campaign.[82] The project in CAR was designed to leverage this momentum to include young people in the agreement's implementation,[83] as well as broader commitments by the CAR Government to greater youth inclusion as part of addressing one of the structural drivers of conflict.[84]

While these dynamics created a window for youth engagement, an additional hurdle surfaced during project implementation. As one of the staff members involved put it: "The youth were not adequately prepared for engagement at such a high level."[85] With a literacy rate of just 13.03 per cent in the country, and overall low levels of education even among those who are literate, only a very small minority of youth had the skills necessary to become credible participants in the peace process.[86] Beyond literacy alone, young people would have to be equipped to understand conflict dynamics, the agreement itself, and any subsequent policy options and decisions, as well as to effectively advocate for their positions. If not adequately prepared, they would also be at risk of political manipulation.

As a result, implementing partners shifted the focus of the project to preparing young people to be active participants, both in this follow-on process and in other future peace processes or political dialogues. Training was provided to 750 young men and women on key themes such as civic education, conflict prevention, management and resolution,

community leadership, and the rule of law.[87] Among them, 150 were trained as trainers, ensuring the transfer of these skills to their communities.[88] They also organized informational sessions on the agreement itself in three of the most conflict-prone locations – Bangui as the political centre, Bambari and Bossangoa – involving hundreds of youth participants.[89]

This experience highlights a critical gap in translating policy into practice in youth inclusion in peace processes. While common programmatic responses have focused on improving access for young people – ensuring they have a seat at the table – the project revealed that a key prerequisite is equipping them with the necessary skills and experiences to effectively contribute to the discussions. Only then can youth have a chance to meaningfully participate, in ways that shape the peace process and its future implementation for the better.

D. Socioeconomic needs and components

The projects suggest that socioeconomic considerations and components are particularly important for youth programming. Such components (e.g. support to youth economic needs or livelihoods) tended to be viewed as the most successful in projects across the Review sample. On the flip side, in several projects where socioeconomic components were absent or minimal, the issue was raised by independent evaluations or participants as a major gap that impaired project impact.[90]

There are several reasons why socioeconomic considerations and components loom large in youth programming. First was the perceived connection between socioeconomic needs and conflict drivers or vulnerabilities. Projects pursuing a Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) rationale often position lack of livelihood or economic opportunities for young people as a key risk factor in levels of community violence or risk of recruitment into armed groups.[91] This logic was evident in many of the projects in the sample, and justified a range of livelihood support activities, for example "cash for work" programmes and other income-generating activities (e.g. Sierra Leone PBF/SLE/D-3, Niger PBF/IRF-462), career counselling and skills training (Uganda PBF/IRF-303), improving financial literacy and establishing village savings and credit associations (CAR PBF/IRF-304), or facilitating private sector engagement and mentorship with young people (e.g. Liberia PBF/LBR/D-15, Sierra Leone PBF/SLE/D-3).[92]

Second, at a purely practical or programmatic level, socioeconomic activities could help in garnering greater support and engagement from young people and other stakeholders for the project. As one UN staff member observed, reflecting on a project that supported youth-run small businesses, "With a training on peace, they attend, but then when it ends you have to go back to your real life. But the moment the social enterprises were established, the youth were committed to it."[93] He also observed that this component gained much greater interest and support from local and national government officials, which enhanced the project's immediate success and sustainability beyond the lifespan of the project.

Dismantling socioeconomic barriers key to enabling participation: Third, lack of work or economic means is often the key barrier for youth to engage in peacebuilding or other forms of civic and political participation. Young people facing economic strains may not have the time or means to participate in other activities. Additionally, in many communities, lack of employment can generate stigma that, especially when compounded with stigmas about age, can present a substantial barrier to youth credibility. Given this, going some way towards addressing socioeconomic needs may help empower young people to participate.

Although jobs and livelihoods were often a chief concern for young people, socioeconomic needs and concerns frequently extended beyond this, particularly when dealing with at-risk youth. For example, in Liberia (PBF/LBR/D-15), the project targeted at-risk youth, primarily ex-combatants who were still involved in violent behaviour. Many participants struggled with drug addiction and homelessness, which proved a substantial bar to participating in the project. "When we invited them to the activities, they did not come," one implementing partner said.[94] To address this socioeconomic barrier and enable participation, the project helped beneficiaries secure shelter (with facilitation from the Ministry of Health) and rehabilitation services. Another implementing partner observed that addressing these critical needs, in particular the rehabilitation needs, was necessary to put the young people in "the right frame of mind" to engage. "If you do not have that rehab phase, they are not ready to participate in the project," they said.[95]

Finally, some of the most critical arenas for young people to be involved in community decision-making and peacebuilding relate to livelihoods and other economic

Young people interviewed stressed the need to address young people's socioeconomic needs – as with the job and skills training illustrated in this project in The Gambia – as a concrete way to counter barriers to participation, and to enable youth empowerment. Photo provided courtesy of International Organization for Migration (IOM).

issues. Across the projects in cohort 4, enabling young people to take part in the management of land and natural resources was presented not merely as a socioeconomic opportunity, but as a means of involving young people in the most important area of local or community decision-making. Involving young people in discussions related to local land management and other community livelihood issues was also central to the youth empowerment projects in Sierra Leone (PBF/SLE/D-3) and Solomon Islands (PBF/IRF-472). Such issues had traditionally been the domain of community elders, so involving youth was a way to address past youth exclusion. Interestingly, in both projects, youth engagement extended to considering the impact of outside investors or private sector actors whose land-use or investment decisions could affect community lands. In Solomon Islands, young people actively engaged with members of the private sector (i.e. the extractive industry) to advocate for community interests.[96]

Several projects that sought to link young people with local councils or other municipal forms of government also involved them in local development planning, and/or provided seed-funding so that young people could spearhead local development or community service projects – for example, the youth engagement in improving local waste collection in Tunisia (PBF/IRF-288) that was noted above. These local development issues and service provision had the potential to result in tangible added value to communities. Thus, involving youth provided them with an opportunity to make a material difference, and demonstrate their credibility.

Catalytic effects of socioeconomic components: In addition to being an important space for engagement, socioeconomic components appeared to have strong non-financial catalytic effects. For example, the project in Honduras (PBF/IRF-435) sought to encourage youth (particularly Indigenous youth) in decision-making around land management, including by linking them with local and district authorities. Implementing partners perceived that this engagement on land management issues "broke the ice" for youth to participate in broader political discussions and push forward other policy agendas.[97]

Several of the project experiences as well as the field research interviews in Guinea and CAR also suggest that socioeconomic components within peacebuilding projects can enhance young people's employability and leadership

potential, making this type of intervention highly valued by young people and able to deliver catalytic effects, at least on an individual level. For example, in the project PBF/IRF-264 in Guinea, where youth unemployment is high, former youth council members secured jobs as community relations officers at major mining companies, thanks to their experience in community outreach within the project.[98] One former participant reflected, "While project funds may come and go, skills and knowledge are things you can never take away," underscoring the value of these initiatives as career launchpads.[99] A practical recommendation to project teams from young people interviewed in Guinea is the need for certification of youth involvement in PBF programming, which participants view as essential for improving their job market prospects. In CAR, young beneficiaries of PBF-supported programmes shared similar experiences. One young woman in particular, a sociology student with limited practical experience, participated in the project PBF/IRF-334 in CAR. She became actively involved in youth-centred advocacy in one of the most volatile districts of the capital city Bangui, which had faced recurring violence since the civil war began in 2014. The project aimed to engage youth in understanding and promoting the 2019 National Peace Accord by recruiting young people from targeted communities, training them and providing compensation for their outreach efforts. "The project was an incredible springboard for me. Although I studied sociology at university, it was through this project that I conducted my first ever field observations and surveys," she shared during a research visit in Bangui in February 2024. This experience later enabled her to secure a position as a community outreach officer with an international humanitarian organization, leveraging her new skills and experience.[100]

> "You cannot tackle the social and political aspects of youth inclusion without addressing their economic concerns."
> — Youth expert in Colombia

Beyond the individual impact for those involved, practitioners frequently observed significant catalytic effects of socioeconomic activities or components. One strong example is the cross-border project in Cameroon, Chad and Gabon (PBF/IRF-370, 369, 368). One of the key subcomponents which came to play a prominent role in Cameroon was an initiative to provide seed-funding for social entrepreneurship, available to all community members and benefiting a large number of youth grantees. This socioeconomic component proved very successful, with one implementing partner estimating that the average gains were 10 to 20 times the initial investment.[101] This was in part because the grants empowered members of the community, particularly youth, to create change in their communities, which then had much broader ripple effects for peacebuilding. In addition, because they were enabling young people and community members to initiate new projects, which also garnered the support of government officials, they had a much higher prospect of being continued after the project, creating not only sustainability but a continuing catalytic effect. "It was a game-changer for the project, and a life-changer for the beneficiaries," one UN staff member who observed these sites stated, adding that "if you had 4,000 of these [projects] you could change a country, or at least a region."[102]

Table 2: Common tools, activities and practice strategies

	Example 1	**Example 2**	**Example 2**
Creating or fostering youth mechanisms or bodies (local or national councils, professional or social clubs, youth networks, etc.)	Colombia PBF/IRF-455: established local youth assemblies that developed advocacy to address youth grievances.	Guinea PBF/IRF-264: established local councils in 20 communities, offering a proof of concept for project PBF/GIN/B-12 in Guinea to establish a National Youth Council.[103]	Mali PBF/MLI/C-1: supported youth Dimitra Clubs, which provide youth with dedicated spaces to make decisions and discuss concerns regarding resources.

Table 2: Common tools, activities and practice strategies			
	Example 1	**Example 2**	**Example 2**
Linking youth to decision makers (formal or informal)	El Salvador PBF/IRF-414: 109 youth integrated into Municipal Committees for the Prevention of Violence, and facilitated consultations with local governance actors.	Uganda PBF/IRF-303: 84 elected local youth representatives (50 women; 34 men) engaged with national parliamentarians on behalf of their communities, influencing public policy.	Solomon Islands PBF/IRF-472: established a youth caucus at the ward level, giving youth a platform to voice grievances and define community roles.
Involving youth in local dispute resolution	DRC PBF/IRF-262: 192 youth members of 25 local peace committees ("*barazas*") given a central role in dispute resolution and mediation between Twa and Bantu communities.	Chad PBF/TCD/A-1: young people were brought into local dispute resolution, within the youth community and in mixed host, displaced and refugee communities in the Lake Chad basin.	Niger PBF/IRF-298: trained 100 youth to participate in mediation networks and exercises to enable youth to take part in local dispute resolution, especially young women.
Intergenerational dialogue	Tunisia PBF/IRF-288: facilitated workshops and consultations for 780 youth in 7 municipalities where they could engage directly with community elders.	Chad PBF/IRF-263: created local dialogue platforms bringing youth and community elders together, with both committing to a signed "intergenerational charter".	The Gambia PBF/GMD/D-1: supported regional dialogues bringing together local authorities, police, ministries and youth in three regions to improve trust and relations.
Media and sensitization on YPS or on youth	CAR PBF/IRF-468: partnered with the popular Radio Ndélé to broadcast youth-led programmes that promoted peace and violence prevention, reaching 9,000 people.	Uganda PBF/IRF-303: youth-led "entertainment education", marginalized youth spread peace messages through popular radio, music and television programmes.	Tunisia PBF/IRF-288: provided training on youth-sensitive reporting to media stakeholders, shifting prevalent youth narratives.
Identifying trusted intermediaries or bridges	CAR PBF/IRF-334: created 3-month mentoring programmes for 19 youth interns, hosted by CSOs in legal aid, human rights or related fields.	Niger PBF/IRF-298: worked with religious teachers and traditional and religious leaders to shift perceptions of young women and recognize their potential.	Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329: established older women mentors to advise young women and connect them with authorities.
Supporting youth capacity-building (on conflict mediation, leadership, participation)	Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-384: conducted capacity-building for 571 youth parliamentarians and young aspiring leaders on peacebuilding, health and socioeconomic issues.	El Salvador PBF/IRF-381: provided training to 532 marginalized youth to enable them to become leaders in community action, to promote diversity and peacebuilding.	Solomon Islands PBF/IRF-472: organized trainings for young people on communal land management to enable them to engage in community land management discussions.

Table 2: Common tools, activities and practice strategies			
	Example 1	**Example 2**	**Example 2**
Supporting youth livelihoods and professional development	Liberia PBF/LBR/D-15: 500 at-risk youth given training plus start-up capital for micro-enterprises, and sustainable jobs.	Mali PBF/MLI/C-1: facilitated training for youth (sustainable livelihoods in agriculture, fish farming), and public–private partnerships supporting youth entrepreneurs.	Mauritania PBF/IRF-441: facilitated youth access to "green jobs", i.e. through facilitating production and delivery of biogas.
Engaging youth in monitoring, conflict prevention, and early warning tasks and mechanisms	Côte d'Ivoire PBF/IRF-259: organized youth surveillance brigades to track deforestation and signs of illegal activity in protected forests or future conflict risks.	Chad PBF/IRF-263: brought 1,300 youth (including 700 women) into local conflict and dispute resolution, and organized youth into sentinels for conflict prevention.	Burkina Faso-Mali PBF/IRF-292, 291: engaged youth in cross-border prevention by integrating them in local conflict prevention and early warning mechanisms within cross-border areas.
Gamification or technology platform engagement (to increase youth interest, or scale/access)	Honduras PBF/IRF-435: created a platform for youth to create and use interactive maps of their territories to track pollution, land ownership and climate change.	Somalia PBF/IRF-433: created a cellular phone application that gamified the selection of canal sites and microprojects, encouraging community engagement.	Tunisia PBF/IRF-288: as part of project activities, youth created an app for community waste management and another for delivering taxi services to women at night.
Seed-funding and social entrepreneurship	Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger PBF/BFA/B-6: provided microgrants to youth organizations to support community improvements or local sustainable businesses.	CAR PBF/IRF-468: supported 35 community-based organizations to implement 35 microprojects to help strengthen interactions between communities.	Tunisia PBF/IRF-288: supported 107 youth-led and youth-implemented development projects within their communities.
Sport, arts and music as a conduit for youth engagement and community trust-building	Uganda PBF/IRF-303: organized football and netball events and shared peace messages through arts and music, notably a popular song titled "Peace Lover".	The Gambia PBF/IRF-342: organized joint football matches to foster cooperation and film screenings as part of intercommunal trust-building.	Niger PBF/IRF-462: hosted culinary competitions and other cultural events for vulnerable youth.

3. Select practice areas

Within the youth programming field, several common practice areas have emerged, focusing on particular areas of peacebuilding practice or on specific elements of the YPS agenda and pillars. While it was not possible to canvass all of these in the course of the research, the projects selected offered specific insights for four key or emerging areas of practice:

- Support to national youth mechanisms and policies, such as National Youth Councils or National Action Plans on YPS
- Youth engagement in regional and cross-border peacebuilding and conflict prevention
- Youth engagement in climate- and natural resources-related peacebuilding
- Intersectional approaches to youth programming

A. National youth mechanisms, strategies and policies

Most of the PBF-supported programming examined promoted youth inclusion at the local or community level. Nonetheless, resolution 2250 and other YPS strategies and reports have highlighted the need for greater youth participation and inclusion at a national, regional or global level (i.e. at global forums like the PBC, at international conferences like the climate-related Conference of the Parties, or in global UN decision-making).[104] While programming approaches (the focus of this Review) do not tend to reach that global level of participation, PBF-supported work has taken steps to encourage greater youth participation in national decision-making, conflict prevention and other peacebuilding efforts. This includes through supporting national youth representative bodies like National Youth Councils, [105] the development or implementation of National Action Plans or policies on YPS or support for YPS coalitions. [106] Definitions and programming examples of some of these national flagship processes or bodies are summarized in box 3. This Review also examined several examples of other YPS-related projects operating at a national level, including one involving young people in monitoring of an active conflict (Sudan PBF/IRF-471), and three considering involvement in other national peace and transition processes (CAR PBF/IRF-334, South Sudan PBF/SSD/A-5, Yemen PBF/IRF-270).

Across these projects, several lessons stood out about the value of trying to increase youth participation at a national level, as well as the challenges of trying to "scale up" youth programming at that level.

1. National councils, mechanisms and coalitions can increase young people's national visibility, coordination and voice, while also supporting local peacebuilding. National representative bodies or national networks and coalitions can be an important way to connect local voices, and give young people a greater platform at national level. The project PBF/GMD/D-1 in The Gambia helped anchor youth voices at a national level by strengthening an existing National Youth Parliament, and also creating a Children's National Assembly. Bringing together representatives from 172 youth organizations, the National Youth Parliament helped coordinate and coalesce work that had been happening at a local level, increasing young people's visibility and their ability to provide input into national decision-making. "The impact of the project has been huge," one of the Youth Parliamentarians interviewed offered. "It has prepared us to act on the national level. The project has contributed to how transformative we have become in The Gambia."[107] The Children's National Assembly provided a conduit for those on the younger side of the youth spectrum to become more involved. Since its establishment, between 10 and 12 members of the Children's National Assembly have been elected to the National Youth Parliament.[108]

Box 3: National youth mechanisms, action plans and platforms: definitions and project examples

PBF-supported projects have supported national representative bodies and councils, YPS coalitions and other forms of youth networks, and have helped facilitate processes for elaborating YPS National Action Plans or strategies. The list below offers some definitions of these different mechanisms and of PBF-supported projects within the sample that worked to strengthen them.

National Action Plans on YPS are documents adopted voluntarily by governments outlining their strategies and the actions they will take at different levels to institutionalize and operationalize the YPS agenda, and to prioritize meaningful

youth inclusion in decision-making processes.[109] At the time of research, only four countries had YPS National Action Plans: Finland, Nigeria, DRC and the Philippines. However, The Gambia had begun taking steps towards validating such a plan in November 2024 and Malawi officially launched its plan in December 2024. Within the sample of 33 countries and territories within this Review, only DRC had a fully validated National Action Plan. However, a plan was being discussed in at least 9 countries,[110] and 12 had established national youth policies and/or national youth strategies.[111]

- Projects involved in helping elaborate National Action Plans on YPS or facilitating national policies: South Sudan PBF/SSD/A-5, Guinea PBF/GIN/B-12, follow-on project to Western Balkans PBF/IRF-250.[112]

National Youth Councils, commissions, assemblies and parliaments are representative bodies established at a national level that consult on youth policy development.[113] Their form and function vary. In some countries, they are legally established with a formal link to government institutions (often the youth ministry). In others, they resemble non-governmental umbrella organizations that provide a platform for other youth associations, local and regional councils, youth unions, and individual young people to identify youth priorities and engage with policymakers. Of the 33 countries and territories in which the projects in this Review were implemented, 25 had a National Youth Council (although some had become inactive).[114]

- Projects supporting National Youth Councils: Guinea PBF/GIN/B-12, The Gambia PBF/GMB/D-1.
- Projects in which National Youth Councils interacted with project activities or elements: The Gambia PBF/GMB/D-1, Cameroon-Chad-Gabon, PBF/IRF-370, 369, 368, Burkina Faso-Mali PBF/IRF-292, 291.

YPS coalitions, in contrast, with more formalized National Youth Councils, are more dynamic alliances of young people and other organizations and individuals specifically focused on advancing the YPS agenda.[115] They are often focused on ensuring accountability and follow-through on YPS commitments, including those that might emerge in National Action Plans or other YPS policies. While these are harder to track, such YPS coalitions were present in at least five of the countries in the sample (Cameroon, El Salvador, The Gambia, Liberia and Sri Lanka) and in two relevant regions (Latin America and Middle East and North Africa, or MENA).[116]

- Projects that had some linkage with YPS coalitions: Guinea PBF/GIN/B-12, The Gambia PBF/GMB/D-1, Yemen PBF/IRF-270.[117]

A more recent project in Guinea (PBF/GIN/B-12), approved in 2022, invested in several flagship mechanisms at a national level: it kickstarted the development of a National Youth Council, and also facilitated consultations on a revised national youth strategy and the creation of a road map and YPS coalition. The latter set of activities were designed to contribute to a National Action Plan on YPS in Guinea. Illustrating how national youth bodies can be a way to link youth organizations and activists nationally and enhance coordination, the National Youth Council was designed to be the top level in a connected national network of youth representation, linked to 8 regional offices of youth representatives, 362 at the prefectural and communal level, and 410 sub-prefectural offices. It was also seen by youth activists in Guinea – many of whom had long aspired to have a National Youth Council – as a springboard for national engagement.[118] Although new, there were already signs that this National Youth Council was positioned to have a more direct interface with senior government officials, and to be engaged in national conversations in ways that had not been possible before (also due to the change in the political environment, see box 5).

Elevating youth voices through national coalitions: This ability to better connect and organize local voices for national action is not limited to national representative bodies such as youth councils. Those working on the National Action Plan on YPS in The Gambia saw one of its virtues as contributing to coordination and organization of the youth movement by creating a division of labour, and a strategy that would lead to greater accountability and follow-through on youth commitments in the country.[119]

The project in Sudan (PBF/IRF-471) illustrates a different way that youth organizations and local voices can be brought together, through national coalition-building. The project was initially designed to facilitate greater youth participation in the transition process that followed the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement by supporting a nationwide network of youth activists and organizations, the Youth

Citizen Observer Network (YCON), to monitor the transition and peace process. Midway through project implementation, in April 2023, conflict broke out and the transition process lapsed. The project was adapted so that YCON could play an active role in this new stage of the conflict, with youth becoming local monitors on conflict developments, including local ceasefires, humanitarian aid and access, migration and displacement trends, and the educational and economic impacts of the war.[120] Overall, the project was viewed as highly impactful, with young people in these monitoring groups demonstrating how they could contribute to conflict monitoring and mitigation in their own communities. However, it was their linkage through the network of YCON that elevated their voices for a broader national impact and role.[121]

National mechanisms as a connector for local peacebuilding: The example of YCON also illustrates another important value of these national networks and mechanisms: through their connecting function, they can facilitate peacebuilding work at a local or subregional level. As it gained a reputation for credible reporting, youth groups and individuals linked through YCON received requests for briefing and follow-on information, including from peacebuilding actors and UN organizations operating nationally, as well as Sudanese communities.[122] YCON has even advanced its exposure on the international stage, contributing to UN Security Council meetings on the ongoing situation in Sudan.[123]

Another example of how national youth bodies or networks can contribute to other peacebuilding work is the project in Burkina Faso and Mali (PBF/IRF-292, 291), which was designed to engage youth in cross-border conflict prevention and resolution work. The National Youth Councils helped in identifying young people in 10 cross-border communes, mobilizing them into local sensitization and community service initiatives. Some of the National Youth Council members in Cameroon were also involved as community leaders in the cross-border project in Cameroon, Chad and Gabon (PBF/IRF-370, 369, 368).

2. To avoid the risk of tokenism, national mechanisms and platforms have to invest in participatory and inclusive approaches, and connect with local efforts.

While these flagship national processes, such as National Youth Councils, are valued for their ability to give a national platform to youth voices, there are also risks that they can become tokenistic vehicles, or worse, be subject to politicization.[124] Another concern is that these flagship national mechanisms or processes can attract funding and attention, but can sometimes be seen as disconnected from

Hanaa Eltigani Mohamed, Assistant Secretary General for the Youth Citizen Observer Network (YCON), formed as part of the project PBF/IRF-471 in Sudan, representing the findings of youth monitors in Sudan at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in February 2025. Photo provided courtesy of The Carter Center.

youth issues and advancement on the ground. The risk of token or superficial youth empowerment via something like a National Youth Council is the reason that some youth activists prefer investing energy in youth networks or YPS coalitions, which can galvanize support around National Action Plans, strategies or policies on YPS, and thereby potentially aim for a wider impact.

With both National Youth Councils and National Action Plans, however, there can be issues of sustainability due to lack of consistent funding, as well as loss of momentum. In addition, experts cautioned against viewing National Action Plans as a "magical formula" for YPS advancement.[125] Lack of follow-through and implementation on YPS commitments within them is common and can lead to them being seen as empty promises rather than ways to actually advance youth empowerment. Additionally, experts said the sort of change that is sought is ultimately a relational and not a transactional endeavour, and thus the bargains struck in an output-oriented document such as a National Action Plan may not fully reflect the exchanges, relationships and trust-building that would be required to meaningfully advance youth engagement.

Investing in representative and inclusive processes: To avoid some of these risks, practitioners and youth activists stressed the need to invest in making these national

processes and platforms as representative, participatory and inclusive as possible.[126] An illustration of this can be seen in the project PBF/GIN/B-12 in Guinea, which was designed to create processes that would be as broadly inclusive and representative (across the whole of Guinea) as possible, both in the formulation of the National Youth Council and also in the other consultations towards a National Action Plan on YPS.[127] As noted, the National Youth Council was designed as the top level of a connected series of youth councils at subregional, prefectural and communal, and sub-prefectural levels. Youth representatives were to be selected for each level through an electoral model (which was developed in the prior PBF-supported project in Guinea discussed in section 2.A, PBF/IRF-264). Those elected to the highest level, the National Youth Councils, were drawn from those with past experience at a subregional or prefectural level. This was designed with a view to giving the National Youth Council greater credibility, and also ensuring that it was connected to youth representation and issues happening at different levels across the country.[128]

Inclusive and participatory consultation processes and broad-based YPS coalitions are also viewed as one way to avoid tokenism or lack of follow-through with National Action Plans on YPS. Although there can be many reasons that National Action Plans or other national commitments on YPS are not implemented, one issue may be lack of sufficient accountability for follow-through, which a broad-based and resilient YPS coalition could help address by creating pressure points and keeping up the momentum. A widely consultative process for developing a National Action Plan could help generate such a broad-based YPS coalition, while also creating a process by which a range of youth can input into and shape national policies. This is why the project PBF/IRF-264 in Guinea, which also aimed to contribute to the development of a National Action Plan on YPS, organized a series of nationwide consultations, so that a diverse range of youth (and partners of youth) from around the country could form a YPS coalition and at the same time have a means of shaping national YPS policies and commitments. The project in Yemen (PBF/IRF-270) proposed a similar broad-based consultation process to move towards a national coalition and YPS Pact; however, most of these objectives ultimately could not be pursued due to other political dynamics and limitations (discussed in section 4.D).[129]

Another example of how important participatory process design can be in developing National Action Plans comes from the project in South Sudan (PBF/SSD/A-5).[130] The project facilitated nationwide consultations with around

The project PBF/GIN/B-12 in Guinea demonstrated the importance of participatory and inclusive processes, bringing together youth from across the country to consult on national youth strategies and develop a National Action Plan on Youth. Photo taken by UNU-CPR during an in-country field visit.

800 people, including youth organizations and community leaders from 10 states and 3 administrative areas in the country, on what they would like to see in the strategy. The intent, as with many National Action Plans or strategies,[131] was to not only advance formal policies and commitments on YPS in South Sudan, but also to allow the processes surrounding this National Action Plan to become a vehicle for youth to input into national policy formulation.

National platforms and mechanisms stronger where linked to local efforts: The design of the South Sudan project also illustrated another common point across these projects – that national mechanisms and platforms were stronger where linked with local, bottom-up efforts on youth empowerment. In the South Sudan project, the National Action Plan consultations were designed to take place alongside other support to youth inclusion in peace forums at the State level. This dual approach could help address concerns about these national youth policies and YPS strategies becoming too divorced from real issues facing youth in their daily life, and of not paying sufficient attention to the slow trust- and relationship-building that is necessary to advance youth engagement on the ground.

Another project in Sri Lanka (PBF/IRF-384) illustrated how creating ties between national platforms and local action

can give resonance to national YPS initiatives and mechanisms. The project supported selected youth parliamentarians from the National Youth Services Council and young aspiring leaders beyond it to participate in capacity-building programmes on peacebuilding, health and socioeconomic issues, empowering them to return to their communities to produce community-based action plans to address community issues.[132] Youth parliamentarians were to serve as connectors between local and national levels of governance, with health used as an entry point for youth participation and building community social cohesion in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.[133] The role of youth, as one partner described it, was to "translate this programme into corresponding actions in their communities".[134] This set-up served as a training ground for young aspiring leaders to gain visibility within their communities and local political parties, linking local and national political landscapes, and boosting youth participation in local governance.

A note of caution here: while supporting young leaders to engage at local and subnational levels can give them credibility to engage at higher levels, the local action should not be a substitute for national engagement. One of the frustrations within the Sri Lanka project was that it proved difficult to promote greater youth leadership and meaningful participation in the oversight mechanisms linked to the Sri Lankan Parliament. Many of the young people supported by the project assumed leadership roles at the community level (e.g., resolving community issues around water scarcity, or running for local council elections) but they still faced a ceiling on participation at the national level.

Considering sustainability in national mechanisms: A final issue confronting many of these national mechanisms and platforms is that of sustainability, in particular financial sustainability. Youth activists and experts interviewed provided multiple examples of National Youth Councils that had become inactive, or National Action plans or strategies on YPS that had lost momentum due to insufficient funding.[135] For example, of the 33 countries and territories in which the projects from this Review's sample were implemented, 25 had a National Youth Council but at least 3 had become inactive, in part due to lack of sustained support.[136]

Tensions around sustained financial support were evident in nearly all of the projects examined that were operating at a national level. In Guinea, members of the National Youth Council said they were fighting to include the National Youth Council and youth-related activities in the state budget, and also working to strengthen their own fundraising and self-financing mechanisms.[137] Even a small amount of funds for activities would have gone a long way in enabling the council to be sustainable, they said.[138]

The project noted above in The Gambia (PBF/GMD/D-1) illustrated a positive example of sustainability but also some of these continuing financial challenges. This was one of the earliest projects in the sample, approved in 2018, and so it was possible to see some of the legacy effects. Seven years on, both the National Youth Parliament and the Children's National Assembly continued to function, hold regular elections and to actively participate in national debates. For example, during the course of the research, in 2024, there was a proposal to repeal legal prohibitions on female genital mutilation in The Gambia. Both the National Youth Parliament and the Children's National Assembly were active among the voices arguing against this.[139]

Those involved credit past PBF support, and the way they were able to generate broad participation and engagement, with the resilience of these institutions, but also noted limitations. For example, one of the youth parliamentarians involved in the project PBF/GMB/D-1 said it provided "the bare minimum to transform".[140] Both the final evaluation of the project and testimonies from the individuals involved in the youth parliament noted that limited funding opportunities were likely to be factors in the youth parliament's sustainability and resilience.[141]

3. Gaining traction on youth participation and YPS goals at a national level may first depend on creating a foundation for youth participation at a local level.

A key lesson learned from national youth programming is that gaining traction on youth participation and YPS goals at a national level may depend on creating a foundation for youth participation at a local level.

In the project PBF/GIN/B-12 in Guinea, for example, the project's success at a national level (with the youth council and other consultations) was possible in large part because of the efforts of the previous youth participation project in Guinea (PBF/IRF-264, discussed in section 2.A). By establishing local youth councils in 20 conflict-prone communities in the country, the earlier project had offered a proof of concept that increasing youth participation could reduce conflict risks and add value to local governance. It "showed the State the importance of this institution [the National Youth Council]", and meant that when it came to establishing a National Youth Council later, "the political will was there", one implementing partner offered.[142] A second benefit was that the later project could draw from some of the youth engaged in the prior project, with these individuals elected to National Youth Council positions or

taking part in the consultations for the revised national youth policy and YPS strategy. In addition, and as noted, the earlier project laid the foundation for a more credible and inclusive National Youth Council through the elected representative system it innovated.

The successful establishment of a national youth monitoring network (YCON) in the project in Sudan (PBF/IRF-471) was another example of building from a local foundation. Because of the strength of the youth movement in Sudan there were already existing youth-led organizations across the country's 18 states. Thanks to prior programming work in Sudan, the Carter Center was in touch with many of these, and also could count on support from governmental authorities. Generating a network with national reach and impact was possible because it could build on previous investments and youth mobilization at a local level across the country.

Conclusions and key findings on national-level programming:

Investing in national bodies or YPS mechanisms can be a powerful way to promote youth voices on a national level, giving a platform to youth concerns that could not be achieved at a local level alone. Because there are barriers to generating national-level mechanisms, this is the sort of intervention that the PBF's catalytic funding is well suited to support, provided attention is given to sustainability concerns. However, the following points emerged as key considerations in designing national-level YPS programming:

- A strong local foundation may add resilience to national mechanisms and increase the chance of success, so sequencing between supporting youth engagement at national and at local levels is important. Iterative or sequential funding may improve impact in this area.
- To reduce the risks of token or superficial national mechanisms, a greater emphasis on broad-based consultation, participatory processes and inclusion of diverse voices is important in the formation of national youth bodies or initiatives.
- Creating YPS coalitions can help maintain momentum on national action, but will not entirely compensate for some of the lack of follow-on and inactivity of youth bodies that stem from ad hoc or short-term financing patterns.

B. Regional and cross-border youth engagement

The project sample included four cross-border or regional projects: Western Balkans (PBF/IRF-250); Burkina Faso-Mali (PBF/IRF-292, 291); Cameroon-Chad-Gabon (PBF/IRF-370, 369, 368); and Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger (PBF/BFA/B-6).[143] UN officials and implementing partners interviewed also shared experiences with regional and cross-border projects beyond these projects.[144] Three, often interlinked, factors were identified as chief challenges for these projects: complexity of implementation; difficulty obtaining full support and engagement across multiple countries; and a theory of change that did not fully link with or justify a cross-border programming modality. These are broader challenges with cross-border and regional programming, rather than issues specific to youth-focused programming. They nonetheless provide insights for future PBF-supported cross-border programming that might seek to incorporate youth or YPS objectives. As a result of these common challenges, many of the cross-border components and elements were never fully realized. In addition, similar to that with national level programming, cross-border programming also appeared more likely to succeed when it could build from a foundation of prior youth programming. Each of these issues will be discussed in turn, along with suggestions for addressing them in future programming:

1. Complexity and coordination issues: A major challenge for cross-border or regional projects is the additional time and resources required for implementation and management. It takes greater staff time to coordinate across multiple agencies and implementing partners, and across multiple countries and territories. As one UN staff member put it, "Cross-border projects are hard to implement. They require cooperation from several agencies in different countries with different political calendars, which can harm project implementation or progress."[145] One UN staff member who had tried to help facilitate PBF-supported regional initiatives (beyond those in this Review sample alone) observed that even among staff who are within the same organization, the different country environments in which they are operating (e.g. one in a more post-conflict or prevention mode and the other dealing with a crisis situation) can create "very different head-spaces" that can make it hard for them to effectively coordinate and sync activities.[146] One illustration of this manifested in the project in Cameroon, Chad and Gabon (PBF/IRF-370, 369, 368), where even the idea of creating a common project across countries in very different stages of conflict management created some initial challenges in conceptualization and operation.[147]

The time and resource investment may be even greater when the activities involve coordinating the schedules, agendas and interests of outside stakeholders like national government counterparts, local authorities or local civil society members – as many of the cross-border activities would require. One UN staff member who took part in some of the activities and government liaising for the project in Cameroon, Chad and Gabon observed that it had proved virtually impossible for the project to hold meetings between the three countries' line ministries. "Having three ministers of three different countries align their schedules, even for a meeting online… [proved difficult] …much less in person," he said.[148] Arranging such meetings took not only substantial implementing partner staff time, but also the prerequisite of a strong relationship with the line ministries in question, which implementing partners or UN staff in all countries did not equally enjoy.[149] UN staff members involved in the project in Burkina Faso and Mali (PBF/IRF-292, 291) raised a similar issue in aligning the schedules of various actors and authorities.[150]

The importance of these coordination issues in influencing how successful a cross-border project might be can be seen with the more positive experience of the cross-border project in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (PBF/BFA/B-6), situated in the remote transborder area of the Liptako-Gourma subregion. The primary activity was subgrants to local organizations and CSO community initiatives (a modality developed in part because of the inaccessibility of the area but also as a way to invest in local peacebuilding). The coordinating organization that would distribute these grants drew from only one organization, Mercy Corps (but across its offices in all three countries). This significantly simplified the organizational complexity of the project. In addition, because there is only a limited government presence in the area and because it was not the main focus of this community-focused project, there were no significant cross-border governmental exchanges or elements to coordinate. Thus, all of the coordination issues that proved so time-consuming in other cross-border projects were relatively light in this project.

Cross-border components the first to be de-prioritized or dropped: Given all the coordination and implementation challenges involved, ultimately the project teams in both the Cameroon-Chad-Gabon project and the Burkina Faso-Mali project chose to focus on activities and objectives within each country, for the most part abandoning the cross-border elements. As one of the staff members observed, given the slow progress and limited likely results, at a certain point, "It became more important to advance implementation of activities in the various countries than to advance coordination between the countries."[151]

Interviews with a range of implementing partners, and also reflections from other PBF thematic reviews suggest that this tendency for the cross-border components of a project to be de-prioritized or be dropped altogether is fairly common within such projects, suggesting that this issue goes beyond implementation challenges in any single project or country context.[152] Because of these implementation, coordination and management challenges, a single cross-border activity in three countries can be not just three times the work, but multiple times that.

Navigating multiple, complex security environments: However, the project in the Liptako-Gourma subregion does illustrate one other issue that can make implementation of cross-border work challenging: navigating multiple complex security environments at once. Within the project (PBF/BFA/B-6), it proved exceedingly difficult to have consistent cross-border exchanges with CSOs or communities because of fluctuations in the security situation across borders. Stability in one border community (e.g. in Mali) could be concurrent with substantial disruption in a neighbouring village just a couple of kilometres across the border (e.g. in Burkina Faso).[153] This level of security flux across three countries made it difficult to find the right windows of time to enable programming to go forward. Despite having mitigation measures in place, complex security dynamics, manifesting differently in each country, were also a major complication in the Burkina Faso-Mali project (PBF/IRF-292, 291).[154]

Implementing partners involved in both of these cross-border projects were aware of the security contexts at the inception of the project and had risk mitigation strategies in place.[155] However, juggling these variable and fluctuating security dynamics in more than one context simultaneously made it even more difficult to keep implementation on track, even with anticipation of some issues.

2. Difficulty of maintaining full engagement across multiple stakeholders: One challenge that arose across almost all of the cross-border projects was the difficulty of obtaining and maintaining the full engagement of all stakeholders throughout the course of the project. All PBF-supported projects are counter-signed and approved by the government(s) in question, and many originate from national strategies developed by these governments, including with respect to addressing youth issues and cross-border cooperation. Nonetheless, enthusiasm for supporting youth work at a national level may not trickle

down evenly to local border officials or the non-governmental stakeholders who also must be involved. In addition, each country involved in a cross-border project may be in a different stage of the conflict and peace spectrum, and also may have different perspectives with regard to how youth inclusion intersects with national or regional prevention and peacebuilding strategies.[156] This can make it difficult to get all partners on the same page. While such issues can sometimes be averted through stronger consultation at the outset, sometimes differences in perspective are not easy to overcome, particularly not in the short time period allotted for PBF-supported projects. Competing time demands and other pressing priorities (especially in border areas with security challenges) may also be an issue. Reflecting more broadly on the challenges of cross-border programming, one UN staff member commented, "Honestly, politically, diplomatically and practically, to have three countries sit together [at] the same table is difficult."[157]

These issues may be even more challenging for projects trying to operate on a regional level or engaging with regional organizations, as was illustrated with the Burkina Faso-Mali project (PBF/IRF-292, 291). The project aimed to increase youth participation in regional conflict prevention by both strengthening youth engagement in local conflict prevention, and also connecting these efforts with those of other regional actors, notably the G5 Sahel grouping of Member States (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger). When the project was being developed, the G5 Sahel Integrated Youth Strategy had just been developed, and this project offered one way to operationalize it.[158] The project initially had the strong support and interest of the G5 Sahel, and the promise of being connected with its regional conflict prevention strategy.[159] However, by the time the project got under way, there were significant strains on the G5 Sahel, which Mali would exit not long after project closure.[160]

Additionally, during the project's lifespan, there were two unconstitutional changes in government in Mali, and burgeoning instability in Burkina Faso, which would also be subject to two unconstitutional changes in the year after project closure, in 2022. This level of political volatility made it nearly impossible to count on any degree of consistent political engagement. Activities still went ahead within the border communities, and with some strong achievements at a local level. But disconnected from this larger national and regional framework, it was hard for them to add up to the transnational early warning and prevention effect that the project was intended to catalyse.

3. Lack of sync or clear connection with the theory of change: In several projects, the rationale for having a particular youth empowerment or engagement initiative realized simultaneously in more than one country was not clear. The 2023 *Climate-Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review*, which reviewed some 14 cross-border projects, observed that in most cases, there was little perceptible sync between the theory of change or project objectives and the decision to approach a project through a cross-border modality.[161] As a result, cross-border projects "presented significant additional challenges in terms of implementation, and this additional cost and effort was not always justified by a clearly identifiable benefit".[162]

Those interviewed for this Review shared similar observations. More often than not, PBF-supported cross-border work resembled projects implemented "side by side simultaneously", with any cross-border components (such as bringing together government officials or civil society from different countries) featuring as only a minor component of a much wider swathe of nationally focused activities.[163] Within several of the projects, cross-border activities often come closer to resembling "add-on" features rather than core components of the project. What that meant was that when implementation challenges arose, those add-ons were the first to fall by the wayside. For example, in the project in Cameroon, Chad and Gabon (PBF/IRF-370, 369, 368), the cross-border element of bringing young people together as early warning sentinels on conflict triggers and illicit wildlife tracking in border areas represented only a minor part of the overall array of activities proposed. It was hard to see it justifying a project whose activities and objectives for the most part were contained within national borders. As a result, when faced with the range of implementation and coordination challenges described above, these cross-border activities quickly ran aground.

The benefits of ensuring a fit between the theory of change and the selection of a cross-border or regional programming modality can be seen with the projects in the Liptako-Gourma subregion and in the Western Balkans. In the project in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (PBF/BFA/B-6), even if most of the activities were still very localized the rationale for having cross-border engagement was better linked to the project premise. The primary rationale was to develop peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities within border communities, given the lack of access or ability of other actors to influence these areas. In addition, given that these border communities drew from the same population base and demographics, with many of the same traditions and linguistic ties, it was felt that community exchanges

and cross-border social or cultural events could facilitate transnational social cohesion-building within and among border communities. The level of cross-border exchanges was still limited (in part by the variability in the security situation), and it would be hard to say that a robust level of transnational social cohesion emerged. Nonetheless, approaching this project through a cross-border modality was central to the rationale and theory of change.

The link between the project rationale and the regional operating modality was also strong with the project in the Western Balkans (PBF/IRF-250). The project sought to foster reconciliation across six Balkan entities[164] by strengthening the capacity of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), facilitating cross-border exchanges for youth engagement in peacebuilding and reconciliation issues (including through schools), and supporting existing youth groups and grass-roots organizations (through RYCO) to engage in peacebuilding projects. UN staff members involved in the original design recollected that unlike some initiatives proposed by the UN, this project idea was proposed and driven by the six Western Balkan Governments or entities involved.[165] Modelled after French-German reconciliation efforts after the Second World War, the project was designed to create a space where the region could move towards rapprochement, cooperation and positive exchanges. Youth engagement was identified by the Governments and entities themselves as the most suitable space.

Those involved identified additional activities that would have further strengthened the project's youth reconciliation objective, and its effects nationally and regionally (many of which were taken up in a follow-on project). Nonetheless, the core theory of change and premise were well matched to the regional peacebuilding model and activities.[166] Notwithstanding some tensions that arose over some of these youth exchanges – perhaps inevitable in a region with deep faultlines and ongoing political divisions – overall support remained constant.[167] Strong results followed from this: as one implementing partner described, the project was a "game-changer" that "allowed us to convey the message that peacebuilding is important and youth are the ones we need to be engaging with".[168]

4. Building from a strong national or local foundation: Similar to the finding in the previous section that national-level projects benefit from a strong grounding at the local level, regional or cross-border youth projects appeared to have a better chance of success when they could build on youth empowerment and inclusion projects at a local and national level. The Western Balkans project (PBF/IRF-250) was viewed as highly successful at building bridges in the region through a youth exchange and empowerment project. However, those involved reflected that it could have been stronger if it had connected youth at a community level before, or in combination with, regional youth exchanges, in part because of substantial internal divisions (based on cultural, ethnic or linguistic differences) within each of the countries or territories involved.

The Gabon-Chad-Cameroon cross-border project (PBF/IRF-370, 369, 368) pointed to similar learning. The project's main objective was to create a youth network by training and coordinating 1,800 young people across the countries to become conflict prevention actors ("*jeunes tisserands de la paix*"), particularly for the prevention of illicit trafficking within cross-border areas. However, the regional organization (Payncop) in charge of coordinating the "*jeunes tisserands*" network argued, "We must first emphasize the participation of young people at the local level. If the micro or local level works, it can (then) evolve at the national level."[169]

Conclusions and key findings on regional and cross-border programming:

Regional or cross-border programming was deemed to be innovative, and a worthwhile investment to explore, but has so far demonstrated mixed results. While many of the drawbacks identified were not specific to youth-focused programming, taking some of these issues into consideration might improve this type of YPS programming going forward:

- To address common implementation and coordination issues, it is important to build more time into cross-border projects, especially at the project development or start-up phase.
- There must be a strong enough fit with the rationale for a cross-border modality (within the theory of change) to justify the additional transaction costs of these projects.
- Gaining traction on youth participation at a regional or cross-border level may depend on creating a foundation at the local and national level first.

C. Youth in Climate, Peace and Security, and other environmental peacebuilding

There are many reasons to look to the intersection of youth and climate change in the peacebuilding space – including

the youth movement's engagement globally on climate issues, the particular vulnerabilities that young people may face as a result of climate change, and also the particular opportunities that youth engagement in climate adaptation and mitigation may bring. Yet, despite these natural overlaps, programming at the intersection of these two key priority areas is still very much a new and emerging area.[170] During the initial review and selection process for projects for this Review sample, only a couple of the 153 PBF-supported projects examined had a direct linkage with both youth and climate change. One of the projects selected for cohort 4, for example, explores young people's role in climate adaptation and peacebuilding in 12 communities in The Gambia (PBF/GMB/B-2), but is so far a stand-out example.

There have been a greater number of PBF-supported projects related to the management of natural resources and environmental peacebuilding more generally, with the natural resources issues in question sometimes impacted by climate change but without a clear or direct nexus to climate change per se. However, even within this much larger category of PBF-supported work, youth were often one of the many groups addressed, rather than the specific focus. This suggests something of a gap in programming, in terms of climate-related and environmental peacebuilding work that intentionally focuses on youth inclusion, engagement or impacts. As part of the research for this Review, UNU-CPR engaged in broader consultations with experts and practitioners in the field and found this to be a broader gap, not limited to PBF-supported programming. While there have been dedicated efforts to pilot programming that would respond to the gendered impact of climate change and involve women in climate adaptation and response, there has not been the same level of activity on the nexus between YPS and CPS.[171]

Nonetheless, even if not the dedicated focus, programming involving young people in climate-related and environmental peacebuilding has been emerging organically. In multiple projects in cohort 4, even where it was not intended to be a "youth-focused" project, young people were a large part of the population involved.[172] In projects like those in CAR PBF/IRF-468, Chad PBF/TCD/A-1 and Burkina Faso PBF/IRF-446, young herders were a large percentage of those whose livelihoods were affected by diminishing water points (including as a result of climate change), forcing them into new transhumance patterns that brought them into clashes with farming populations.[173] Young people were the primary actors involved in artisanal mining, which was the centre of environmental peacebuilding in the projects PBF/CIV/A-5 in Côte d'Ivoire and PBF/MLI/C-1 in Mali. In the projects PBF/TCD/A-1 in the Lake Chad basin and PBF/IRF-441 on the border of Mauritania and Mali, young people made up a large portion of the internally displaced persons (IDPs), such that easing tensions around natural resources strains, and developing more sustainable livelihoods, would inevitably have to involve the youth population. For example, in the project PBF/TCD/A-1 in Chad, although it was not initially designed as a "youth" project, young people ultimately made up 60 per cent of the participants.[174]

One climate adviser working in the Liptako-Gourma subregion of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (PBF/BFA/B-6), which he described as the paradigmatic case of climate and security issues coming together, stressed that youth had a critical role to play in all CPS initiatives. Youth make up 60 to 70 per cent of the population in that area, and he stressed, "There is no activity, no strategy developed in this region, without youth in the centre of it."[175]

The fact that young people were emerging as central players in CPS work and were helping to advance climate perspectives and adaptation in natural resources-related projects points to the significant natural synergies between YPS and CPS work. However, it is also important to highlight the gap that this signifies. Because youth were often not thought of as the primary or significant target of CPS and environmentally attuned peacebuilding, they were often not the key drivers or consulted interlocuters during the project development phase. Some community consultations involved young people, but to a lesser degree than some of the explicitly youth participation-focused projects in this Review sample.[176] Youth climate activists interviewed said a larger issue in the field is the lack of funding for youth-led climate work, and lack of support for young climate activists to develop their own initiatives.

While more programming and learning in this space is needed, the projects in cohort 4 offered insights into how youth are already contributing to CPS work and also the inverse – why the climate and environmental peacebuilding space is a key avenue for youth empowerment and participation. Four findings stood out:

1. Youth have often been leaders in promoting climate awareness and embracing climate-friendly local solutions. As observed in other parts of this research, a benefit of youth inclusion in peacebuilding is that young people often bring different perspectives and vantage points to the discussion. This seemed particularly true of the climate space. In several of the projects, it was young people in the targeted communities who raised the issue of climate change as a factor, or appeared more ready to embrace new approaches, technologies or adaptation

methods that would be more climate-friendly and sustainable. For example, in the project PBF/CIV/A-5 in Côte d'Ivoire, which focused on environmental degradation and community tensions surrounding artisanal mining, youth representatives were the ones to raise the issue of climate change and its impacts in the community dialogues organized.[177] "Youth had a level of sophistication and awareness of the environmental impact of climate change that was surprising," one implementing partner who was present observed.[178] While elders tended to attribute natural resources issues and tensions – declining crop yields, lack of pastureland for animals, declining arable land, and conflicts and tensions connected to them – to factors ranging from youth turning their backs on agriculture to "the will of the gods", youth would point to climate change linked to the burning of fossil fuels.[179]

In another project that worked with host and migrant communities in the Lake Chad basin (Chad PBF/TCD/A-1), implementing partners recollected that "we had not planned the issue of climate in the activities, but the young people themselves put it on the table when we consulted them".[180] He said youth were the ones who proposed a significant reforestation initiative in their area (which became part of the project activities) and also took the greatest interest in sustainable adaptation strategies.

> "Youth are the ones that will be affected in the long term by this changing climate. They want to be a part of the response to violence driven by this." — African Union staff member

The important, de facto leadership role that young people are playing in CPS initiatives was also observed by those working on initiatives beyond PBF-supported programming.[181] For example, one African Union (AU) representative described many youth-led initiatives happening as part of the AU's Great Green Wall initiative. "Youth have a sense of how climate is affecting them and affecting their continent. They know that they are the ones that will be affected in the long term by this changing climate. They want to be a part of the response to violence driven by this," he said.[182]

2. Young people can play an important role in conflict-sensitive climate adaptation. The project that most directly explored the mutual benefits of supporting climate adaptation and peacebuilding jointly was project PBF/GMB/B-2 in The Gambia. Its goal was to jointly reduce the impact of climate change and social conflict by bringing communities together in adaptation practices, and making them aware of the peace and security implications of climate change. Twelve communities identified as experiencing tensions around land and natural resources (with climate change identified as a strong contributor) were brought together through community trust-building activities, skills training on alternative livelihoods, joint clean-up and reforestation initiatives, and joint conversations and activities related to climate adaptation, including through sustainable livelihoods and land management.[183] This was described by those involved as a "transformative initiative", one that kickstarted community discussions on adaptation and alternative livelihoods. It also appeared to have a real impact in reducing community tensions and improving social cohesion in communities experiencing the impact of climate change.[184] According to the project evaluation, it catalysed government and community awareness and cooperation that would be necessary for continuing proactive adaptation responses.[185] Overall, the evaluation noted strong evidence that the project had strengthened community relationships and social cohesion, creating a "societal-level change" that suggested it should be replicated in other communities.[186]

The project was not solely focused on youth, but inclusion of young people became an important part of the climate adaptation and peacebuilding elements. One implementing partner observed that "youth are a very strong entry point for taking forward climate adaptation…[for example, in] tree-planting, looking into forest belts, preventing fires – youth are at the forefront in addressing these issues".[187] However, what was equally critical, he observed, was that young people became "ambassadors who could talk to other members of the communities", helping address some of the sources of violence and tensions.[188] Community members also highlighted the willingness of youth to cooperate in the project as a significant turning point. As one community member reflected: "If peace exists here it is because of the youth. The youth are involved in violence, and it is the youth that decided on peace."[189] Overall, the results suggested significant benefits of combining local adaptation strategies with peacebuilding, particularly with regard to youth involvement.

While this model and project experience offered important proof of concept – the independent evaluation as well as project partners and UN and government officials interviewed all argued it should be replicated – some of the most interesting learning about the role of peacebuilding in

In Mali, a country strongly affected by intersecting climate and security dynamics, projects like PBF/MLI/C-1 placed a strong emphasis on supporting "green" jobs for young people, and working with the next generation on sustainable livestock and farming practices. Photo provided courtesy of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

climate adaptation came from a project that was not ostensibly about it. The project PBF/IRF-259 in Côte d'Ivoire was not initially designed as a climate adaptation project, nor particularly as a youth-focussed project, but it offered one of the strongest proofs of concept that youth can play a key role in conflict-sensitive adaptation. The core issues that the project sought to address are those that many governments and communities will confront if they are to carry forward global commitments to environmental protection and local climate adaptation. The project sought to respond to a classic example of maladaptation: with increasing competition for arable land in Côte d'Ivoire, parts of the population have been settling in forested areas and contributing to deforestation. To counter this, in 2016 the Government of Côte d'Ivoire introduced a plan to relocate individuals that were (illegally) occupying protected forest – many of them youth. While a forward step in terms of environmental protection, this relocation created tensions, both among the displaced populations and in the host communities they were settled into.[190]

The project PBF/IRF-259 sought to address these tensions through a mixed model of community awareness-raising, and efforts to promote community cooperation and social cohesion by involving them in forest protection and sustainable jobs. Youth in particular were given roles in dispute resolution committees and early warning mechanisms, and acted as sentinels to protect the forests. The independent evaluation concluded that the project had "significantly impacted the environment, behaviour, and habits of community populations" with the activities not only facilitating the governmental plan for environmental protection but also creating "real opportunities for cohabitation and living together among communities".[191]

This example offers a global lesson about what peacebuilding strategies have to offer in this space, in particular peacebuilding strategies that engage young people. In many communities the very process of climate adaptation, while necessary in the long term, could exacerbate tensions or generate conflict. In both The Gambia and Côte d'Ivoire projects, there was a recognition that youth can either be leaders in championing a more harmonious adaptation process or have the potential to become spoilers if not appropriately included. For this reason, specific attention was given to involving youth in the community discussions

and dispute resolution over natural resources issues, and in enabling them to develop more sustainable livelihoods. In many contexts, for climate adaptation to be successful and sustainable, it will require greater conflict sensitivity and a combination with peacebuilding techniques, with particular attention to the role of young people.

3. Natural resources and climate-related peacebuilding offer the promise of getting at "root causes", including sources of youth vulnerability. In most of the local peacebuilding contexts examined, natural resources scarcity and changing weather patterns were viewed as root causes of local conflicts. Increasing aridity and drought in the Sahel were changing generational transhumance patterns, bringing herders into conflict with sedentary populations. Increased drought, environmental degradation and salination of soil – together with population surges – limited arable land and put pressure on agriculture and food security in ways that generated land and intercommunal conflicts. Unequal access to water and increasing limitations on water supply put individuals at risk and threatened community harmony. Those vulnerable to these effects, and the knock-on limitations for livelihoods, then sometimes resorted to taking part in criminal networks or other violent extremism groups as the only available source of income.[192] Interviews highlighted that youth may be particularly vulnerable to these knock-on effects of climate change.

Project responses to these challenges often combined "hard" inputs – improving agricultural techniques or animal fodder or care, renovating or supplementing water points or pastureland, providing seeds – with "soft" inputs, such as encouraging dialogue or social cohesion (e.g. in Chad PBF/TCD/A-1, Mauritania PBF/IRF-441, Somalia PBF/IRF-433).[193] Many projects also worked to kick-start or expand sustainable livelihoods and "green jobs".[194] As a result, communities tended to welcome these projects because they offered direct responses to what were seen as the root causes and key issues in their communities. Youth in particular often strongly welcomed this type of programming. As highlighted previously, socioeconomic needs and lack of job opportunities are at the core of youth concerns. In most of the communities where peacebuilding is happening, it is hard to address these without engaging with the land and natural resources issues.

4. Environmental and climate-related projects can provide entry points for other peacebuilding goals, including youth inclusion. A lead finding of the 2023 *Climate-Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review* was that because these natural resources-related projects are so valuable to communities, they can sometimes create entry points for addressing other peacebuilding goals, such as inclusion for marginalized groups.[195] The projects in cohort 4 illustrated this in a range of ways. The project PBF/IRF-304 in CAR was focused on land management to address transhumance tensions but aimed to use engagement on these issues – which were critical to the community – to also promote gender equality. Using the entry point of land and agricultural issues, the project was able to facilitate agreements by village leaders to allow women and girls access to agricultural land.[196] The project in Honduras (PBF/IRF-435) afforded opportunities to bring youth, particularly those from Indigenous communities, into a discussion about land conflict management, thereby also helping address other structural inequities and drivers of conflict. In The Gambia (PBF/GMB/B-2), one of the implementing partners said they could use climate-related and livelihood activities not only to open up space for inclusion of those who are "always left behind" – young people and women – but also to introduce more sensitive issues, such as discussions of sexual and gender-based violence.[197] The project allowed them to push against existing cultural barriers and norms, and to open up the space for addressing underlying cultural drivers of violence and conflict.

The project PBF/TCD/A-1 in the Lake Chad basin offers a strong example of how environmental or climate-related projects create a natural entry point for youth inclusion, as well as the benefits that can result from including young people in these conversations. The project was situated in a context of increasing resource strains and tensions among different communities in the Lake Chad basin – a mix of local Chadians, Chadians displaced from other parts of the country, returnees who had been displaced in earlier periods, and also Nigerien and Nigerian refugees. An additional faultline identified at the start of the project was a great deal of intergenerational mistrust – young people harbouring negative perceptions of formal and informal mechanisms and institutions (and the elders in charge of them), and suspicion of young people by elders because of fears that they would join extremist groups like Boko Haram.

"Hard" inputs such as replenishing water sources and supporting agricultural investments made the project attractive to communities because it helped meet core food and livelihood needs. The communities' openness to these projects in turn created an opportunity to address underlying tensions by encouraging cross- and intra-community collaboration within the project activities, both intergenerationally and between communities. This included mixing young people with elders in dispute resolution activities, and organizing mixed groups of

refugees, IDPs and others from host communities in some of the reforestation and other sustainable livelihood activities. The evaluation concluded that the combined approach had "induced a notable change in social relations between the beneficiary communities" and facilitated "the rapprochement between different communities towards social cohesion".[198] Implementing partners noted that the positive effects of bringing young people into dispute resolution and the self-confidence that they gained through that engagement helped counter intergenerational mistrust.

Another good example was the project PBF/IRF-433 in Somalia, where youth were introduced as change agents in efforts to address water shortages and conflicts in competing communities. The underlying conflict analysis noted that scarce resources and poor water management was a continuing driver of inter-clan conflict. It was difficult to get to this root cause of conflict by working with elders alone given calcified prejudices and strong sociocultural barriers to working across clan lines. However, in the initial project surveys and consultations, youth were identified as having a particular "vantage point", with greater fluidity and capacity to facilitate cross-clan interaction.[199] The project recognized continuing stigmas against youth, particularly given the propensity in Somalia for youth to be caught up in violence and thus stigmatized as "trouble-makers" or "agents of chaos" rather than peacemakers.[200] However, the opportunity to collectively address a fundamental challenge for the communities in question – water scarcity – was viewed as offering a powerful entry point that would allow young people to instead play the role of "change-makers".[201]

Youth associations were supported to work across clan lines to manage and restore water canals – for example, by engaging with the district peace and safety committee (local authorities in charge of water management) and by discussing the projects with communities to prevent tensions or disputes.[202] In addition, the project used the incentive of youth-led community rehabilitation projects (i.e. rehabilitation of water canals) to foster further collaboration and cross-clan engagement and interaction. Mixed teams of youth – mixed across clan and village lines – competed to lead these community water projects, with the winners to be identified through public voting via an app developed by the project. The youth participants were also required to pitch their projects to villagers in-person. This game-strategy generated significant interest, with one community reporting the participation of 19,000 people in the first 10 days of the launch of the app.[203] Implementing partners viewed the project as highly successful in positioning young people to cross clan lines and collectively solve problems, both material (water-related) and interpersonal or intercommunal in nature. The project also illustrates another key finding of the *Climate-Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review*: natural resources or climate-related work can encourage trust-building and cooperation, and space for positive peacebuilding. However, importantly in this case, it was youth who were helping create and lead the positive peacebuilding in action.

The project in Mauritania (PBF/IRF-441) was designed to prevent potential tensions between host and refugee communities by addressing shared natural resources issues, encouraging collaboration on reforestation, and supporting women's cooperatives (working on activities like agroforestry) and "green jobs" projects. Youth were a key focal point, with young people from both refugee and host populations helping develop and deliver biogas, and also acting as peace messengers by addressing tensions between communities, resolving disputes and engaging community members in sustainable technologies and techniques. Their contributions proved to be so valuable that the elders of the community later invited some of these young people to take part in village committees.[204] A similar phenomenon emerged in the project in the cross-border region of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (PBF/BFA/B-6). Youth organizations were provided subgrants to develop community initiatives, many with a linkage to climate security and environmental peacebuilding. In some of the communities, youth established local councils to raise awareness on these issues, and led local community clean-up or environmentally sustainable initiatives. As a result of the positive impression created by their engagement and leadership, some of these young people were invited to take part in community development planning. Youth efforts also inspired others in the community to do more, for example by sparking local businesses to contribute to community infrastructure, or encouraging local governments to reduce taxes on certain communal structures in ways that would improve their usage.[205]

These examples illustrate the larger point that one of the most effective ways to counter stigma against youth is to enable them to prove themselves. Although not the only approach, projects around climate and natural resources have proved to be a tangible way for youth to do so in multiple contexts.

Conclusions and key findings on CPS and environmental peacebuilding:

There are strong synergies between the CPS and YPS agendas, with CPS and environmental peacebuilding programming offering entry points for youth inclusion. Youth engagement in this type of programming also appeared likely to enhance conflict prevention dividends, and to help ensure that climate adaptation is conflict-sensitive and engages key stakeholders. Notwithstanding these synergies, the research pointed to some continuing gaps in this field of work:

- Programming specific to youth in climate adaptation or environmental peacebuilding remains under-explored, and would benefit from greater piloting and investment.
- While there was organic, de facto involvement of youth in climate and natural resources-related programming, it often went unrecognized and was not easy to "projectize". Greater efforts to consult youth on peacebuilding projects in this area, and identify ways to support youth initiatives, may lead to even stronger results.

D. Intersectional approaches to youth programming

A larger critique of youth programming is that it too often "treats youth as a homogenous group".[206] Even when projects do give attention to particular identity or group issues – for example, by focusing on young women or other particular groups, they often do not factor in other identity markers. Critics argue that this can result in less attention to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of the youth involved, which can skew programming goals or activities, or in some cases generate protection risks. Lack of attention to these issues may also mean that projects miss opportunities to harness the full potential of youth participation.

In response to these critiques, there has been increasing interest in taking an "intersectional" approach to programming. Intersectionality, a term first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, has been defined by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) in its Intersectionality Toolkit as an approach that "recognizes that people's lives are shaped by their identities, relationships and social factors. These combine to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression depending on a person's context and existing power structures such as patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, imperialism, homophobia and racism"[207]. As UN Women further points out, an intersectional lens can help in understanding why certain groups are left behind and in identifying hidden structural barriers, which is necessary for developing "more inclusive and responsive policy making" and an improved use of resources: "Without an intersectional approach, the global pledge to leave no one behind will remain aspirational."[208]

Overall, the results suggest strong promise in taking an intersectional approach, both in advancing YPS goals for diverse inclusion of youth, and in potentially expanding the strategies and impact of projects. However, the analysis of projects in cohort 3 also suggested a few larger challenges and dilemmas to programming that seeks to take an intersectional approach. The remainder of this section will first discuss two promising aspects of intersectional programming, then two challenges or dilemmas.

1. Intersectional approaches can help get beyond the "usual suspects" and encourage more diverse participation. Although they are not synonymous, taking an intersectional approach also relates to and can help advance calls for more inclusive programming. Security Council Resolution 2250 and the subsequent YPS initiatives derived from it emphasize not only increasing young people's role in peacebuilding and conflict prevention but also the need for those to be young people from diverse backgrounds.[209] Too often peacebuilding programming engaged with those youth that are already involved and connected – the "usual suspects"[210] – whereas youth that belong to disadvantaged groups, youth in rural communities or youth with lower levels of education or socioeconomic status may be less likely to know about and be brought into youth-centred programming.[211] An implementing partner for one of the projects in Sri Lanka (PBF/IRF-384) observed that the UN had become something of an "echo chamber" for familiar youth voices and similar perspectives.[212] This can limit the reach of programming, making it less able to address root causes or conflict prevention objectives.

Because they give greater attention to the specific needs, vulnerabilities and vantage points of particular groups and individuals, intersectional approaches might help facilitate efforts to go beyond the "usual suspects", to reach more marginalized youth and then to work on dismantling barriers and fostering meaningful participation. The projects in cohort 3 tended to do this through a combination of intentional project design and practical accommodations – thinking about intersectionality and ways to expand inclusion in the initial project design and set-up, but also

then following through with additional accommodations or adaptations in the course of implementation to meet the specific needs of participants. For example, the initial context analysis and rationale for the project in Guinea-Bissau (PBF/IRF-512) took into account overlapping "identity risk factors" (those of young women with disabilities) and used that intersectional analysis and approach to develop an outreach and programming strategy that would facilitate access for disadvantaged youth.[213] Implementing staff spent more time at the start of the project identifying the needs and vulnerabilities of the youth in question, and then tailoring the project's capacity-building and learning components to meet those needs.[214] There were also a number of practical measures taken, such as accommodations to allow participants with visual impairments to participate.[215]

Two linked projects in El Salvador (PBF/IRF-381, PBF/IRF-414) explicitly adopted a "no one left behind" approach at the outset, and designed the projects to try to expand participation to those previously excluded from peacebuilding and the broader political discourse.[216] The projects were primarily focused on LGBTQI+ youth, but also sought to include other marginalized groups, such as young people with disabilities. Project activities in the first project (PBF/IRF-381) included a "leadership school for youth and social change" and also organized youth into committees on violence prevention, while the second (PBF/IRF-414) continued to work with these committees.

A third example is the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka, which was explicitly designed to test a more differentiated approach to youth programming, by considering limitations on young people's voices because of layered gender and age stereotypes. It was designed to engage those that had not been previously involved in peacebuilding programming - young women, particularly those in areas with a limited non-governmental organization (NGO) presence, those who are "differently abled" and those from Indigenous communities.[217] Implementing partners observed that most of the prior youth programming in the country had been focused on young men, and through the lens of preventing risks of radicalization.[218] Given this, the focus on equipping young women to be peacebuilders was viewed as innovative in itself. The project brought together young women of different ethno-religious identities, equipping them with conflict sensitivity and analytical skills, and supporting them in jointly carrying out small grant initiatives in their communities. The independent evaluation assessed that the project led to increased knowledge of conflict resolution methods among young women, as well as greater confidence in working with the authorities.[219]

Box 4: Inclusion and accommodation for youth with disabilities

Against the broader context of a desire to encourage diverse youth participation, there has been particular interest in how peacebuilding projects accommodate and include young people with disabilities. Experts interviewed pointed out that disability issues or status also factor into the ways that individuals experience "exclusion, stigma and discrimination", often layered with other identity-based experiences and lenses.[220] Several of the ProDocs and implementing partners also raised the issue of overlapping "identity risk factors" and the resulting compound discrimination.[221] An interlocutor who worked on one of the Somalia projects, for example, described how some of the young women with disabilities involved were viewed as having "three curses" (age, gender, disability) in the eyes of many community members.[222]

In an initial review of 153 PBF-supported projects to identify the sample for this research, the research team identified only two youth-focused projects that significantly dealt with disability issues (Guinea-Bissau PBF/IRF-512, Somalia PBF/IRF-330). Both of these were included in cohort 3, but this provides only a limited base for considering disability access and inclusion. To supplement this, the research team asked implementing partners in the other 37 projects about any disability-related issues that arose and any accommodations. Several important examples of inclusion and accommodation strategies emerged. Project staff for the projects PBF/GIN/B-12 in Guinea and PBF/IRF-414 in El Salvador worked closely with local NGOs that specialized in working with young people with disabilities or that were led by youth with disabilities, in order to expand access and outreach to those with disabilities or to better understand their needs and the best accommodation strategies.[223] Partners working on the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka recruited a mentor proficient in sign language who could provide consistent support for a participant with a hearing impairment throughout the course of the project (and not only during discrete training activities).[224] While some of these disability-inclusion strategies were planned – as part of efforts to reach a more diverse group of youth – the inclusion of those with disabilities arose organically in some projects. In the cross-border project in Burkina Faso and Mali (PBF/IRF-292, 291), implementing

partners in Mali realized during implementation that youth with disabilities were not being included in local conflict prevention mechanisms and so worked with the office of sustainable development to include disabled youth within local conflict prevention mechanisms.[225]

There were also some critiques in post-project reviews and independent evaluations on how projects might have done more on disability access and inclusion, which in themselves point to practice suggestions going forward. These included the need for considering persons with disabilities in the design phase (Somalia PBF/IRF-330),[226] setting aside funding to accommodate those with physical disabilities who need special transport assistance (Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329),[227] ensuring that accommodations are made for all types of disabilities (El Salvador PBF/IRF-414, Guinea-Bissau PBF/IRF-512),[228] or ensuring suitable, accessible venues are identified early on (The Gambia PBF/GMB/D-1).[229]

Learning from past issues was also evident in the regional project in the Western Balkans (PBF/IRF-250). Several implementing partners noted that it had been difficult to include youth with disabilities in project trainings on youth peacebuilding and conflict transformation due to access issues.[230] Implementing partners learned from these issues in the follow-on PBF-supported project in the Western Balkans (PBF/IRF-479), with greater success in involving youth with disabilities in trainings, sport activities and consultations for the development of a National Youth Strategy in North Macedonia (supported as part of the follow-on project).[231]

The project PBF/IRF-512 in Guinea-Bissau used an intersectional analysis and approach to ensure outreach and inclusion for those with disabilities, including a range of accommodation strategies and activity adaptations to allow those with physical, visual and other disabilities to participate. Photo provided courtesy of Interpeace/Marino da Costa.

Expanding inclusion by creating a 'climate of trust': Implementing partners shared a number of best practices for ways to achieve broader inclusion or advance intersectional approaches within youth programming. One strategy identified was working through intermediaries or allies, both in identifying and gaining the confidence of targeted groups and in helping facilitate their engagement with broader stakeholders. For example, in several of the projects, solidarity groups or organizations that already had linkages or positions of trust with more vulnerable or disadvantaged groups helped to identify participants and overcome their mistrust in engaging in the process, including Mother's Clubs (facilitating outreach with young girls) in The Gambia (PBF/GMB/D-1), and organizations that had previously worked with young people with disabilities in Guinea (PBF/GIN/B-12) and in El Salvador (PBF/IRF-414). This was also sometimes necessary to gain the trust of family members for their young relatives' participation.[232]

In certain settings, it was also important to gain the support of those in positions of authority or trust in the broader community, so that they could speak on behalf of the young people and help create an environment more receptive to their participation. For example, in Niger (PBF/IRF-298), implementing partners engaged traditional and religious leaders to shift perceptions of young women in the project. Once engaged and persuaded, religious teachers then became key advocates and spokespersons for young women's needs and perspectives ("*porte-voix des messages*"), creating a "climate of trust", which allowed young women to be more present.[233]

Budgeting and planning for accomodations: Advancing an intersectional approach often begins at the project design phase but then requires additional adaptations and accommodations in the course of the project. For that reason, partners encouraged incorporating intersectionality from the outset, including in thinking about how to budget for accommodations. For example, in early consultations for the project PBF/IRF-414 in El Salvador, a key barrier to one group's participation, that of young mothers, was the issue of childcare coverage. So to expand to this group, the implementing partners set aside a budget to provide some childcare services.[234] The project also established standards for engagement with young people and created a protocol related to inclusion of LGBTQI+ youth, which was informed by a community survey and grounded in local realities.[235]

The project PBF/GMB/D-1 in The Gambia encountered challenges for disability inclusion and had to adapt its first programme due to the inaccessibility of a venue. As a result, one implementing partner created checklists for the accommodation and inclusion needs of youth and children (this project also had activities related to a Children's Assembly) to ensure the institutional knowledge could be preserved for subsequent projects.[236]

2. Intersectional approaches can leverage new avenues for peacebuilding, community bridge-building and reconciliation. The project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka also highlights another important feature of intersectional approaches: beyond helping advance the YPS goal of more diverse youth participation and engagement, taking an intersectional approach could enhance the degree to which projects are able to achieve peacebuilding and conflict prevention objectives. The Sri Lanka project was premised on the idea that young women were "uniquely positioned" to bridge divides based on their position in the communities, and because they had previously not been engaged, expanding programming to this part of the population could yield a new peacebuilding resource.[237]

There was a similar premise underlying the project rationale and design for the project in Niger (PBF/IRF-298). Set in a context of heightened concerns about violent extremism, the project rationalized its focus on young women by observing that young women were more resilient to violence and extremism.[238] It theorized that involving these young women in peacebuilding and conflict prevention – through addressing some of the barriers that young women face – could leverage young women's untapped potential and leadership as peacebuilders.[239] Also notable from an intersectional perspective, the project equally paid attention to addressing perceptions of masculinity and how this might contribute to conflict drivers.

Diverse youth acting as bridge-builders and change agents: Another prominent sub-theme of some of the more intersectionality-attuned programming was the idea that bringing together young people from differing constituencies or subgroups, and fully recognizing and working with their layered identities and vantage points, could help address larger intercommunal tensions or facilitate reconciliation by positioning youth as bridge-builders or change agents for peace. The ProDoc for the project PBF/IRF-433 in Somalia, for example, theorized that young women and men have the potential to act as critical agents "because the structural inhibitors of collective action are gendered and generational".[240] In this and the other Somalia project, PBF/IRF-330, it is not only their age and gender dynamics, but also young people's local clan identities that were factors that positioned them to be critical bridge-builders or agents of change. The projects assumed that bringing together youth (young men and women) from across clan lines could

help bridge differences, resolve intra-communal conflicts and foster cooperation because they were not bound by the same "historical grievances" that inhibit clan elders.[241]

Both projects attempted to do so through very different strategies and sets of activities. The project PBF/IRF-330 in Somalia was more premised on the personal transformation of a select group of youth, addressing their own stigma and bias against inter-clan engagement, and building their leadership and mediation skills so that they could act as peace ambassadors across clan lines in three areas known for intercommunal conflict. By contrast, the project PBF/IRF-433 saw a common shared natural resources issue – water scarcity and poor management of community water canals – as an entry point for youth to lead in better community use and protection of this resource, which would be contingent on youth reaching across clan lines and fostering joint cooperation and engagement.[242]

Although only time will reveal the full extent to which young people are able to continue to lead on inter-clan cooperation and mediation, both projects observed some significant gains in youth playing this role over the course of the project. The independent evaluation of the project PBF/IRF-330 largely validated its approach, finding that the personal transformation and empowerment activities enabled the youth to "gain agency to be peace actors" and noted optimism that they would then be able to deal with some of the challenges in their communities.[243] In PBF/IRF-433, youth associations (including mixed groups of youth from different villages and clans) were able to gain community support and engagement across clan lines for youth-led community projects to restore and manage water canals.[244]

The final project worth analysing in this respect is the project PBF/IRF-467 in CAR, notably titled "Disarmament of the heart". The project took place in two communities in which an uptick in religiously motivated attacks spurred significant displacement in 2020. With the return of the IDPs, just before the start of the project, there was a risk that revenge attacks or increased competition over resources could renew tensions, or spark another outbreak of conflict.[245] The project sought to facilitate a more harmonious return and to kick-start more long-lasting reconciliation as a way to prevent further outbreaks of conflict. Its theory of change was premised on facilitating personal transformation and reconciliation, as well as of conflict-sensitive but deliberate mixing and exchange of those from different communities or positions – Muslims and Christians, those who were IDPs and those from parts of the community who had remained, as well as those with different vantage points or experiences of the conflict.[246] Some of those involved in the fighting, former combatants and even perpetrators, were included, along with victims of the violence. The project then sought to bring these groups together into "trust spaces" for group therapy and discussion, which included psychosocial support and also mechanisms reminiscent of transitional justice strategies for truth-telling and communal reconciliation (e.g. allowing opportunities for testimony and recognition among perpetrators and victims).[247]

It was a potentially volatile strategy. According to implementers, "many young participants had experienced significant loss and had a strong desire for revenge".[248] Yet the due attention to the particular vulnerabilities, concerns and identities of those involved, and provision of support to them, appeared to foster an environment where these difficult individual and community experiences could be brought out and dealt with in a way that allowed those involved to move beyond past cycles of conflict.

Initial evaluations indicate that this approach effectively fostered communal understanding. Participants reported increased empathy and a greater willingness to engage with peers from other backgrounds, contributing to a more stable peace within the community. A particularly compelling testimony came from a former Muslim young combatant who, upon returning to his predominantly Christian community, faced both personal post-traumatic stress symptoms and shame. He said that the project provided him an opportunity to "publicly ask for forgiveness for what he had done", and he celebrated the acceptance and forgiveness he received from community members – an outcome he attributed to the project's sensitization efforts, particularly through community elders and leaders.[249] This individual later took on a role in supporting local authorities and psychosocial community counsellors, leading similar reconciliation efforts for other former combatants.[250] In this sense, the project empowered youth as proactive agents of change capable of fostering enduring peace, and appears to have helped a segment of the community process past trauma and violations. While there were many components of this project, certainly the overall effect would not have been possible without due attention to the layered identities and needs of those involved.

Overall, the projects in cohort 3 suggested that taking an intersectional approach can facilitate efforts to position youth as "change agents" or "peacemakers". It can facilitate identification of groups who can play this bridge-building or change-agent role and can lead to conflict-sensitive mixing of groups that may be necessary to resolve intercommunal differences or facilitate reconciliation.

3. Intersectional programming has so far faced limitations in scale and scope. Taking a fully intersectional approach can be somewhat resource-intensive. It requires greater staff time at the outset to identify groups or individuals beyond the "usual suspects". When working with groups or individuals that have previously been disadvantaged or discriminated against, it often takes more time to build trust, both with the potential participants or beneficiaries, and with other stakeholders or interlocuters (e.g. government officials and local authorities). Additional staff time and resources are also generally needed to then tailor the project to the particular needs of the groups or individuals involved, and/or to ensure their protection or other accommodation needs are met.

All these considerations take time, monetary resources and implementing staff member bandwidth. Perhaps because this is a more resource-intensive approach, these more intersectional projects have generally been smaller in scope, tending to work in only one or two very localized areas and with a much smaller group of participants. The project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka, for example, has been lauded for having a truly intersectional and tailored model and design. Yet it only focused on four districts, with a very small number of young women participants (125) within that. This can be contrasted with other youth participation projects in the sample that were working with youth beneficiary populations in the several thousands (e.g. Guinea PBF/GIN/B-12, Colombia PBF/IRF-455, Sierra Leone PBF/SLE/D-3, Uganda PBF/IRF-303).

Some of the projects that took a more intersectional approach were also smaller in terms of overall funding, with the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka the lowest in the sample, at just under $500,000 (compared to an average funding amount in this sample of $1.82 million). As a whole, the projects in cohort 3 were only 2.5 months shorter than the average duration of this sample, and some $360,000 less on average compared with the larger sample when the outlier of the Sri Lanka project is set aside.[251] Nonetheless, given the additional inputs that need to go into these projects, this only slightly smaller share of funding and time would not go as far.

Both in terms of the amount of funding that would be required, but also in terms of the bandwidth and capacity of staff involved, there may be limits to scaling these more intersectional projects to a much broader number of communities or broader sector of youth. Attempting to scale these intersectional approaches might risk losing the truly tailored and individualized approaches that are their strength. This presents something of a dilemma for the field: given the systemic and structural nature of challenges to youth participation, some larger-scale projects, reaching a broader sector of youth in multiple communities, are likely necessary to make gains; yet there may be limits to how much this can happen while still maintaining a fully intersectional approach. The compromise may be for some of these larger youth-focused projects to borrow some of the lessons learned from these smaller intersectionality-focused projects, in terms of looking for opportunities to expand the circle, and adopting some of the more easily adaptable accommodation strategies. As highlighted above, this can help with the already established goals of reaching beyond the "usual suspects" even in large-scale programming. In addition, however, the YPS field as a whole must continue to support some of these strong, localized and more specialized intersectional projects for certain communities and situations.

4. Efforts to diversify youth engagement may beget additional protection risks. An additional tension that surfaced in projects focused on including marginalized groups was the risk that doing so might create protection risks. Although not the only situation where these concerns arise, this dilemma was raised by several experts with regard to engaging with LGBTQI+ youth. In many countries, there remains a strong stigma against LGBTQI+ individuals, and legal penalties and barriers exist. Engagement with these groups or individuals as a dedicated project focus could run the risk of exposure, increasing their vulnerability and risk. In some countries, youth organizations or CSOs that have worked with LGBTQI+ communities or issues have lost their NGO status or received fines and penalties.[252] Experts and practitioners in the field cited such issues as a factor explaining why only a small minority of peacebuilding projects work specifically on LGBTQI+ issues, at least explicitly.[253] One YPS expert argued that this dilemma has gotten worse recently, with a rollback on LGBTQI+ rights in many countries creating a "cloak of invisibility on marginalized identities".[254] Experts and practitioners interviewed were not necessarily arguing against engaging with LGBTQI+ young people, but stressing that this is a category where heightened sensitivity to protection risks and "do no harm" admonitions must be taken into account.

The two projects that dealt with this issue most directly, both in El Salvador (PBF/IRF-381, PBF/IRF-414), were able to do so in part because there was a window of opportunity in the country thanks to a period of greater openness and tolerance in talking about LGBTQI+ issues.[255] However, implementing partners also intentionally limited the scope of their engagement to established youth leaders' networks and individuals in the LGBTQI+ community, who were

already "out" and more used to and capable of responding to any particular risks that arose. This represents something of a trade-off, in that such a strategy would reinforce working with the "usual suspects" and not expand programming to those who were previously excluded. However, it was a necessary compromise, as reaching out to a broader swathe of the LGBTQI+ community could have created serious protection risks, even in that more open period of time. One implementing partner also noted that even though they worked with those who openly identified as LGBTQI+, they did not necessarily refer to them as such, as increasing their visibility in that way could have presented risks even for these more established activists.[256]

Other practitioners suggested ways to mitigate protection risks outside of participant selection. One suggested framing projects around broader themes such as human rights, social inclusion and anti-discrimination: "This framing can create a space where LGBTQI+ issues are naturally discussed as part of wider themes, reducing the risk of singling out individuals."[257] Enabling opportunities for anonymous engagement, including virtual participation or input, or closed-group discussions where measures are taken to protect identities, can also ensure safety without compromising participation. Some of these measures are discussed further in section 4.B on protection.

Conclusions and key findings on intersectional programming:

Intersectional approaches can be an important way to fulfill the commitment of "no one left behind" and to diversify youth programming. They can be key in getting beyond the "usual suspects" and could make certain types of programming more effective. However, the projects examined suggest important practical and normative considerations for this type of programming:

- Intensive consultation, intersectional analysis and outreach are important at the design phase for these projects to succeed, as is having sufficient resources and planning to make necessary accommodations.
- Because intersectional approaches can be time- and resource-intensive, sufficient budget and time must be built in from the outset. The resource-intensive and tailored nature of the programming can make them difficult to scale.
- Expanding the circle to typically excluded populations has many benefits, but can also beget additional protection risks; establishing a "culture of protection" (backed by budgetary measures) from the outset can help mitigate some of these.

4. Cross-cutting issues and challenges

In addition to the four cohort themes, researchers also explored a number of cross-cutting issues related to particular sensitivities or challenges in youth programming (e.g. protection and "do no harm" considerations), as well as ways that support for youth participation and engagement contributed to other key peacebuilding goals (such as prevention and advancing the Women, Peace and Security, or WPS, agenda). The research also sought to collect information on the ways that these projects could be said to be realizing the YPS partnership pillar, and any information on sub-partner funding modalities, along with associated catalytic effects or sustainability issues with these projects. This section covers each of these issues, and one more cross-cutting issue that arose from the collected interviews and project analysis – how the permissiveness of the environment impacts project success, and strategies for responding to such challenges.

A. Intersection of the WPS and YPS agendas

A cross-cutting issue raised in some of the initial consultations for this Review was the question of how the YPS and WPS agenda interact within peacebuilding programming. There has been a fertile debate about the intersection of these two agendas since the early days of YPS advancement. The 2018 *Missing Peace* study, for example, observed that "although there are important policy intersections between the YPS and WPS agendas, and sometimes strategic value in partnerships between youth and women's organizations, young people objected to the tendency to simply lump 'women and youth' together".[258] Several of those interviewed noted that while attention to both groups is important, treating both groups as a catch-all inclusion category undermines both agendas by reinforcing stereotypes and overlooking the distinct strategies that must be deployed in a given context.

In some cases, those pursuing the YPS agenda have adopted some of the same strategies pioneered by the WPS movement – for example, modelling National Action Plans on YPS after similar action plans on WPS. However, within the projects that appeared to be using such strategies, the project reporting did not tend to then reflect on whether such strategies had proven successful, or on broader linkages between the WPS and YPS agenda.[259] Moreover, some youth activists interviewed within the course of this research questioned whether legacy strategies of the much older WPS movement (such as replicating National Action Plans) were all that helpful for youth advancement.[260]

Anecdotally, some young female activists said they had been able to leverage the networks and strategies of both communities. For example, one young woman who served as the former coordinator of the DRC National Action Plan on YPS said that members of the WPS community mentored her and shared connections in ways that helped her overcome barriers in engaging governmental officials.[261] In a recently published report, members of the Congolese YPS coalition and Young Women Leaders networks in North and South Kivu noted that the support provided by women peacebuilders, women-led CSOs and grass-roots experts on the UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on WPS was instrumental in advocating for young women's participation in decision-making processes and in advancing the first National Action Plan on YPS in DRC.[262]

Within the projects under review, 14 focused on women and girls, or had a notable sub-focus on women and girls. However, in general these projects appeared to reflect the tendency observed in the *Missing Peace* study, of lumping "women and youth" together as target groups to include in peacebuilding, without articulating why it was beneficial for the project strategy to focus on both groups simultaneously. There appeared to be little thought given to the interaction of the WPS and YPS agendas within the projects.

Three projects in the sample focused specifically on young women: CAR PBF/IRF-304, Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329 and Niger PBF/IRF-298. Even in these projects, the linkage between the WPS and YPS agendas was not clearly present, or at least not articulated in the ProDocs or interviews with implementing partners. The projects in Sri Lanka and Niger appeared to be focused on testing a prominent theory within the YPS field that young women offer untapped potential as peacebuilders.[263] This theory did not necessarily bear out in the course of these projects; nonetheless, the projects did demonstrate important ways to increase outreach to and inclusion of young women (as discussed in section 3.D). Also, importantly, while practitioners noted a need to give greater attention to inclusion of young women in programming, they cautioned against doing so in ways that risk reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Overall the findings suggest a need for more considered attention to the intersection between the YPS and WPS agendas. In addition, while there must be continued promotion of women's and young people's participation in peacebuilding, this should not be done through lumping both groups into a catch-all inclusion category.

One of the few projects intentionally working at the intersection of the WPS and YPS agendas was a project in Niger (PBF/IRF-298) that worked with community and religious leaders to create a broader enabling space for young women and girls' participation in peacebuilding. Photo provided courtesy of UNFPA and UNICEF Niger.

B. Protection and "do no harm" concerns

Many practitioners and implementing partners raised protection issues as a central consideration in working with youth. Youth are considered a community that comes with heightened vulnerabilities and risk because of fewer economic resources, a lower social status and stigma, or because of their exclusion or lack of access to certain spaces. The rise of hate speech and disinformation on social media and in other online spaces has increased protection risks to certain groups.[264] Despite these well-known risks, experts interviewed for this Review said there was too little guidance on youth protection issues and safeguarding, and a lack of universal standards.[265]

Several of the projects featured situations of heightened or specific protection risks because of the nature of the youth population in question, for example, in the projects described in the previous section that worked with young women. Implementing partners in these and other projects described strategies of working in partnership with trusted interlocuters, taking time to build trust among the young women to alleviate their concerns about physical safety and reputational risks, and also in many cases liaising with the young women's broader family and community networks.[266] Outreach to community figures was also important in order to create a safer enabling environment for these young women to participate.

Protection safeguards responding to physical, reputational and psychosocial risks and needs were also important in many of the projects that tried to engage "at-risk" youth – those who were viewed as vulnerable to recruitment into armed groups or other forms of violence. The project in Sierra Leone (PBF/SLE/D-3), for example, focused on youth linked to or vulnerable to gang activity, including formerly incarcerated young people. The protection strategies ranged from measures taken to enable safe participation (including concern for both physical and reputational risks) to encouraging stronger protection measures among target stakeholder groups, such as national law enforcement authorities (in particular for young people who were incarcerated).[267] There was a particularly notable approach to responding to the protection needs of young women engaged in the Sierra Leone project. The project's conflict analysis noted that young people may be drawn to cliques and gangs not only because of poverty or unemployment but also due to a perceived need for protection. A joint

assessment by the UN and the Government of Sierra Leone found that some girls joined gangs with the expectation of being protected, but were later coerced into sex work to generate income for their gang leaders.[268] In response, the project team provided counselling and psychosocial support on gender-based violence and early marriage.

Projects taking place in post-conflict scenarios, or following a period of conflict or violence – for example, the project PBF/IRF-467 in CAR, which centred around DDR and community reconciliation following a period of conflict – might also be dealing with both trauma from prior protection threats and ongoing risks. In fact, a protection expert noted that when working in post-conflict contexts they assume that most young people have encountered some protection issues or experiences with trauma.[269]

Protection concerns arose most frequently in projects that engaged those suffering discrimination or persecution because of their identity or status. For example, practitioners said that there must be heightened awareness of protection concerns and the guiding imperative to "do no harm" when engaging with young people or youth organizations that identified as LGBTQI+.[270] One practitioner gave the example of a project that sought to engage and empower LGBTQI+ youth, but in doing so inadvertently exposed them – effectively "outing" them and exposing them to risks.[271]

Protection risks are highly project specific – one expert said that they can vary "from street to street" or even, as another said, from "person to person".[272] Nonetheless, practitioners offered some suggestions for building safeguards into project design, and also identified some outstanding gaps they had observed in the field (not necessarily specific to PBF-supported work). Some recommended putting protection risks at the centre of discussions early on in the project, and seeking more input from youth-led peacebuilding organizations on what they view as primary protection concerns.[273] In line with this, it was recommended to think about protection holistically and to develop a "culture of protection" within the implementing teams. This could, for instance, include putting protection on the agenda for every meeting and, in addition to instituting protection focal points, ensuring that every team member feels responsible for protection or safeguarding.[274]

Another suggestion, dovetailing with those identified as necessary for an intersectional approach, was for more disaggregated data (by age, or other categories) about partners or beneficiaries, and then tailoring risk mitigation strategies, and follow-on evaluation of those strategies, to those categories.[275] This, in time, could improve overall knowledge and awareness of protection risks that young people are exposed to.

Consideration for issues of confidentiality and visibility are also important in developing protection strategies. In certain contexts, more discrete or non-public programming modalities may be necessary to mitigate protection risks. One suggestion was the idea of nesting more sensitive aspects of a project (e.g. work with a vulnerable group) within a larger project on other themes, or permission from the donor to be more discreet in disclosing project findings, especially publicly.[276] Another YPS specialist working in the Middle East gave the example of a network of young "inside mediators" who would work to resolve disputes quietly, or even intervene before they escalated. They had a strong track record of success, but out of fear that it would compromise their safety or the effectiveness of their work, there was a decision not to publicize it.[277] In addition to these non-public approaches, the project provided them with additional mental health and psychosocial support resources, to allow them to personally deal with the stress factors associated with the conflicts they were negotiating.

Budgetary measures and practical steps for protection: Several practitioners and youth activists interviewed said that donors are often aware of the need to ensure protection risks, yet they do not always support project modalities that would enable this. For example, one key step to respond to risks of violence or threats would be to have the means to assist participants or implementing partners (e.g. local civil society or youth organizations) when a protection threat manifests. This could include providing medical or psychosocial support, or in extreme cases, assisting with moving individuals to safe locations. In some cases, local organizations do take such measures but draw from their own resources to do so. Given this, experts suggested that funding mechanisms should allow for a contingency budget for potential protection mitigation measures.[278] For example, in one project implemented by Search for Common Ground (not in this Review sample), 5 per cent of the budget was dedicated to protection contingencies; however, while possible in that one project, many donors do not allow for this.[279]

Other suggestions for future best practices on protection include having checklists or safeguards built into the project design from the outset. Some interviewees proposed tracking indicators related to protection; others countered that given the project-specific nature of protection risks, it would be difficult to generate such indicators. When asked about the best means to ensure protection, most of those interviewed stressed relying on the discretion and strategies

of those with knowledge of the local protection risks – for example, knowledgeable staff and participants – rather than top-down policies. Such reliance might have to be backstopped by additional training, however, as experts noted that even well-meaning staff are not immune to stereotypes and biases, which can affect the way protection measures are developed and put in place.[280]

C. Conflict prevention and youth participation

A prominent strand of youth programming (not specific to that supported by the PBF) is to address the perceived risk that young people might be more susceptible to recruitment by armed groups or violent extremist organizations, or otherwise take part in criminal violence because of their economic or social vulnerability or other factors. This strand of programming is often framed broadly as PVE programming. Many take issue with this as a rationale for engaging in youth programming, out of fears that it overly "securitizes" youth programming, or that language discussing the potential for "radicalization" of youth can be stigmatizing, for both the youth involved and the broader community.[281] While there were some projects in this sample that appeared to reflect some of this logic, the overall sample illustrated numerous other ways that supporting young people's participation can contribute to conflict prevention. For example, one project in CAR (PBF/IRF-467) framed reconciliation and psychosocial support – helping former combatants and victims to overcome past trauma – as a way to prevent conflict recurrence in a community that had previously experienced high levels of violence and displacement. Another project in Somalia (PBF/IRF-433) aimed to address historical grievances and prevent future rounds of intercommunal conflict by focusing on the personal transformation of young people from different clan lines, who could then act as peace intermediaries in their communities.

Most, if not all, of the projects in cohort 4 had prevention-related theories of change at the heart of their project models. Environmental degradation and natural resources issues were seen as the underlying root causes of both local intercommunal conflicts and tensions, and of youth vulnerability that might lead to participation in violence or extremism.[282] One illustration of this is the project PBF/IRF-462 in Niger. Part of broader efforts (by the UN and other partners) to counter trends towards recruitment and radicalization in the Lake Chad region, the project included some activities that are common to projects focused on PVE, including economic support to facilitate the reintegration of those formerly linked to violent extremism, supporting young people to take part in positive (pro-peace) narratives, and providing alternative messages to violent extremism. However, the more significant focus of the project was on some of the root causes of conflict and violent extremism, notably economic vulnerabilities brought about by population pressures and declining available natural resources.[283] For that reason, the key preventive measure or approach was increasing youth awareness and engagement on environmental protection and the management of natural resources. This included supporting forums for youth discussion, sharing information about environmental codes and best practices (i.e. not contributing to deforestation or other environmental degradation), and providing a space for young people to debate and propose solutions to this so that they would be better positioned to take environmental protection forward.

The other projects in cohort 4 illustrated a range of prevention responses:

- Several projects operated under the assumption that a more inclusive and environmentally attuned system of land and natural resources management – notably including the youth population – would result in better management of natural resources, and thus prevention of these conflicts in the future (Burkina Faso PBF/IRF-446, The Gambia PBF/GMB/B-2, CAR PBF/IRF-304, Honduras PBF/IRF-435).
- Several projects involved youth in dispute resolution surrounding land conflict or natural resources preservation as a way to both help resolve conflicts and provide a form of early warning (via the youth involved) should there be a risk of these conflicts breaking out again (Chad PBF/TCD/A-1, Chad PBF/IRF-263, Solomon Islands PBF/IRF-472). The project PBF/IRF-259 in Côte d'Ivoire went one step further and organized youth into early warning sentinels to help in forest preservation (the key resource at the centre of communal conflicts in the project) and to ward against other criminal activity.
- Projects also involved youth in sustainable jobs or other income-generation schemes to address underlying sources of conflict and vulnerability (Chad PBF/TCD/A-1, Côte d'Ivoire PBF/IRF-259, Mali PBF/MLI/C-1, Mauritania PBF/IRF-441), as a form of structural prevention.

Many of the above strategies also figured in other youth programming not specifically related to natural resources. For example, the last strategy of supporting at-risk youth with alternative sources of income was a key part of the (structural) prevention theory underlying the theories of change in the projects in Liberia (PBF/LBR/D-15) and Sierra Leone (PBF/SLE/D-3). The idea that involving young people in local decision-making and management could infuse

these mechanisms with better governance strategies and approaches, and in doing so prevent future grievances or conflict, was part of the underlying theory of change for the project PBF/IRF-414 in El Salvador. In that project, young people were integrated into existing Municipal Committees for the Prevention of Violence. This collaboration led to the rethinking of violence prevention strategies, with a focus on enhancing respect for young people's rights and reducing their vulnerability to violence, contributing to a notable decrease in youth-related violence in the targeted areas.

Many of the other projects that sought to involve young people in local decision-making and dispute resolution mechanisms did so not only as a form of participation, but also with the view that youth engagement in these forums would help prevent conflicts. This theory bore out in several projects. In the project PBF/IRF-264 in Guinea (discussed in the part 2.A), involving youth in local councils became a way to prevent future conflicts by giving youth a place to voice grievances and also constructively contribute to mediating community tensions. A similar premise informed engaging youth in dialogue with government officials in the project in Colombia (PBF/IRF-455), helping prevent a recurrence of political violence.

As can be seen in the diversity of theories and approaches, there are many ways to conceptualize youth involvement in conflict prevention, well beyond the obvious categories of early warning mechanisms or PVE. The project analysis suggests a tight linkage between the participation and prevention pillars of the YPS agenda, to the extent that they would be difficult to disentangle.

D. Contextual factors and non-permissive environments

A throughline running across many of the projects was that the permissiveness of the overall environment affects project results and success. In some cases, the degree of "permissiveness" related to the larger political and security context. Even the most well-designed projects could be derailed by a deterioration in the security situation, an outbreak of conflict, or other sources of political instability and upheaval. The project in Burkina Faso and Mali (PBF/IRF-292, 291) – a project focused on engaging young people in cross-border prevention and early warning – began to be implemented in early 2019 at a time when the conflict in Mali was escalating, causing mass displacement and volatility in the border regions that were the focus of the

The project PBF/IRF-467 in CAR, entitled "Disarmament of the Heart", worked to prevent risk of conflict recurrence through personal transformation and conflict-sensitive mixing of youth and affected individuals from different parts of the community. Photo provided courtesy of Vision Enfant de la République Centrafricaine (VERCA).

project. As a result, one of the implementing partners said, "Among the 10 (cross-border) communes targeted, several have become inaccessible due to the security context, and many young people have since left."[284] While some project activities could still be adapted and carried out, and with some discernible impact on local tensions,[285] the overall objectives of contributing to conflict prevention were difficult to achieve in a situation in which security on both sides of the border was deteriorating rapidly.

Larger tensions within the political system, and/or in the way the UN was perceived within a country, was also an issue in several of the projects. While sometimes these issues could be anticipated, in other instances, for example in the project in Uganda (PBF/IRF-303), the environment changed midway through the project, making some of the key themes or objectives (e.g. those on human rights training and civic education in advance of the 2019 electoral period) difficult to pursue.[286]

In some projects, it was a difficult environment specifically for youth engagement and empowerment. Implementing partners working in the MENA region said that because youth played a prominent role in the 2011 Arab Spring protests, in many countries in the region, youth engagement can be a sensitive issue. This is a particularly strong dynamic in Yemen, with Ansar Allah (the group that has exerted de facto control of northern Yemen since 2015) extremely suspicious of youth programming. One implementing partner noted that they were "so wary of youth" that even youth engagement in less controversial areas like health or education would be "heavily scrutinized".[287] Youth empowerment in peace and security was even more contentious, and so projects in Yemen working on such themes had to adopt a low profile approach. Such an approach ran contrary to the main objectives for the project in Yemen (PBF/IRF-270), which was designed to increase the visibility of youth, more frontally involving them in peace and security issues at a national level. One implementing partner said that while the project supported the drafting of a YPS strategic framework, nothing came of it given that the environment was "not receptive to it".[288] Other objectives envisioned in the ProDoc, such as involving youth in track II discussions related to the peace process, never got off the ground (also due to the peace process stalling).

Implementing partners were able to form a youth peace and security pact by the end of the project (which was then continued through other UNFPA initiatives).[289] However, the impact of this appeared to be limited given the overall environment, as well as another potentially limiting factor in conflict environments: that of flux and displacement among the target populations. Although these local pacts are still technically functional, 12 out of 30 of its youth representatives have left the country, leading to very limited effects.[290] Implementing partners working in Yemen suggested that work can still be done in such contexts, but that funding mechanisms and implementing partners must be realistic about the available space, and consider more small-scale, localized and low-profile areas of empowerment work first, before moving onto larger national mechanisms or processes.

The flip side could also be true, with certain environments more open to youth engagement and participation. For example, those who noted that Yemen was a particularly challenging environment for youth engagement pointed out that other places in the Middle East – for example, Iraq and Lebanon – had much more active youth spaces.[291] Those working on the projects in The Gambia (PBF/GMB/B-2, PBF/GMD/D-1) observed that the time was ripe for expanding youth engagement. They described a particularly vibrant and active youth community, and a Government that recognized that given the size of the youth population (with some 60 per cent of the population under 25), "there is a huge need to involve youth and address their concerns".[292] This had resulted in a tremendous openness to youth training and vocational activities, as well as support for youth engagement in a range of other peacebuilding arenas.

In addition, although escalating political or security situations can derail programming, in others, it may actually offer openings for substantive youth engagement. In the project in Sudan (PBF/IRF-471), the project strategy and activities were adapted after the outbreak of conflict, and in those changed circumstances, young people had an equal, arguably even more important role to play (monitoring the active conflict dynamics and humanitarian situation).

The projects also offered insights into ways to push forward progress even in non-permissive environments. The same implementing partner in Yemen who identified the challenges of Houthi mistrust of youth said that in retrospect, while robust youth engagement might not have been possible, they would have gotten better results if they had invested more time in engaging local authorities, both in the north and the south of the country.[293] An even more compelling example comes from examining the two projects in Guinea (PBF/GIN/B-12, PBF/IRF-264). They demonstrate how working strategically within the space available in periods that are more closed to youth engagement can still yield important investments in youth empowerment, which can be built upon when the environment shifts (see box 5).

Box 5: Laying the groundwork and seizing the moment: a strategic approach to making progress in non-permissive environments[294]

Despite 77 per cent of the population of Guinea being under 35, young people were almost entirely excluded from the national political dialogue during former President Alpha Condé's 11-year administration. During the research team's field visit to Guinea, experts and youth said that young people had been perceived as a threat during this period. As a result, despite the existence of institutions and policies dedicated to youth, such as a National Youth Ministry, for nearly a decade it had been difficult to gain any real traction in advancing the YPS agenda. As the former National Director of the Ministry of Youth recalled, "For over a decade, we tried to make progress on youth, including establishing youth policies, but the former Governments categorically refused to support a National Action Plan for youth", or other youth empowerment policies.[295]

Deprived of avenues for meaningful participation, many young people turned to violent protests, according to those interviewed. Tensions were especially high in mining towns like Kolaboui and Kamsar, where economic opportunities were scarce despite lucrative natural resources, which were largely under the control of foreign mining companies. The Mayor of Kolaboui recounted, "Young people in the region couldn't find job opportunities, and communities lacked essential services like clean water, electricity and employment. So, you can understand how this fuelled deep frustration."[296] Youth were trapped in a cycle of socioeconomic marginalization, political manipulation and violence, without the means to engage or put forward constructive solutions.

Confronted with these dynamics, those advocating for youth empowerment chose a strategic course. We had to become "very skilled at navigating the political landscape, which was very closed to establishing these youth structures", one youth advocate recalled.[297] With such strong resistance at the top, the most promising opportunities – or at least the fewest barriers – were at the local level. This idea of building locally was the inspiration for the project PBF/IRF-264 in Guinea, which focused on local youth council development and youth engagement in 20 of the most conflict-prone communities. One programming officer who had worked on youth programming for many years explained, "Back then, although we had the ambition to create something like a National Youth Council, we didn't speak of it openly. We focused on local structures, made no claims about scaling up nationally, and waited. When the political opportunity finally came, that's when we advanced the idea of the national council."[298]

This opportunity came with the 2021 change of government in Guinea. The transitional President appeared more open to youth engagement.[299] Some explained the change in attitudes towards youth as the product of this being a sort of "reset" moment: "The counters went back to zero, so we seized the opportunity," one member of the executive office of the National Youth Council said. When the transitional President asked youth advocates about their priorities, they told him that they "finally wanted to establish a National Youth Council".[300] The second Guinea project (PBF/GIN/B-12) examined in this Review helped to operationalize this vision. These efforts culminated in the creation of the National Youth Council officially inaugurated on 25 September 2023, and which is now playing a vital role in shaping the new national youth policy of Guinea.[301] However, as discussed in chapter 2, the investments in building a local foundation remained crucial. Those involved estimated that even with these more favourable political conditions for youth involvement, the second project would not have been as successful without the groundwork laid by the prior project.[302]

This example speaks to the limitations that can be imposed by the surrounding political context, but also suggests that progress can be made even in these difficult circumstances. Those who were advocates of youth empowerment spent the years when conditions were less permissive doing the groundwork; when more favourable conditions emerged, they were able to rely on this to seize the moment. As one implementing partner in Guinea put it, it was a "bet" that paid off.[303]

E. Catalytic effects and innovation

The PBF is designed to be a "catalytic" fund, which it defines as "creat[ing] momentum for the removal of barriers that block longer-term or sustained peacebuilding support, or for the engagement of additional stakeholders in existing peacebuilding efforts" as well as "facilitat[ing] new initiatives that bring in new resources to peacebuilding priorities in the country".[304]

Financial catalytic effects: One way of measuring catalytic effectis is whether the projects led to follow-on funding, or longer-term financing, for example, scaling successful pilot programming to a national level. Some examples include:

- Liberia PBF/LBR/D-15: the Government of Liberia was so impressed with the results that it committed to provide $1 million per annum to build on the project in a second phase, with the support of other donors.[305]
- Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329: following completion, the implementing organization Search for Common Ground was able to continue working with its initial project participants (and additional ones) for three more years with funding from two other donors, drawing substantially from the approach and model developed in this project.[306] Additionally, a small organization for youth with hearing impairments, involved in the project's small grants initiative, received commitments by district authorities to support them post-project.[307]
- Côte d'Ivoire PBF/CIV/A-5: following completion, both implementing partners developed follow-on projects, in the same or in other areas of Côte d'Ivoire.[308]
- Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger (PBF/BFA/B-6): 7 out of the 17 CSOs selected as subgrantees in Niger as part of the Liptako-Gourma project leveraged their project experience and the fundraising capacity-building they received to secure funding from subsequent donors, allowing them to continue their community-level activities.[309]
- Western Balkans (PBF/IRF-250): following completion, RYCO was said to have a "rich portfolio of new donors".[310] Additionally, some of the grass-roots organizations that had been supported through the project have since secured grants from other funding sources to pursue peacebuilding work.[311]

There were also a number of innovative examples of local, national or even international partnerships collaborating to continue the activities within projects, even where they did not fully replicate a new cycle of activities. For example, following the successful renovation of water canals in the project PBF/IRF-433 in Somalia, the community (with support from implementing partners) tested out a "crowd-funding" mechanism for members of the Somali diaspora to donate to and help the communities pay for the supplies needed to maintain the water canals.[312] Other examples of local and national initiatives to sustain project activities are included in the next section on sustainability.

Non-financial catalytic effects: Non-financial catalytic effects can include "catalysing vital peace processes" or peacebuilding initiatives, testing innovative or high-risk approaches that could improve practice and learning in the field, or as one prior review of PBF catalytic effects suggested, building "capacity for critical change within a system", with the result of "leav[ing] behind some enhanced capacity to address later problems or issues".[313]

Most implementing partners and young people interviewed tended to focus more on these non-financial catalytic effects and appeared to judge the success of a project by them. In particular, given that the major aim of this field is youth empowerment, a great emphasis was placed on a project's ability to generate "capacities for change" among the youth participants. Many of the youth interviewed valued the projects most where they helped youth develop their knowledge, skills and credibility, and created opportunities for them to succeed and take forward professional or civic initiatives later on. Speaking to the lasting effects of these projects, one youth participant in the project PBF/IRF-264 in Guinea observed that funding will go away when the project ends, "but you can't remove the knowledge we have been given".[314]

Another strong example of supporting youth capacities for change was provided by the project PBF/GMB/D-1 in The Gambia, which provided training designed to increase youth activist and organizational capacities to participate in decision-making processes at the local and national levels. Many of the participants continued to engage in peacebuilding work after the project ended, and one participant had notable success establishing his own youth-led organization, the Peace Hub. It has become a leading civil society voice in the country on peacebuilding issues, helping lead ongoing discussions for a National Action Plan on YPS, and is also involved in regional and global initiatives, in particular related to climate-related conflicts.[315] Although the project has long ended, the "capacities for change" created continue to have a ripple effect for the peacebuilding space in The Gambia and the region.

While many of the examples of supporting youth "capacities for change" focused on activities such as trainings, mentorship or youth network support, there was also

evidence of how projects might generate catalytic effects by virtue of the space they created for youth engagement and participation, sometimes not even as part of the planned project activities. An implementing partner for the project in Mauritania (PBF/IRF-441) described one of the "unintended consequences" of the project as one of the surest signs that the project would leave a legacy for youth engagement in the local community. Youth had been given a prominent role in sustainable "green jobs" that benefited the community and also as "peace messengers" to broker stronger cooperation and ties between refugee and host communities. The young people who took this up were viewed as having made such a positive contribution to the community that they were invited to take part in local council meetings, without any facilitation or suggestion from the project partners. In doing so, the implementing partner said, the youth became "actors of change and not just beneficiaries".[316]

Innovation in programming: The project sample offered multiple examples of innovative programming. Nearly all of the regional or cross-border projects were innovative in their own right, even if for some, implementation challenges did not allow for a full testing of these models. The project in Burkina Faso and Mali (PBF/IRF-292, 291) tested a model of youth programming in conjunction with a regional organization (the G5 Sahel) in transnational conflict prevention and early warning. The project in the Liptako-Gourma subregion across Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (PBF/BFA/B-6) tested both a new small grants modality and whether it was possible to mitigate and prevent conflict through a model of transnational social cohesion-strengthening. The project in the Western Balkans (PBF/IRF-250) was the first case of using the PBF to facilitate regional youth-led peacebuilding, a model deemed so successful that it led to a follow-up regional project (PBF/IRF-479).

There was also significant innovation and testing new thresholds in terms of expanding access and inclusion and testing intersectional approaches. The project PBF/IRF-381 in El Salvador was the first example of dedicated peacebuilding programming with LGBTQI+ activists in the country. The project PBF/GMB/D-1 in The Gambia broke new ground in the way it reached out to out-of-school and marginalized youth outside the formal youth structures (a perennial challenge in youth programming). This led to national partners, such as the National Council on Civic Education, discussing how the project's activities could be expanded beyond the three targeted regions to reach more districts and regions, including implementation at a national level.[317] In this way, the project has contributed to sparking conversations within national institutions on replicating engagement of marginalized youth in other regions not targeted by the project.

Several of the projects also tested new ways to expand the YPS agenda. For example, while identified as an important part of the YPS agenda, effectively involving young people in transition processes has often been difficult. The project in Sudan (PBF/IRF-471) broke new ground by organizing a network of conflict observers in the midst of the conflict, who collected real-time information that was used to support ceasefire maintenance and humanitarian delivery. The project PBF/IRF-468 in CAR sought to use peacebuilding programming to enable youth and women's inclusion in peace and transition processes in the country (see box 2).

There was also promising innovation at the activity and implementation level, from testing more inclusive, youth-led, learning and evaluation methods (Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329, Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger PBF/BFA/B-6), to using gamification as a means to encourage both youth engagement and greater popular interest in peacebuilding projects (Somalia PBF/IRF-433), to the development of a bottom-up election and consultation process for youth representation (Guinea PBF/IRF-264).[318] One project in CAR (PBF/IRF-467) developed a more individual health and trauma-focused model of reconciliation and reintegration, which helped destigmatize the topic and informed national discussions on mental health in post-conflict contexts.[319]

F. Sustainability

A concern cited across many of the projects was the risk that they would be difficult to sustain. This is a frequent concern with those receiving PBF funding given that these projects are designed to be short term, and many last only 1 or 2 years. The average duration for projects in this sample was just over 24 months.

Having programming that only endures for a short period of time can be a particular challenge for peacebuilding that seeks to address structural or systemic factors like those connected to lack of youth participation. Stigmas against youth can be slow to change. Addressing the socioeconomic barriers, which often relate to much larger issues of poverty, a poor economic or governance situation, or other factors, are well beyond the scope of a single project.

The project review highlighted a few situations that make sustainability an even greater challenge. Although there is no perfect way to test this, some of the project evidence

suggested greater sustainability challenges where projects attempted to encourage youth participation by creating new mechanisms. Given short project timelines, there was a high risk that these would simply fall apart without continued funding after project closure. Instead, projects tended to find more success within the course of implementation, and to suggest the likelihood of further sustainability, when they built on existing structures and mechanisms. For example, implementing partners working with the project in DRC (PBF/IRF-262) were relatively optimistic that the local peace committees or "*barazas*" would continue, given that many had been set up in a prior project and had already been sustained beyond the prior project's lifespan. They had demonstrated their own proof of concept and the local investment in continuing them. Where it was necessary to create new mechanisms or initiatives, some practitioners recommended at least linking the young people in question to existing networks, so that they would have a better chance of continuing support and sustainability after project support ended.[320]

Other examples that seemed more likely to be sustainable were efforts to bring youth more frontally into community mechanisms that already existed, on the premise that these would certainly continue. In some cases, it was about reinforcing or leveraging the youth representation that already existed in community bodies or mechanisms (as was the case in the projects Côte d'Ivoire PBF/CIV/A-5, Chad PBF/IRF-263).[321] The project PBF/BFA/B-6 in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, for example, worked with local organizations that already existed, with the subregion possessing a strong tradition of local youth organizations. Because the project worked through local organizations and networks, there was greater optimism among implementing partners that project gains would continue beyond the project, and already some evidence that authorities and communities were working together to sustain many of the initiatives. Implementing partners also emphasized the sustainability of some of the project's more intangible gains. "The exchange of experiences and meetings between the CSOs have helped reinforce links between them … they have established a durable line of collaboration", one implementing partner observed, adding that these connections and the skills gained in the course of the projects were "precious and cannot be taken away".[322]

While such experiences provide a strong rationale for investing in local mechanisms, the counterargument voiced by many CSOs and youth representatives interviewed was that these community mechanisms and organizations may also face sustainability challenges. Short bursts of project funding are not always sufficient to allow them to carry forward initiatives or mechanisms that require many years of sustained work in difficult circumstances.

Sustainability issues caused by non-permissive conditions: Another situation that highlighted potential sustainability issues was the permissiveness of the environment. Where youth programming was already working "against the grain" and trying to encourage youth participation in situations where this was strongly mistrusted, there not only tended to be minimal progress in the course of the project, but also serious doubt about any lingering effects.

Changes in political circumstances could also have a dramatic effect on sustainability. The project in Tunisia (PBF/IRF-288), for example, has been referenced several times in this Review for its innovative features and some marked successes in integrating young people into municipal decision-making discussions, and helping change the discourse around youth engagement. However, the project was approved in 2018, at a moment when the democratic transition of Tunisia was in full swing, and the environment was still fertile for youth engagement. After the closure of the project at the very end of 2020, political conditions in Tunisia shifted. In March 2023, the Tunisian President suspended the municipal councils, which the project had worked to link with youth on local governance questions. Thus, despite tremendous success in the course of the project, implementing partners later felt that "earlier progress was erased".[323]

Another example of this was the project PBF/IRF-462 in Niger, which had gained notable traction in encouraging greater inclusion of young women and girls in local conflict resolution and peace consolidation efforts, including obtaining local authorities' support for that engagement. At the close of the project, there appeared to be some potential to scale it up to more national engagement or similar work in other areas of Niger – which would have been a notable example of catalytic effect. The project team was continuing to work towards this,[324] but the unconstitutional change of government in Niger in July 2023 had an impact on government policies and political will across Niger, from the national to the local. "Political power dictates the political context and therefore the appropriation of the project," explained a UN staff member.[325] In that changed context, those involved were no longer optimistic that they could build on the prior project's success and expand or replicate it.

Reinforcing local ownership and capacities for change: Responses to these sustainability challenges varied. As

suggested by the examples above, one approach was to prioritize working from existing mechanisms or initiatives – whether those that are indigenous to a local community, or those that were inherited from previous peacebuilding programming.[326]

Another was suggested in the previous section on catalytic effects: investing in "capacities for change" could both increase the potential catalytic impact – by catalysing other peacebuilding initiatives – and also lead to the sustainability of existing investments by ensuring that there were individuals or entities able to take the work forward. Across the sample, there were examples of projects that had supported local youth networks, community ventures and peacebuilding initiatives, and of these continuing to exist and to be led by the youth involved long after the project closed:

- Mauritania PBF/IRF-441: the biogas company established under the project (to address energy needs and thereby reduce sources of conflict) was still functioning after project closure, and providing "green jobs" and activities for engagement in youth. The Mauritanian Government had also expressed interest in expanding it to other areas, with additional donor support.[327]
- Sudan PBF/IRF-471: youth network, created during the project, still existed as of the time of writing. The Carter Center has continued supporting it and has discussed (including with the Ministry of Youth and Sports) how the network could become independent.[328]
- Cameroon-Chad-Gabon (PBF/IRF-370, 369, 368): under this cross-border project, many of the community social enterprises established in Cameroon through seed-funding continued to exist. Many were productive businesses or enterprises in their own right, but in addition, the Government of Cameroon expressed interest in taking the initiative forward and expanding it to other areas.[329]

As these three examples also illustrate, both local and national ownership can be an important part of ensuring sustainability. Where key community or national interlocuters saw great value in the initiatives and operated as strong co-partners, there was greater success within the course of the project, and also greater optimism about its results or activities being sustained after project closure. In the project on youth peace committees ("*barazas*") in DRC (PBF/IRF-262), both local and national authorities, including territorial administrators, were deeply engaged throughout the project. The Minister of the Interior himself ensured that a representative of his office attended all key activities and also stepped in to address resource shortages at different points in the project.[330] This high level of involvement from both local and national actors fostered what implementers described as a "culture of collaboration and accountability", which not only facilitated project activities during the project but also increased confidence in the project's long-term sustainability and impact. There were even inquiries from local authorities in neighbouring villages about expanding the initiative to their area, suggesting both a level of sustainability and catalytic effects.[331] On the flip side, where government linkages were weak or limited, it was often taken as a sign of a high risk of lack of sustainability. For example, implementing partners working on a project in Burkina Faso (linked to one of the projects in the Review sample but not within it) saw immediate positive effects in the project's establishment of three multifunctional centres in Burkina Faso offering trainings on alternative means of livelihoods (six were initially planned).[332] However, the initiative was not synced with national actors and so implementing partners doubted it would be sustained beyond the project.[333] As one UN staff member pointed out, "We cannot work with populations without the support of the State. The initiative [was] good, but we cannot speak of impact."[334]

Strong support and partnership with government departments or officials could also result in mechanisms or models created in the course of PBF-supported projects being officially institutionalized and (relevant to catalytic effects) even scaled up in other areas. They could lead to more project resources, either immediate logistical or financial support (as in DRC), or long-term financial support that could enhance future sustainability. As noted in the section on catalytic effects, the Liberian Government was so impressed with the results of the project PBF/LBR/D-15, in particular the strategies for reintegration of former combatant populations and economic inputs to at-risk youth, that it committed to provide $1 million per annum to build on the project in a second phase. In the project in Tunisia (PBF/IRF-288), for example, one mayor had developed such strong relationships with the youth that he personally pledged to fund the renovation of their headquarters, which they had struggled to finance.[335] However, this example also illustrates how sustainability can be affected by circumstances. Following project closure, changes in government policies resulted in the suspension of certain municipal positions, among them that of the mayor who was such a champion of the project. Due to this, implementing partners were not optimistic about the continuing effects of the project.

Given that no promises of continuing support are certain, implementing partners stressed the need to diversify, and

Several of the projects identified as more sustainable not only profited from strong local partnerships but also leveraged partnerships with the private sector or technological investments – like this provision of a solar-powered water pump in Faya, Chad – to create more enduring strategies for addressing underlying conflict drivers. Photo provided courtesy of IOM 2021.

also look for continuing partnerships from the private sector, academia, civil society or other social institutions. In some situations working "with an actor that is stable and will stay" regardless of the political winds, could be the key to sustainability, one implementing partner working in Latin America advised.[336]

For projects that sought to address youth economic vulnerability, government connections could offer the possibility of larger and more sustainable sources of income. However, many implementing partners, local organizations and the youth involved also sought additional contributions and sustainability strategies by engaging the private sector. The project PBF/MLI/C-1 in Mali, which had a focus on encouraging (sustainable and environmentally friendly) youth employment as a way to reduce local conflict drivers, did a bit of both. It directly involved both the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and private sector actors in the income-generating activities supported in the project. This public–private partnership, boosted by the injection of funds and initiative of this peacebuilding project, was thought to encourage connections between young entrepreneurs and the private sector in ways that might be more sustainable beyond the lifespan of the project. The project only closed in July 2024, so it was not yet possible to see if this sustainability strategy bore fruit.

The project PBF/IRF-264 in Guinea, described in chapter 2.A, also depended significantly on obtaining the engagement and investment of local authorities in project activities. Some of the communes in question were based in mining areas with substantial private sector investment, and these proved to be an additional source of funding and continuity. Following the success of youth integration in the local councils in the mining community of Kamsar – which was deemed to have significantly reduced tensions and improved community relations with the mining company – the CEO of a major mining company and major financial actor operating in the community provided in-kind support for the local youth council.[337]

Also, as illustrated above by the kick-starting of biogas production in Mauritania (PBF/IRF-441), and in many of the social enterprises in Cameroon (PBF/IRF-370), there was some prospect of greater sustainability in the activities that involved or activated private sector investment. With this, they could become self-sustaining economic activities in themselves.

A larger theme within the youth peacebuilding field is whether the limited funds available within peacebuilding funding could be complemented by funding from the private sector, multilateral development banks or other international financial institutions. No significant examples of this type of partnership surfaced within the project reviews or interviews; however, it is a theme that both PBSO and other research partners have recently been exploring.[338]

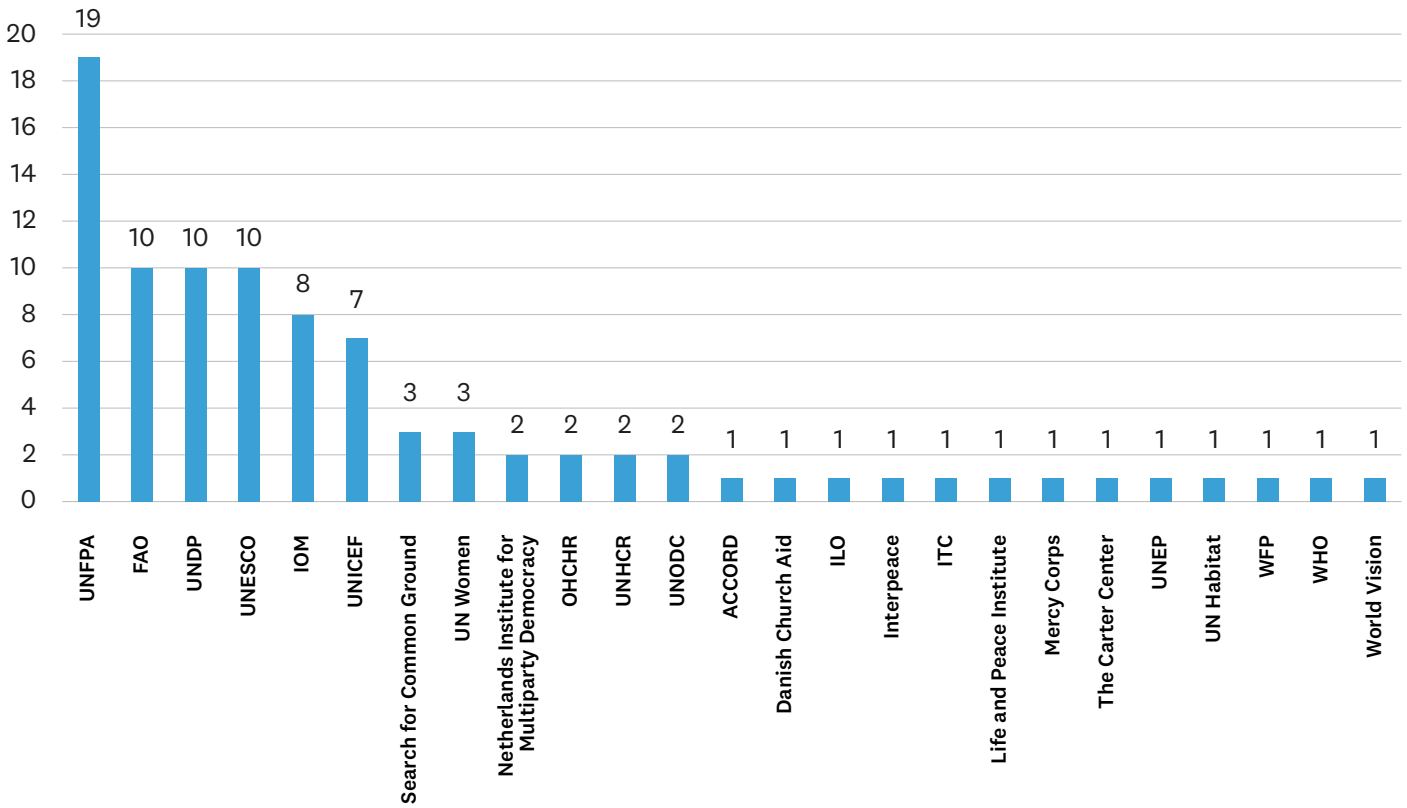
G. Partnerships and funding arrangements with local organizations

The partnerships pillar within YPS urges Member States to establish partnerships with international organizations and local and non-governmental actors to support young people's needs in peace efforts, in conflict and post-conflict contexts.[339] One interpretation of this has been to enable young people to have input and agency in shaping youth peacebuilding programming, as well as efforts to ensure that youth-led and youth-focused organizations are given funding to take the lead in YPS initiatives.

Many YPS studies have documented young people's concerns that their engagement and contributions are frequently not compensated, and also that the YPS agenda overall has not been sufficiently supported financially. In the course of interviews for this Review, YPS experts, youth activists and members of youth-led CSOs relayed many obstacles to meaningful youth leadership, design, participation and funding in youth programming (including but not limited to funding via the PBF). At a local level, many reported administrative barriers, red tape and lengthy UN procedures that almost automatically excluded funding going directly to smaller or more localized organizations.[340] While such barriers affect the ability of local organizations more broadly to receive UN funding, they may be even more acute for youth-led organizations, which tend to lack robust financial resources and administrative structures, and may have had less time to build up a track record.

Youth organizations interviewed expressed frustration that due to some of these bureaucratic and administrative obstacles, they were not given opportunities to lead their own project initiatives, and only received a small amount of the YPS funding that is allocated to larger international organizations and UN agencies. One member of a prominent youth organization in CAR noted that "restrictive eligibility criteria" and other administrative limitations on funding prevented organizations like theirs from receiving direct PBF funding, with the result that those with the greatest

Chart 1: Involvement in projects, by entity/organization



"will and expertise" to lead local youth empowerment initiatives were limited in doing so.[341] Examples of how UN or other funding mechanisms' standard procedures create structural barriers to youth leadership and agency in the YPS field were also noted. One member of a youth-led NGO in CAR observed that rather than allowing projects to be guided and led by what youth thought about the underlying value of a project, the funding mechanisms were structured in a way that NGOs had to spend all their time adapting their proposals to the donor matrix, to set indicators or other selection criteria.[342]

To help identify potential responses to these issues, the research team tried to assess to what extent youth and youth-led organizations were able to act as meaningful partners in the sample of 41 projects. Did youth or youth-led organizations receive any of the PBF funding, either as direct recipients or sub-implementing partners, or through other grant modalities? Were there other ways (beyond financial contributions) that young people or youth-led organizations substantively participated in the development and implementation of the 41 PBF-supported projects? To explore these questions, the research team asked about the degree and type of youth participation in each project, and also asked all implementing partners to provide data on their sub-implementing partners, particularly any youth organizations as sub-implementing partners. PBSO also shared data it has begun collecting on sub-implementing partners on a global level since 2022. Preliminary analysis of this data is shared in box 6. The remainder of this section will take each of these issues in turn, first providing background on PBF funding trends with regard to CSOs and youth organizations generally, and as witnessed in this sample; then on other measures of youth partnership and initiative in the projects, including through seed-funding and subgrant modalities.

PBF funding patterns: Most PBF-supported projects have more than one direct beneficiary or implementing partner. This is most commonly a UN entity, although large CSOs also frequently act as direct recipients (often alongside a partner UN entity). The individual components of a project then tend to be subgranted to international or national NGOs, which themselves may also rely on sub-grantees. Local organizations, including youth and youth-led organizations, tend to fall into the last category of subsidiary implementing partners.

PBSO has taken steps over the last several years to address the larger critique that there is a "glass ceiling" in funding with respect to national and local CSOs, and to encourage greater funding, as well as transparency over funding, to local CSOs (including youth organizations).[343] The PBF 2020–2024 Strategy encouraged greater partnerships with local CSOs or peacebuilders, including by exploring "new avenues to make funding available for community-based organizations" and to explore "flexible funding to local-level organisations", depending on the context.[344] As part of taking this forward, PBSO has recently been testing "inception phase" grants in Madagascar and Kyrgyzstan (in 2023–2024), which are designed to provide support to CSOs in the project development phases.[345] In addition, since their inception in 2011 and 2016, respectively, the Gender Promotion Initiative (GPI) and YPI funding modalities – which were competitive calls for funding open to both UN entities and CSOs – have also partly served this role.[346] They have tended to include a higher proportion of CSOs as direct recipients compared with other fund modalities (based on 5-year eligibility packages).

Perhaps partially due to these efforts, there has been an increase over time in the number of CSOs (international and national) that have been direct recipients of PBF funding. In 2021, 2022 and 2023 the share of allocation of total approvals to CSOs (international and national) as direct recipients of funds was 10.1 per cent, 13.5 per cent and 18.9 per cent, respectively.[347] Internal PBSO tracking suggested that from 2021 to 2023, the number of national and local CSOs that were direct recipients of PBF funding went from 2 to 11. However, most CSOs still receive funding as subsidiary implementing partners, so since 2022, PBSO has begun collecting data on subsidiary funds from all direct recipients (discussed further in box 6).

Funding and partnership patterns in the Review sample: The 41 projects in this sample largely reflect these larger funding patterns. UN entities were direct recipients in 32 projects, and large international CSOs were direct recipients in 12 projects. In all but one of the projects where a CSO was a direct recipient, the funding was allotted via the YPI.

No national CSOs or youth organizations were direct recipients in this Review sample; however, as is true globally, they commonly received funding as sub-implementing partners, and often took on substantial responsibility for designing and taking key activities forward. In the project in Colombia (PBF/IRF-455), for example, UNICEF, UNFPA and the International Labour Organization (ILO) were the direct implementing partners, but they together allocated 42 per cent of the funding to the Colombia chapter of a large international NGO, SOS Children's Village, and a well-established Colombian CSO, Movilizatorio, which works on social engagement. The project PBF/GMB/B-2 in The Gambia was directly managed by the World Food Programme

(WFP), the ITC and UNFPA, but with 63 per cent of the funding implemented via a range of national CSOs (including youth-focused ones), an academic institution (University of The Gambia) and government partners (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare).[348]

There were a number of examples of youth-centred or youth-led local organizations that were substantially involved in shaping the projects and their implementation. The project in Guinea-Bissau (PBF/IRF-512), for example, was led by UNFPA and Interpeace, but data collected by PBSO suggested that some 26 per cent of the funding had been allocated to a national organization, Voz di Paz, which reportedly played a key role in engaging youth NGOs in the consultation and design of the project. One of the projects in Somalia (PBF/IRF-330) was managed by an international CSO, the Life and Peace Institute, but 56 per cent of the funding was redirected to other CSOs, notably Somali Peace Line, a Somali CSO with strong youth engagement (discussed further below).

In the project PBF/IRF-334 in CAR, two youth organizations were awarded funding as project subsidiaries, the National Youth Council ("Conseil National de la Jeunesse") and the most well-established youth organization in CAR, Uru.[349] Although they could not meet the financial and administrative criteria required of direct recipients, the project (which was formally awarded through the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, ACCORD) was always designed to give these organizations the substantive lead in shaping youth engagement in the transition process (see box 2 for more on the project themes).[350]

Box 6: Tracking PBF funding to local organizations as subgrantees

Since 2022, PBSO has begun collecting data on sub-implementing partners at each semi-annual and annual reporting period, as part of an effort to have greater transparency over how much funding goes to local organizations. The data associates sub-implementing partners with a number of set categories, including "National Youth CSO" or "Subnational Youth CSO". The research team reviewed the PBSO data for 2022 and 2023 on sub-implementing partners. In addition, to help cross-check the PBSO database, UNU-CPR requested data on subgrantees for all 41 projects reviewed, and asked implementing partners to specify whether any subgrantees were youth-led or youth-focused organizations. Partners from 19 out of 41 projects responded.

The PBSO data set is still a developing tool and the data captured within it does not yet allow for accurate totals of the amount of funding that goes to youth organizations as subgrantees. This is in part because it is cumulative data, and only from projects ongoing in 2022 and 2023. As a result, the data set is incomplete and prone to risks of miscounting and inaccuracy.[351] A more substantial issue is inaccurate or imprecise categorization of subgrantees. While calls for greater tracking in the peacebuilding field reference funding going to both youth organizations and to "youth-led" CSOs, the latter is a difficult category to pinpoint and there appeared to be no parameters for tracking this in the PBSO data set, which so far only accounts for "youth CSOs" at large. Further, the database does not allow for dual categorization, meaning that organizations that work on both women and youth issues, for example, will only be counted in one category. There is no process to verify the information that goes into this database. On examination, there appeared to be many cases of youth organizations that were not categorized as such. When UNU-CPR compared the information in the PBSO database with the information received from 19 projects in its sample, there was little correlation. In one case, five out of the seven sub-implementing partners ascribed to one project in the PBSO database were miscategorized.

As a result, while this database will likely be a valuable indicator of youth funding in the future, it will take more cycles of tracking data (such that there are more cumulative, complete data sets) and refinement of subgrantee categorization before this database can begin to fill some of the gaps in information about subgrantee funding, especially to youth, and youth-led, organizations.

Encouraging youth input and partnership beyond funding: As some of the above examples suggest, there were significant efforts to involve young people in shaping the projects substantively. All projects involved some degree of local consultation at the project inception and design stage, but some projects appeared to place an even greater emphasis on having youth or youth-focused CSOs lead in designing and shaping the project throughout its

lifespan. For the project PBF/IRF-330 in Somalia, managed by the Life and Peace Institute, staff emphasized that the primary national CSO involved, Somali Peace Line, should be considered not a subsidiary but a full "co-implementer of the project, playing a critical role from proposal design to the implementation of the project. They took the lead in executing more than 90 per cent of the project activities, including monitoring and evaluating the project's progress."[352] When asked about the level of engagement and input youth had in the project in Tunisia (PBF/IRF-288), implementing partners responded: "The youth were the ones who really carried the project. They were the ones to take forward activities with youth in their region," including those ranging from capacity-building, to sensitization, advocacy with government officials and developing local development projects.[353]

In some of the projects, meaningful youth participation and direction of activities was bound up within the theory of change. For example, the project PBF/IRF-468 in CAR and in Tanganyika Province of DRC (PBF/IRF-262) sought to enable youth to lead conflict mediation efforts (farmer–herder conflicts in the former, and between Twa and Bantu communities in the latter). In both, project teams emphasized viewing youth as co-implementers rather than beneficiaries, and described how youth were in the lead in everything, including identifying the conflicts in question, those they would reach out to, the strategies involved and many other steps of implementation.[354] The rationale was that allowing youth to directly demonstrate their leadership capabilities would shift negative perceptions about youth (specifically disproving narratives about their passiveness), and thus advance overall YPS goals of youth participation and engagement.[355]

Seed-funding and microgrant modalities: Linking both funding and meaningful participation, many of the projects incorporated some form of seed-funding, microfinancing or other subgrant modalities to allow youth or youth-focused organizations to develop and lead their own community initiatives, peacebuilding projects, businesses or other social enterprises. In Tunisia (PBF/IRF-288), project funds supported 107 youth-led local development projects;[356] in Cameroon (PBF/IRF/370), there was seed-funding for local actors or organizations to take on social entrepreneurship projects; and in project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka small grants were available for initiatives led by young women. Microgrants to youth and CSOs to lead advocacy and sensitization activities were a prominent planned activity for the ongoing project in Guinea-Bissau (PBF/IRF-512).[357]

An advantage of these seed-funding initiatives was that the application processes tended to be lighter in terms of bureaucratic or administrative processes and so more accessible to local organizations. One example that surfaced in interviews (albeit not linked to the PBF) was a peace messaging initiative in Pakistan, in which the international NGO offering grants allowed youth and CSOs to submit video applications. The programme wanted to encourage peace initiatives from a wider range of the population (and not just CSOs who are used to programming work), including from poorer urban and rural populations who might face literacy challenges and/or had no familiarity with formal proposals or reporting.

Where seed-funding or microgrants were provided, it tended to be as one project component or activity, among many others. However, in the project in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (PBF/BFA/B-6), which was implemented by Mercy Corps, it was the inverse. It offered an innovative modality for involving more local organizations in leading peacebuilding initiatives. The sole project activity was to create a modality for providing microgrants to local organizations in the hard-to-access subregion of Liptako-Gourma, which straddles the borders of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.[358] The project provided microgrants ranging from $2,500 to $20,000 to at least 64 organizations in border communities across the three countries.[359] There was a competitive proposal process, with priority given to applicants that were youth-led and women's organizations. Peacebuilding related to climate change and natural resources was also encouraged. Outside of these key priorities, the conception, design and full implementation of the project was left to the local organizations. Some of the examples of initiatives that were proposed and funded included: purging or cleansing corrupted well waters and developing better shared usage strategies (given that this had been a source of local conflict); creating units for waste removal and environmental clean-up, which also created a local revenue source; reforestation and tree nurseries (led by a group of young women); and composting and urban pollution clean-up activities near displaced communities to alleviate conditions and sources of local tensions.[360]

Local organizations under this subgrant modality would have been unlikely to meet the standards or be able to complete the processes to be direct PBF recipients, yet they were able to take forward their own initiatives. Mercy Corps reporting suggests that at least 20 per cent of the $2.5 million for this project went to local organizations for them to develop and lead local initiatives, a substantial number of them youth organizations.[361] In Niger alone, for example, implementing partners observed that 7 out of the

17 grantees were youth-led organizations.[362] A pass-down rate of 20 per cent to local or national CSOs is not unique, according to the data provided to UNU-CPR by implementing partners.[363] However, it was also not common. In addition, there would be a difference in the degree of agency supported in the Liptako-Gourma project, in that the local organizations would be implementing initiatives of their own design, rather than carrying out those of larger international NGOs or UN entities.

Mercy Corps did require that certain administrative standards be met – that the organizations be a registered NGO and have a certain number of staff. However, it also worked with a number of the very localized (not registered) organizations to help them obtain their NGO registration, including negotiating with local officials to allow them to obtain waivers or defrayal of certain administrative costs required for registration.[364] This was critical for youth organizations in particular to take part because while grass-roots youth organizations are prevalent in the Liptako-Gourma subregion and have a degree of recognition, they tend to not be formally registered.

Once accepted, Mercy Corps worked with grantees to develop their administrative capacities, to ensure that they would be able to appropriately and transparently manage the budgets and other processes. This investment in the organizations, and the credibility that they gained from taking part in the project, had catalytic effects on its own. Following its experience in the project, one of the subgrantee organizations in Niger, Action pour la Femme Rurale, was able to secure three separate grants from different donors, amounting to combined catalytic funding of approximately $133,000, a large amount by the standards of local organizations.[365] A Mercy Corps staff member explained that following the implementation of the project, "Action pour la Femme Rurale, which initially had no visibility, became one of the most prominent civil society actors in the area due to its ability to access local populations."[366]

This example reflects a larger lesson for improving youth partnerships and agency: it is important to not just give youth organizations a role in leading initiatives, but also to invest in their technical or administrative capacity, so that in the future they can develop and propose projects on their own. This should include direct funding or activities related to these objectives built into the project.

All of this suggests that while some progress has been made to encourage more opportunities for youth partnerships, there are still substantial barriers in implementing peacebuilding projects. Past PBF thematic reviews have taken note of the need to develop pathways for local organizations (including but not limited to youth-led organizations) to be able to directly receive PBF funds, or failing that, to ensure greater input in project design and implementation.[367] The findings suggest that notwithstanding some gains, these recommendations are still relevant. In addition, given that the YPI, which had previously been a key conduit for CSO direct funding, was not offered in 2024 and its future status remains uncertain, there may need to be a renewed emphasis on other avenues for CSOs to directly receive funding. Beyond funding, the findings from this limited sample suggest significant promise in some of the subgrant modalities and seed-funding initiatives, as well as in efforts to involve youth organizations substantively in the implementation and development of peacebuilding initiatives. Doing so in a way that also invests in youth organizations' capacity to meet the necessary technical, financial and administrative demands of programming may over time help to fill a key gap in youth partnership.

H. Data gaps and challenges in appraising YPS progress

One issue that surfaced in relation to both funding and other efforts to appraise progress on YPS was an overall lack of data and information. During the consultations, several experts highlighted that the field as a whole is "data poor", with virtually no information on how much funding is going to youth organizations in the YPS field.[368] Efforts like those undertaken by PBSO to gather more information on subsidiary partners (see box 6) are not common. There appeared to be no equivalent efforts to track how other major sources of UN funding on YPS, or that of other major funding mechanisms, trickle down to youth organizations.

There are also large gaps in the data that might be used to appraise progress on YPS objectives within any given project. Within the reporting provided to PBSO, the data collected tended to track outputs, such as the number of activities and rates of participation in activities. While some progress reports or final reports mentioned baseline or post-project surveys, as a way to measure progress, data from these was limited or absent in the vast majority of the progress reports examined. There was very little in the progress reports that might allow for assessments of results or impact, for example, comparison of rates of participation, or of levels or types of socioeconomic needs of the target populations before and after the project. Information that might contribute to an understanding of whether the theory of change proposed at project inception had borne out, or

information on whether the project or project model would be sustained after project closure, was rare.

In addition, and surprisingly for a field focused on youth, even the basic activity data tended not to be age-disaggregated. Among UN entities, there are established definitions (albeit varying ones, see box 7), of what constitutes a young person, with most defining it as between 15 and 24. Despite this, only eight projects in this sample provided age-disaggregated information in PBF reporting. Many of the independent evaluations of projects (11 of which contained age-disaggregated data) noted that implementing partners were tracking the age of participants, suggesting that this information may be tracked but not provided in PBF reporting.

All these data gaps can make it difficult to assess the levels of progress on YPS goals. Some of these metrics are difficult to track and gather even with the best efforts, given the diffuse nature of the field (with youth inclusion supposed to be mainstreamed across many funds and types of projects) and issues like competing definitions of youth (see box 7). With frequent differences between international standards and common perceptions in the target countries, something as seemingly simple as reporting how many "youth" benefited or participated can be a complex question. With these differing age standards, it is equally difficult to then determine what constitutes a "youth-led" organization for the purposes of tracking whether funding going towards it constitutes progress on youth financing goals. In addition, those leading these projects tended to express a sense that the very short time horizons were limiting their window to carry out basic activities, much less to build in time for features like pre-project or post-project surveys, or other data-collection methods. Within the field as a whole, investments in longitudinal or impact studies are few and far between.

While all of these are very real limitations, the experts and young people interviewed emphasized a need for greater accountability for progress on YPS goals, which may require greater efforts to fill some of these data gaps.

Box 7: Who is a "youth"? Differing definitions and challenges in tracking

Many have argued for greater tracking of who benefits from YPS programming, by tracking participants or beneficiaries by age, as well as more systematic efforts to understand whether funding flows to organizations led by young people. However, with such wide variance in definitions of who is a "youth", a recommendation as seemingly simple as tracking the age of beneficiaries can prove challenging to implement at a global level.

While acknowledging that definitions may vary, Security Council resolution 2250 defines youth as "persons of the age of 18–29 years old". Since 1981, the common official definition of a youth across the UN system has been a person between 15 and 24 years.[369] Nonetheless, even within UN entities there is variation, with some entities adopting a definition of 14–24 years (UN Secretariat; ILO; and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO), and some extending the upper limit to 32 years (Youth Fund of UN-Habitat). UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNFPA distinguish between adolescents (10–19 years), young people (10–24 years) and youth (15–24 years). The ambiguity in what constitutes a young person can pose challenges in terms of accountability for progress on YPS goals.

A further complication is that the definitions established at headquarters do not always match the legal definitions or societal perceptions of youth in the countries where peacebuilding programming is implemented. For instance, UNFPA staff members working on the project PBF/IRF-292, 291 in Burkina Faso and Mali noted that their standard agency definition of youth – individuals aged 15–24 – did not align with the national legislation of Mali, which defines youth as up to 35 years old, and they subsequently had to adjust participant standards.[370] In many of the countries examined, societal perceptions of what constitutes a "youth" tended to extend far beyond the typical thresholds of 29 or 35 years. Those interviewed during field research said whether someone was considered a "youth" or not depended on an individual's social conditions, such as their marital or employment status, rather than on numerical age alone. During a focus group discussion in CAR, for example, many appeared to be above 29 years of age. One of these individuals explained: "We consider ourselves young even though some of us have exceeded 'the age' for a while now."[371] Because they were still unemployed and dependent on their families, they still identified (and were treated) as youth, he and others in the focus group said.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The PBF-supported projects examined in this Review demonstrated numerous ways that peacebuilding programming can help advance the YPS agenda. The initiatives within them helped expand space for youth participation and engagement in decision-making at local, national and regional levels by establishing or supporting youth councils or other representative bodies; fostering linkages and dialogue with key stakeholders; and creating channels for youth input and engagement on a range of issues. They helped activate individual and collective engagement by young people, by strengthening and facilitating regional, local and national youth networks; providing the necessary skill, capacity and knowledge development for individuals; and addressing some of the barriers, from stigma to lack of socioeconomic means and access. Several of the projects were testing new approaches to get beyond the "usual suspects" of youth, and to expand the diversity and inclusiveness of youth-focused peacebuilding.

In addition to taking forward key YPS objectives, the projects provided further evidence of how youth involvement can meaningfully advance peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Young people who took part in national conflict prevention mechanisms, or in these local councils or local dispute resolution bodies, proved able to offer concrete avenues for preventing future outbreaks of violent conflict (Colombia PBF/IRF-455, El Salvador PBF/IRF-414). They did so not just by dealing with disputes between youth, but also by virtue of community engagement, helping to soothe community tensions and broker cooperation across intercommunal lines. In Guinea (PBF/IRF-264), for example, mayors, elders, leading businessmen and other key stakeholders in the community credited youth inclusion and youth outreach and engagement in the community with having flatlined incidences of violence in the most conflict-prone communities.

Young people brought different viewpoints and bases of knowledge, such that when included, they tangibly improved community efforts to address root causes and drivers of conflict. In projects responding to climate change and natural resources management, for example, young people were often the first to understand the impact of climate change for local dynamics, and to both embrace and propose new technologies, techniques and community management strategies to help mitigate its effects.

Although in some countries the space for youth engagement was more limited, in others, engagement via youth proved to be a neutral meeting ground, with certain groups of youth able to engage despite local or regional faultlines. Youth exchanges were the vanguard of efforts to encourage regional peacebuilding and reconciliation in the Western Balkans (PBF/IRF-250). Youth were seen as more neutral intermediaries in Somalia, able to bridge clan lines in ways that other groups of the population could not, to broker cooperation and reduce intercommunal conflict. Some of the projects – like the one supporting a conflict monitoring network in Sudan (PBF/IRF-471) – illustrated that young people have a role to play not only in prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding, but also in helping mitigate and manage the effects of ongoing conflicts.

Learning on best practices and key strategies

The cohort analysis and comparison of results across different project and country contexts suggest important learnings about some of the YPS strategies and practices. Many of the projects focused on creating mechanisms or avenues for inclusion of youth – whether it was the creation of a representative youth body or position, or facilitating intergenerational dialogues, linkages and exchange. In projects in Guinea (PBF/IRF-264), Colombia (PBF/IRF-455) and El Salvador (PBF/IRF-414), just allowing young people to be more informed, and to relay their concerns, contributed to reducing tensions and conflict. This awareness created the sense that there were peaceful outlets for expressing grievances and concerns. It also enabled young people to access opportunities for them to contribute to conflict resolution and prevention, and other community matters. In addition, these mechanisms, platforms or initiatives provided a means of structured engagement that could increase the chances of youth engagement being solidly anchored, and also contribute to the prospects of more large-scale or long-term change at both local and national levels.

Beyond creating or strengthening structures and mechanisms, individual empowerment was incredibly important, and many projects dedicated efforts to supporting young people's ability to be knowledgeable, active participants. However, this individual empowerment and capacity-building appeared more likely to "trickle-up" into systemic change where it was supported through broader networks of youth or paired with other linkage or anchoring strategies (i.e. supporting local or National Youth Councils or linking youth with those in authority positions, as in PBF/IRF-288 in Tunisia and PBF/IRF-263 in Chad). These had the potential to have a strong catalytic effect, enabling investment in individual transformation and advocacy to become more than the sum of its parts.

Youth participants take part in a teambuilding exercise at a workshop where national youth organizations developed a roadmap for a national youth action plan, as part of the project PBF/GIN/B-12 in Guinea. Photo provided courtesy of UNFPA Guinea.

There were still outstanding challenges with some of these mechanisms that should be considered for future programming. For these mechanisms to be successfully established, and to be more than token appointments, there needs to be a foundation for them to build on. In the case of National Youth Councils or regional youth engagement, for example, there was a clear finding that these are more likely to be successful and sustainable when they can build on pre-existing work establishing such mechanisms or at least a base of youth activism – and acceptance within community relations – at a local level. Moreover, it is not enough to simply establish these mechanisms. To prevent them from becoming tokenistic, they need to have a raison d'être outside of simply being a forum of youth inclusion or representation. They should have a role to play in continuing to link back and serve youth constituents at a local level (i.e. in Sri Lanka), or be connected to broader service delivery or peacebuilding platforms or mechanisms (i.e. in project PBF/IRF-288 in Tunisia). In some cases, the key deficit was not just having them linked to decision-making processes but ensuring that those links were meaningful, such that youth representatives' input could result in actual policy developments or change. This was often contingent on cultivating strong local partnerships and investment by a range of stakeholders (both governmental and non-governmental). This often required a significant investment of time at the outset.

Such engagement and trust-building also related to another key factor – that of strategies that might support an enabling environment for diverse youth participation. Working to counter the suspicions or stereotypes of youth by directly engaging key stakeholders (whether community elders or leaders, religious figures or government officials), as well as broader community sensitization and advocacy, through media engagement, music and sport, intergenerational dialogue or other person-to-person engagement campaigns, were all viewed as important in shaping the environment surrounding youth, in ways that might open more windows to meaningful youth participation. In projects like the one in Mauritania (PBF/IRF-441), young people became much more visible when given the opportunity to act as "peace messengers", and in the process of engaging with the community, they gained much greater recognition of their contributions and credibility as key stakeholders. The impact of activities like media campaigns or awareness-raising was more diffuse, and harder to directly tie to immediate effects.

These were nonetheless viewed as crucial, given that long-term progress on meaningful youth inclusion at scale (i.e. beyond a small number of dedicated activists) depends on shifting societal perceptions. The different forms of sensitization and engagement (e.g. advocacy with key stakeholders) could also be important as a means of identifying allies and partners within other demographics.

As important as this dialogue and awareness-raising was, arguably even more significant were opportunities for youth to show what they could do. Whether allowing young people to establish community service initiatives, act as messengers of peace and community liaisons, or design their own media and peacebuilding outreach, projects that showcased young people's ability to contribute appeared far more effective at dismantling stigmas and stereotypes than intervention strategies premised on simply communicating young people's potential. Such approaches also limited the risk of tokenistic youth involvement in programmes, and helped carry forward the key goals underlying the participation pillar of the YPS agenda.

Youth engagement in economic spaces added another dimension to these strategies. Addressing socioeconomic needs and vulnerabilities has been seen as one of the most important ways to tackle barriers to youth participation, and a way to respond to key youth demands and vulnerability. Having greater economic opportunities not only helps meet youth needs, freeing them to then consider and take action in other arenas, it also affords youth a more equivalent status and positions them to engage with credibility. In addition, what the programming related to climate and natural resources issues highlighted was that at a local level, questions of economic management – for example, management of shared natural resources, decisions about agricultural practices or relations with extractive industries – are key areas of community decision-making (The Gambia PBF/GMB/B-2, Mali PBF/MLI/C-1, Solomon Islands PBF/IRF-472). Exclusion of youth from decision-making spaces that relate to economic or livelihood needs limits them from input into some of the most significant issues affecting them and their communities. In addition, given evidence of how these socioeconomic issues (including equality of access to socioeconomic resources) can be a significant conflict driver, limited youth engagement in this space constrains their ability to address root causes and contribute to peacebuilding. On the flip side, because of the significance of these socioeconomic issues, investments in youth livelihoods, involving them in sustainable technologies and industries, and in the improved management of natural resources, proved to be potent spaces for peacebuilding, and important entry points for youth empowerment.

A final cross-cutting best practice was the proviso to try to "meet youth where they are", as one Gambian activist framed it.[372] Although the activist was providing suggestions on how to best reach youth from more marginalized communities, this proviso is relevant to a range of youth engagement strategies and approaches. This could include spending more time considering necessary accommodations and tailored outreach strategies, as discussed in the section on intersectional approaches. When thinking about how to engage "hard to reach" or at-risk youth, it could mean greater efforts to "speak young people's language" (figuratively and literally in some situations) and investing more time in their communities, and with key intermediaries.[373] Other interviewees emphasized the importance of identifying activities and spaces that were naturally attractive to young people. This was the premise behind engagement via sporting events, or arts or music messaging and activities, or of trying to "gamify" certain peacebuilding strategies or adapt them to online outreach modalities – these were naturally arenas that youth would be engaged in and would receive messages through. However, meeting youth where they were was not always about packaging messaging in more "gamified" or engaging methods, but about identifying issues that were important to youth. Youth were far more interested when it came to issues that mattered to them personally, to their families and their communities. This is part of why some of the practice areas highlighted – engagement at the local or community level, in natural resources-related areas, or on socioeconomic issues – often had greater traction.

Gaps and future funding opportunities

While all of the above offered cause for optimism and validated the substantial attention and interest in youth programming, the project experiences also pointed to a number of significant challenges and gaps. First and foremost was simply the scale of the challenge. Many of the issues that these projects sought to tackle – discrimination or stigma against young people, high levels of youth poverty or unemployment, or lack of opportunities for education, understanding and awareness for young people – are issues happening on such a large scale that they can be difficult to tackle through small-scale programming. Even if there is an intent to catalyse larger efforts, for issues of this size and scope, even incremental efforts might require projects several times the duration and funding amounts of PBF-supported projects.

The second major scale issue related not just to the number of people but to the scale or size of the larger societal challenges signalled by youth exclusion. Youth programming is often treated as a particular rights issue, specific to the

exclusion of one group of society. Yet in many of the localities, youth represented 60, 70 or even 80 per cent of the population. It is perhaps because of this that the Secretary-General's 2021 report *Our Common Agenda* framed greater meaningful, diverse and effective youth engagement in political processes as a core component of the social contract.[374] It is a credit to the PBF that there has been such a significant emphasis on youth programming in recent years. However, this larger perspective raises the question of whether youth-focused programming merits even more attention in peacebuilding, both in terms of youth mainstreaming and in increasing support for youth-focused initiatives.

This Review could only consider a limited sample of PBF-supported programming, and could not capture all the different areas of youth-related work that the PBF supports, much less that of other UN entities, private and public donors, and civil society actors. Nonetheless, the interviews with practitioners and experts suggested some outstanding gaps in the field where there has so far been either limited programming, or even greater demand for such work. One of the biggest gaps was at the intersection of CPS and YPS. The projects examined suggest this is potentially one of the most fertile areas for youth programming, because of the natural interest and leadership of young people on climate and environmental issues, because of the key nexus with socioeconomic gaps and issues, and because of the potential for natural resources-related programming to open entry points for other peacebuilding goals. There have been some efforts to develop programming specific to youth and the management of natural resources, and a smaller amount of programming that considers climate or climate adaptation work from a youth perspective, but there is much more room for investment in this area.

This Review also paid specific attention to emerging practice on intersectional work, and to strategies for the protection and inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable youth. It would be unfair to say that there is a gap in this area, given evidence that many youth activists, civil society partners and UN entities have been pushing hard to strengthen such considerations and mainstream them more across all youth programming. Nonetheless, the project experiences and expert interviews suggest that fully seeing through commitments for diverse engagement, and ensuring that commitments on the protection needs of certain youth are met, are outstanding challenges. Interlocuters noted accessibility concerns, many of which could have been addressed by additional budget provisions or more extensive preparation. Many also called for more structural measures – with safeguarding measures built into budgets, protocols and project design modalities – as a way to reinforce the rhetorical support in this area.

In terms of partnerships with young people and youth organizations, new models for grant-giving and co-partnership in implementation of projects have enabled more local organizations, including those led by young people, to lead on YPS initiatives. There were some important examples of programming designed to put youth-led organizations in the driver's seat, acting not as beneficiaries but as co-implementers, and also examples of new funding modalities that allowed more YPS funding to reach youth-led and youth-focused CSOs. In addition, models of seed-funding and subgrants have allowed young people to advance their own initiatives, and be involved in everything from project design to monitoring and evaluating projects. However, a general issue in the field (not specific to work supported by the PBF), is that there is still insufficient youth input and ownership over the design and implementation of peacebuilding programming. Both practitioners and youth activists shared the impression that there is insufficient funding going to youth organizations, and very little transparency on the levels of funding and partnership in the broader development, humanitarian and peacebuilding fields. Notwithstanding some substantial recent efforts by PBSO to track funding for sub-implementing partners, it was difficult to obtain even approximate figures on how much of the funding for any given project is going to youth organizations. There was, equally, a dearth of data in terms of the age of beneficiaries or participants, and of indicators that might allow for inferences on impact with respect to the advancement of YPS goals.

Recommendations and next steps

The results suggest some very strong existing strategies among partners working to advance youth inclusion in decision-making and peacebuilding. Nonetheless, partners offered a number of suggestions for reinforcing best practices, both within PBF-supported projects and those supported by other funding mechanisms.

- **Continue to invest in greater youth participation and involvement in peacebuilding and conflict prevention** through dedicated projects bringing young people into decision-making and conflict resolution forums (among other activities) as well as mainstreaming youth inclusion across the broader peacebuilding field.
- **Think strategically and incrementally about activities and interventions, even when planning a two-year project.** Given the scale of the challenges, each individual youth-focused peacebuilding project must be

thought of as part of a larger chain of youth engagement and empowerment. The greatest successes resulted where youth activists and peacebuilders thought sequentially, and used each project as an opportunity to nudge forward incremental change, or invest in a foundation for subsequent work.

- **Consider opportunities for sequential funding.**[375] Given the incremental or sequential nature of the field, funding mechanisms like the PBF may want to consider synced or sequential funding strategies so that project teams have an opportunity to build from past successes, or create pathways for scaling catalytic change where successful models are identified.
- **Consider youth participation mechanisms as a way to open channels of communication and relationship-building with others in the community.** Some of the most powerful effects of youth participatory mechanisms was that they allowed for input, communication and feedback loops among the community, de facto expanding civic space, which could defuse tensions in the short term and have broader impacts on social cohesion.
- **Create opportunities for youth to lead, and to showcase their abilities.** Whether involving youth in community planning, renovation or other public works, or giving youth the chance to lead on conflict resolution or community awareness, allowing youth to "show by doing" can be one of the most effective ways to dismantling stigmas and enable participation.
- **Invest in youth-led representative bodies and networks,** including youth councils (at a national or subnational level), youth activism platforms or networks, or social or professional clubs. Such solidarity groups and platforms support collective action for young people, and can anchor gains in youth participation. Relatedly, investing in youth-led organizations, helping them build a track record through small–medium grants and capacity-development, can nurture more youth-led peacebuilding and programming initiatives in the field.
- **Build on existing mechanisms, initiatives and networks wherever possible.** Related to sequential strategies, strengthening existing youth organizations and mechanisms (whether traditional or part of prior peacebuilding work) offered advantages in gaining traction and ownership and may prove more sustainable.
- **Ensure that project timelines and budgets allow sufficient time for engagement and sensitization on the project at the outset.** This is necessary for overcoming stigma, gaining support from local stakeholders and ensuring sufficient trust from youth involved.
- **Consider more flexible and localized funding modalities, such as seed-funding and subgrant modalities.** There were several strong examples of true "partnership" modalities, with local organizations (including those that were youth-led) leading initiatives through provision of microgrants, seed-funding and subgranting modalities. These modalities can be more accessible to youth organizations, as they often allow more flexible and locally adapted proposal processes. To empower youth organizations in the long-term, however, and beyond such localized mechanisms, it is also important to build in capacity-building support for project management (such as budgetary training) into any subgrant or seed funding initiatives.
- **Consider socioeconomic considerations and components in virtually all youth peacebuilding programming.** Socioeconomic needs were so central to youth exclusion and vulnerability, and economic participation proved to be such a lynchpin for other forms of youth participation, that it would be hard to have strong catalytic effects and impact without some attention to these issues. Socioeconomic needs encompass much more than short-term livelihood support. Given this, more thought needs to be given to syncing project inputs with national and local economies and development plans.
- **Invest in young people's capacities, skill sets and knowledge,** ranging from knowledge of political and peacebuilding processes to practical skills, such as project management and fundraising. Where peacebuilding programming provides some form of training or capacity-building, providing an official certificate of participation can further enhance non-financial catalytic effects; in countries where training opportunities are limited, these can be an important part of the job credentialling process.
- **Build from sufficient local foundations when considering national or regional youth platforms** (i.e. National Youth Councils or representative bodies) **or strategies.** Otherwise, there is too high a risk of the national or regional mechanisms not coming together or doing so only in a tokenistic way.

Regional and cross-border programming: While the idea of regional or cross-border work on youth was promising, strong models of such programming do not yet exist. The following key considerations will be important in developing more fit-for-purpose cross-border or regional youth programming.

- **Ensure a strong fit between the theory of change and the cross-border or regional modality.** Otherwise,

given the high implementation costs involved in cross-border projects, there is a risk of burdening what might otherwise be highly productive national projects, or of the cross-border or regional elements falling by the wayside.

- **Ensure that there is sufficient alignment and partnership across all stakeholders involved.** Given the complexity of regional or cross-border work, a greater degree of investment by a range of stakeholders may be necessary to overcome the coordination and transaction costs, sufficient to ensure project success and sustainability. Ensuring that the implementing partners have the relationships and operating modalities required to enable this is also important.
- **Increase duration and/or start-up time for cross-border or regional projects.** Given the additional administrative and transactional complexity of cross-border or regional projects, it may be necessary to increase the maximum duration for these projects, or at least allow them a pre-start-up period before implementation starts.

Climate change and natural resources-related peacebuilding: The findings suggest a strong rationale and already emerging, organic demand for youth engagement in climate and natural resources-related peacebuilding work. However, the field is still nascent, and the following steps could encourage this area of work and lend towards improved practice.

- **Invest in greater research, assessment and policy attention in the CPS x YPS space.** Within the CPS field as a whole, more attention needs to be paid specifically to the youth dimensions of climate change, similar to the progress made in considering the gendered impacts of climate change. This theoretical framework could then support greater programming at the intersection of YPS and CPS.
- **Pilot youth-centred CPS programming in more areas,** specifically giving attention to young people's role in climate adaptation, as well as in other environmental and natural resources-related conflict prevention.
- **Invest in greater monitoring, evaluation and learning, and more longitudinal studies of youth-centered CPS work.** Of the PBF-supported projects that did work with youth and natural resources or youth and climate change-related programming, there was a much lower level of independent evaluations available compared with other areas of youth work. The evaluations that did exist for these projects largely lacked means of appraising the impact in terms of both climate dimensions and youth empowerment and participation.
- **Consider more systemic engagement on the socioeconomic dimensions of programming related to natural resources.** For those engaged in programming focused on engaging youth in alternative or sustainable livelihoods, consider ways to link these to national or private sector programming initiatives, or to broader climate financing initiatives and development strategies.
- **Consider more regional partnerships on youth and climate work, particularly in Africa.** While the peacebuilding field appears slightly behind in exploring the nexus between CPS and YPS, some Member States and regional organizations or missions have been leading the way in calling for greater attention to this nexus.[376] Developing youth-centred CPS programming in coordination with some of these regional organizations or missions may be an important avenue for expanding this work, and also expanding cross-border or regional peacebuilding models, going forward.

Inclusion, intersectionality, protection and "do no harm": The importance of including a diverse range of youth, of "leaving no one behind" and of ensuring consideration for protection work are principles that are all well mainstreamed within the field and within PBF-supported work. Nonetheless, implementing partners suggested a number of ways to strengthen these practices, both for future PBF-supported work and in that supported by other funding mechanisms.

- **Continue to prioritize the YPS commitments to diverse youth inclusion,** enabling those from all genders, ethnic and religious identities, and different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, to participate equally in peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives. This requires not only a continued emphasis on mainstreaming diverse inclusion across all programming (not limited to youth programming), but also continued support for developing intersectional approaches, and for more innovative outreach strategies.
- **Establish a "culture of protection" within implementing teams.** Ensure that all project staff are aware of and responsible for protection needs, and utilize staff and participants' knowledge to ensure comprehensive safeguards at all levels.
- **Create sufficient safeguards and budgetary capacity for mitigation measures.** To reinforce "do no harm" and protection standards, part of the project budget could be earmarked for responding to protection risks or threats that might arise.
- **Consider developing a "road map" and checklists of best practices on inclusion and protection standards.** Developing checklists with simple reminders (e.g.

building in considerations for different types of disabilities, group safeguards or considerations when project design commences) or a repository of practical tips (e.g. lists of accessible and secure venues, transport options) could help preserve institutional memory and remind staff of potential accommodation options for diverse youth. A road map at the start of the project could help activate use of these checklists.

- **Identify and work with trusted local organizations** that have existing relationships with youth with marginalized identities and know their needs well.
- **Establish clear, transparent participant selection criteria.** This promotes inclusivity, establishes a foundation for building trust, and mitigates the risk of selection bias from implementing partners.
- **Consider use of mentorship programmes in youth projects.** Mentors can offer targeted advice, serve as role models, sometimes address or alleviate protection concerns, and facilitate an enabling environment. Engaging women mentors can be especially crucial for empowering young women by demonstrating leadership, providing political guidance and advocating with community opinion leaders.
- **Work to engage key community stakeholders, including religious authorities and local leaders early on in the project** to create an inclusive and open environment conducive to the participation of youth, especially more marginalized youth.
- **Take into account the higher amount of funding and staff bandwidth necessary to ensure an inclusive and intersectional approach.** More time may be needed to allow for outreach and identification of participants, building trust and adapting project materials. More resources may be needed for facilitating access or other accommodations.

Learning, monitoring and evaluation: Limited data made it difficult to identify projects with a strong focus on youth participation and engagement in certain peacebuilding areas. It also limited the degree to which issues like the level of youth participation and funding support could be ascertained. These recommendations apply more broadly to the field, not just to PBF-supported work.

- **Encourage greater age-disaggregated data tracking of participants or beneficiaries,** while also taking into account the fluidity of perceptions of age and other intersecting identity markers (such as gender).
- **Greater transparency and tracking of funding that goes to youth-led or youth-focused organizations,** similar to PBSO's recent efforts to collect subgrantee funding data, would benefit the field as a whole. This would take consistent efforts by a wide range of UN entities, Member States, other funding mechanisms and implementing partners to begin to fill the blanks in this "data-poor" field. Within PBSO's aggregated data tracking on subpartners, more consistent coding of the subgrantee categories (including of youth-led organizations), enabling coding of an organization by more than one category as appropriate (i.e. a CSO working on women and youth), and consolidated tracking at the conclusion of the project, rather than iterative tracking, might yield more usable databases, able to identify the share of funding going to youth organizations.
- **Include youth directly in project evaluations** (beyond baseline consultations) **to enhance accountability and increase their influence in shaping youth programming.** There were at least two examples within the projects examined of youth taking part in monitoring, learning and evaluation exercises, which proved useful in understanding the final results (Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329 and CAR PBF/IRF-334).
- **Encourage more effective appraisal of YPS results** through collection of data on indicators that go beyond activity counts. This should include measures or indicators of effects on youth participation, youth socioeconomic needs, or other objectives over the course of the project. To encourage this, PBSO could require that all youth empowerment projects include youth-focused indicators at outcome level, enforce the requirement of gender and age-disaggregated data beyond activity level indicators, and encourage more youth self-reporting against indicators and/or self-appraisals on the validity of the theory of change. PBSO could also request fund recipients to allocate funds in the budget for "learning approaches" and for baseline and post-project surveys, or could consider investing in longitudinal studies to improve overall learning in the field.

Annex 1: List of projects by cohort

Each of the 41 projects are listed below, grouped with respect to the 4 cohorts. Two projects were jointly considered under more than one cohort: PBF/IRF-414 in El Salvador and PBF/IRF-433 in Somalia. Additionally, as indicated below, two projects (Burundi PBF/IRF-316, Myanmar PBF/IRF-226) were initially selected for the sample, but it was not possible to interview the implementing partners, so they did not significantly inform the substantive analysis.

The PBF allocates funding through two funding modalities, with different eligibility and approval processes, maximum funding caps and project duration limits. Nine projects, or 22 per cent of the sample, were funded through what is known as the Peacebuilding and Recovery Facility (PRF). PRF funding is available for countries deemed eligible for a 5-year term following their submission of an eligibility package to the Secretary-General.[377] Thirty-two projects (78 per cent of the sample) came through the Immediate Response Facility (IRF). This higher percentage is to be expected given that the IRF is used to support the YPI (26 projects in this sample) as well as the Gender Promotion Initiative (2 projects in this sample). The IRF can also be used to support other immediate response initiatives for countries not eligible for PRF funding, as with one project in this sample (Uganda PBF/IRF-303). The IRF is also the more common facility for supporting regional or cross-border projects, which are projects implemented in more than one country simultaneously but as part of the same project. There were four of these in this sample, which is notable given past PBF commitments to focus more on youth in cross-border projects.[378]

Cohort 1: Youth participation in local or community-level decision-making, peacebuilding and conflict prevention

This cohort examines different approaches to involving youth in local decision-making, peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

	Key information	Year Approved	Name	Implementing Partners
1	CAR PBF/IRF-468 (YPI) $800,000 2022-2023	2021	Strengthening conflict prevention by increasing youth engagement in local mediation processes in the Bamingui-Bangoran Region in CAR	Search for Common Ground
2	Chad PBF/IRF-263 (YPI) $1,500,000 2018-2020	2018	Renforcement de la participation et de la représentation de la jeunesse dans les mécanismes de prévention et de gestion des conflits au niveau communautaire	UNFPA, UNESCO
3	Colombia PBF/IRF-455 (YPI) $1,400,000 2022-2023	2021	Espacios cívicos juveniles para la resiliencia y la reconciliación en el Pacífico colombiano	UNICEF, UNFPA, ILO
4	DRC PBF/IRF-262 (YPI) $1,396,343 2018-2020	2018	Renforcer la participation des jeunes leaders Twa & Bantous aux comites locaux de paix "BARAZA 1" pour la consolidation de la paix et la cohésion sociale dans la province du TANGANYIKA	UNFPA, FAO, UNESCO

	Key information	Year Approved	Name	Implementing Partners
5	El Salvador PBF/IRF-414 (YPI) $1,499,530 2021-2022	2020	Juventudes salvadoreñas construyendo paz y resiliencia: Derecho a ciudadanía participativa e incidencia en los municipios de Jiquilisco y Tecoluca	UNFPA, UNESCO, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
6	Guinea PBF/IRF-264 (YPI) $1,442,360 2018-2020	2018	Projet d'appui à la participation des jeunes hommes et jeunes femmes à la gouvernance dans les 20 communes les plus conflictogènes de la Guinée	UNFPA, UNICEF, UNESCO
7	Liberia PBF/LBR/D-15 $1,400,001 2019-2021	2018	Socio-Economic Empowerment of Disadvantaged (SEED) Youth in Liberia	Liberia UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund
8	Sierra Leone PBF/SLE/D-3 $3,000,000 2020-2023	2020	Empowering youth at risk as resources for sustaining peace and community resilience in Tonkolili and Kenema districts in Sierra Leone	FAO, UNDP, UNFPA
9	Solomon Islands PBF/IRF-472 (YPI) $1,499,960 2022-2024	2021	Bridging traditional governance and rule of law through youths' participation as agents of peace and change in Rennel and Bellona	World Vision, UNDP
10	Tunisia PBF/IRF-288 (YPI) $2,998,889 2018-2020	2018	Pérenniser la paix en Tunisie par l'inclusion des jeunes au niveau local	UNDP, UNESCO, UN Women
11	Uganda PBF/IRF-303 $2,487,750 2019-2021	2019	Harnessing the youth's potential for sustaining peace in Uganda	UNDP, UNFPA, OHCHR
12	Burundi* PBF/IRF-316 (YPI) $1,500,000 2019-2021	2019	Community-based prevention of violence and social cohesion using innovation for young people in displaced and host communities	UNICEF, UNFPA

*The Burundi project was selected for this Review sample, but interviewees were not available to comment on its implementation, so it has largely been excluded from the analysis.

Cohort 2: Youth participation and engagement in national political processes, peace and transition mechanisms, and Youth, Peace and Security strategies

This cohort examines different approaches or mechanisms for involving youth in local decision-making, peacebuilding and conflict prevention at a national, cross-border or regional level.

	Key information	Year Approved	Name	Implementing Partners
13	Burkina Faso-Mali PBF/IRF-292 PBF/IRF-291 $3,000,000 2019-2021	2018	Jeunes et paix: "Une approche transfrontalière entre le Mali et le Burkina-Faso"	UNDP, UNFPA
14	CAR PBF/IRF-334 (YPI) $801,409 2019-2021	2019	Towards youth inclusive and gendered peace processes in the Central African Republic	ACCORD
15	Cameroon-Chad-Gabon PBF/IRF-370 PBF/IRF-369 PBF/IRF-368 $4,000,000 2020-2023	2020	Les jeunes, tisserands de la paix dans les régions transfrontalières du Gabon, Cameroun et Tchad	UNODC, UNESCO
16	The Gambia PBF/GMB/D-1 $1,300,000 2018-2020	2018	Increased women and youth participation in decision-making processes and as agents of community conflict prevention	UNFPA, UNICEF
17	Guinea PBF/GIN/B-12 $2,049,050 2022-2024	2022	Appui à la participation des jeunes (femmes et hommes) pour une transition apaisée et inclusive	UNFPA, UNDP, UNESCO
18	South Sudan PBF/SSD/A-5 $3,000,000 2022-2024	2022	Youth leading peace: Establishing participatory and inclusive local and national mechanisms for implementation of Youth, Peace and Security agenda in South Sudan	UNFPA, UNESCO
19	Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-384 (YPI) $1,499,999 2021-2023	2020	Youth Participation and Engagement for a Healthier Equitable Safer and United Sri Lanka	WHO, UNDP
20	Sudan PBF/IRF-471 (YPI) $1,498,341 2022-2023	2021	Sudan Youth Citizen Observer Network: Strengthening youth's role as peacebuilders and promoters of civic space in Sudan's transition	The Carter Center

	Key information	Year Approved	Name	Implementing Partners
21	Yemen PBF/IRF-270 (YPI) $1,500,000 2018-2020	2018	Furthering the Youth, Peace and Security agenda in Yemen	UNFPA, UN Women
22	Western Balkans PBF/IRF-250 $2,999,745 2018-2021	2018	Supporting the Western Balkan's collective leadership on reconciliation: Building capacity and momentum for the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)	UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF
23	Myanmar* PBF/IRF-226 (YPI) $2,000,000 2018-2019	2018	Empowering young women and men as agents in peacebuilding in Myanmar	UNFPA, UNICEF

*The Myanmar project was selected for this Review sample, but interviewees were not available to comment on its implementation, so it has largely been excluded from the analysis.

Cohort 3: Youth participation in peacebuilding through an intersectional lens

This cohort allows exploration of how and to what extent programming takes the intersecting identities of its target groups into account, and how these intersectional approaches to youth programming might advance peacebuilding strategies and goals for greater inclusion and diversity in youth programming.

	Key information	Year Approved	Project titles	Implementing partners
24	CAR PBF/IRF-467 (YPI) $1,500,000 2022-2024	2021	Disarmament of the heart – Promoting young people's mental health and psychosocial well-being to build a peaceful future for the Central African Republic	Danish Church Aid
25	El Salvador PBF/IRF-381 (YPI) $1,500,000 2021-2023	2020	MOVEO – Jóvenes en acción: hacia la diversidad sin violencia forjando alianzas para la construcción de paz y justicia en El Salvador	IOM, UNODC
	El Salvador PBF/IRF-414 (YPI) $1,499,530 2021-2022 [also in cohort 1]	2020	Juventudes salvadoreñas construyendo paz y resiliencia: Derecho a ciudadanía participativa e incidencia en los municipios de Jiquilisco y Tecoluca	UNFPA, UNESCO, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
26	Guinea-Bissau PBF/IRF-512 $2,000,000 2023-2025	2022	Inclusive policies and institutions for a peaceful society: Strengthening the social fabric and fostering youth meaningful participation in decision-making in Guinea-Bissau	UNFPA, Interpeace

	Key information	Year Approved	Project titles	Implementing partners
27	Niger PBF/IRF-298 (YPI) $1,500,000 2019-2020	2018	Les jeunes filles nigériennes avec les leaders s'engagent pour une participation pacifique et inclusive	UNFPA, UNICEF
28	Somalia PBF/IRF-330 (YPI) $1,000,000 2019-2021	2019	Youth building peace in Somalia	Life and Peace Institute
29	Somalia PBF/IRF-433 (YPI) $1,500,000 2021-2023	2021	Promoting Inclusive Action in Peacebuilding (PIAP Initiative)	FAO, IOM
30	Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329 (YPI) $439,907 2019-2021	2019	Young Women as Drivers of Peace: Providing 360° Support to Emerging Women Leaders	Search for Common Ground

Cohort 4: Youth in climate, peace and security, and environmental peacebuilding

This cohort explores youth engagement in projects related to CPS or other environmental peacebuilding, including that related to land and the management of natural resources.

	Key information	Year Approved	Name	Implementing partners
31	Burkina Faso PBF/IRF-446 (YPI) $1,500,000 2022–2023	2021	Facilitation de l'accès à la terre et participation des jeunes à la prévention et la gestion des conflits fonciers dans les régions de la Boucle du Mouhoun et des Hauts Bassins	FAO, UN-Habitat
32	CAR PBF/IRF-304 $1,500,000 2019–2021	2019	Renforcement du relèvement et de réintégration des femmes et des filles grâce à une agriculture résiliente au changement climatique pour instaurer la paix et la réconciliation en RCA après conflit	FAO, UN Women
33	Chad PBF/TCD/A-1 $2,488,906 2018–2020	2018	Projet de consolidation de la paix à travers l'adaptation au changement climatique et la résilience des moyens d'existence des populations de la région du lac Tchad	FAO, IOM, UNHCR
34	Côte d'Ivoire PBF/IRF-259 (YPI) $1,500,000 2018–2020	2018	Participation des jeunes à la gestion durable des ressources forestières pour le renforcement de la cohésion sociale dans la région Ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire	UNDP, IOM

	Key information	Year Approved	Name	Implementing partners
35	Côte d'Ivoire PBF/CIV/A-5 $2,503,800 2020–2023	2020	Consolidation de la paix dans la zone frontalière du nord-est de la Côte d'Ivoire, par le biais d'une gestion participative et planifiée des ressources naturelles	FAO, IOM, UNEP
36	The Gambia PBF/GMB/B-2 $1,700,000 2020–2022	2019	Climate conflict: Strengthening community coping mechanisms against risks of climate-induced conflict and minimizing gender-related vulnerabilities and tensions in The Gambia	ITC, UNFPA, WFP
37	Honduras PBF/IRF-435 (YPI) $1,500,000 2021–2023	2021	Prevenir y gestionar la conflictividad social vinculada a la tierra y territorio que enfrentan las juventudes campesinas e indígenas en Honduras.	FAO, OHCHR
38	Mali PBF/MLI/C-1 $2,500,000 2022–2024	2021	Soutien à l'auto-emploi de la jeunesse rurale, vecteur de paix et de cohésion sociale au Mali	FAO, IOM, UNESCO
39	Mauritania PBF/IRF-441 $1,500,000 2021–2023	2021	Consolidation de la "paix verte" en Mauritanie: appui à la coexistence pacifique entre les jeunes hommes et femmes réfugiées et des communautés d'acceuil dans la région du Hodh El Chargui en Mauritanie	UNDP, UNHCR
40	Niger PBF/IRF-462 (YPI) $1,500,000 2022–2023	2021	La jeunesse nigérienne en action : Soutenir le rôle actif des jeunes femmes et hommes pour la consolidation de la paix dans les départements de Diffa (Communes de Diffa, Chetimari et Gueskerou), Bosso (Commune de Bosso et Toumour) et N'Guigmi (Communes de Kablewa et Nguigmi)	IOM, Search for Common Ground
41	Niger-Mali-Burkina Faso PBF/BFA/B-6 PBF/NER/B-6 PBF/MLI/B-1 $2,500,000 2022–2024	2021	AILP: Appui aux Initiatives Locales de promotion de la Paix	Mercy Corps
	Somalia PBF/IRF-433 (YPI) $1,500,000 2021–2023 [also in cohort 3]	2021	Promoting Inclusive Action in Peacebuilding (PIAP Initiative)	FAO, IOM

Annex 2: Additional methodology and project selection

Research questions

The Terms of Reference identified the following questions for the Thematic Review:

"1) How do PBF-funded projects contribute to promoting meaningful participation of youth in political processes? Do PBF-funded projects demonstrate any other innovative approaches to promoting the positive contribution of youth in peace and security?

2) To what extent and how do projects engage and empower diverse young people? How do PBF-supported projects respond to the need to consider intersectionality (including specifically, youth and gender, among others) and adopt approaches that are tailored to the needs and vulnerabilities of specific sub-groups of youth?

3) How much funding has the PBF allocated to youth organizations and CSOs (international, national and local), both as direct recipients of funds and as indirect implementing partners/sub-contractors? What types of engagement and partnerships with youth-focused CSOs are the most common? Does the evidence suggest funding strategies, modalities or processes that might be better at promoting inclusion and engagement of youth?

4) What are the key results and emerging good practices among PBF-supported programming on young people's political participation, particularly any evidence of how programming on youth empowerment contributes to social cohesion or other positive peacebuilding effects? What are the lessons learned from less successful initiatives? What recommendations do these suggest for PBSO, PBF and peacebuilding practitioners at large?

5) Does the evidence from PBF programming, and that of other related programming in the field, suggest any gaps in existing programming and opportunities for growth in future YPS programming or policy initiatives going forward, either for PBSO or other peacebuilding practitioners or policy actors?"

In addition to these research questions, the research team and Thematic Review partners identified the following themes and issues as important:

- How youth participation and engagement contribute to prevention strategies, and any best practices in engaging youth in prevention.
- Examples of and strategies for encouraging youth engagement in climate-related or other environmental peacebuilding, and any results thereof.
- Better understanding of how youth participation and engagement contribute to efforts to strengthen or consolidate social cohesion.
- The role of socioeconomic components or considerations in youth peacebuilding programming.

During the inception period interviews, PBSO staff, Review partners and others interviewed raised a number of other research questions. These include:

- How do projects support or operationalize national youth policies or national YPS strategies? Do the countries in question have a national youth council or YPS action plan? How much are the projects integrated in supporting these or related YPS mechanisms?
- What is the role of CSOs and youth organizations in project design, implementation and monitoring of projects? What are some of the funding or other barriers to greater autonomy and direct funding of youth organizations?
- How have the projects approached questions of sustainability? Has integration or linkages with national institutions and strategies, the private sector or other institutional actors helped to address sustainability concerns? What elements of youth programming have had the greatest catalytic impact?
- How do PBSO staff and implementing partners identify particular youth groups? How do projects ensure the diversification of perspectives among youth groups? Are projects focused on engaging youth from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds?
- What kind of youth and climate work is most represented within PBF-supported projects?
- How do the projects deal with youth protection concerns and "do no harm" considerations? How have the projects dealt with issues of disability and access for those who are not able-bodied?

As part of the methodology, UNU-CPR conducted a literature review of youth-related programming or progress on the YPS agenda, and these prior findings also influenced the research questions and focus. Within the peacebuilding field, past studies have highlighted the still-limited levels of youth agency, consultation and autonomy in peacebuilding work;[379] challenges in reaching and including those from diverse backgrounds; a tendency to treat young people as a monolithic group, without due attention to the particular

vulnerabilities or contributions of subgroups; failure to pay sufficient attention to young people's socioeconomic needs; and the challenge of measuring impact.[380] Past reviews and consultations suggest a particular gap in programming on youth engagement in CPS.

Specific to the PBF, prior Thematic Reviews have also highlighted some of these deficits, as well as insufficient attention to youth needs and what would be needed to overcome exclusion; issues in sustainability, particularly for projects that seek to counter deeply entrenched norms or stereotypes about youth; a lack of sufficient youth outcomes or components in certain areas of peacebuilding programming; and lack of sufficient evidence to evaluate the impact of youth-focused interventions.[381]

Several reviews of YPS implementation and of youth-focused programming (in general, not specific to those supported by the PBF) have highlighted the lack of transparency and systematic tracking of YPS funding; lack of robust learning exercises or regular monitoring and evaluation of project impact; insufficient data for monitoring the degree of youth participation;[382] and an overall lack of an "evidence-based approach".[383]

"Lightning review", cohort identification and project selection

To develop the cohort methodology and inform project selection, UNU-CPR's research team conducted a "lightning review" of ProDocs for a total of 153 projects related to youth that were approved between 2018 and 2023. These were identified jointly by UNU-CPR and PBSO, based on existing PBSO tracking of youth-focused projects (including but not limited to projects funded through the YPI) and identification of youth-centred projects in the 2023 *Climate-Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review, and the 2024 PBF Thematic Review: Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding in PBF-supported Programming*.

Given the prioritization of youth participation in the Terms of Reference, during the lightning review the research team evaluated all 153 projects in terms of the strength of focus on participation, and also identified several common approaches or categories of youth participation across the projects. In addition to a review of project materials, the research team also conducted preliminary interviews with PBSO staff and those in certain country teams on projects that were deemed promising for the Thematic Review.

The analysis of projects in this lightning review led to the identification of four cohorts:

1. Youth participation in local or community-level decision-making, peacebuilding and conflict prevention.
2. Youth participation and engagement in national political processes, peace and transition mechanisms, and Youth, Peace and Security strategies.
3. Youth participation in peacebuilding through an intersectional lens.
4. Youth in climate, peace and security, and environmental peacebuilding.

The decision to cluster the cohorts around themes of participation and engagement was in part because these emerged as clear and coherent themes out of the analysis of projects in the lightning review, and reflected prominent questions within the YPS field.

The selection of certain cohort themes was also influenced by themes that had already been covered in recent reviews. In particular, although there were a number of interesting projects related to youth and transitional justice (and this is also a key area of the YPS agenda), transitional justice programming had been the subject of its own PBF Thematic Review and was also one of the main subcategories in the *2024 PBF Thematic Review: Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding in PBF-supported Programming*. For that reason, the cohorts were selected to focus on areas that had received less coverage in prior reviews.

During the inception period, the research team further proofed these cohort categories through an iterative project selection process. The team identified an initial shortlist of potential projects that could align with each cohort. These were shared with Review partners for feedback. The research team also reached out to PBSO staff and the implementing partners involved in more than half of the proposed projects to confirm alignment of the key themes and considerations of the projects, and also to learn whether the projects would add value to the review learning exercise as a whole (including consideration for availability of data). These interviews were also used to explore other candidates for cohort selection, as well as any other suggestions for alternate cohort themes or research questions. An additional proofing exercise was the effort to identify subclusters or questions within each cohort, which helped ensure that this combination of projects would yield inferences collectively.

In addition to analysing the content and learning value of each of the projects, the selection of projects took into consideration overall balance across the four cohorts in terms of geographical diversity, funding modality, project size, implementing partners and other factors. The lightning review found that the overall PBF youth portfolio tilts heavily towards Africa (73 per cent of the projects reviewed), particularly West Africa (42 per cent). Due to the prominence of YPI funding in this area, the youth portfolio also has a much higher content of projects funded through the IRF modality (through which YPI projects in PBF-eligible countries are supported) as opposed to through the PRF, which is available only for countries deemed eligible for a 5-year term. Within the 153 projects examined in the lightning review, only 35 per cent of projects came through the PRF. The sample proposed across all 4 cohorts reflects this overall representation, although it has slightly more geographical diversity than the 153-project sample, has slightly less PRF representation, and favours older projects.

Given the cohort methodology adopted, preference was given to projects that were either complete or had been sufficiently implemented to allow inferences on results or implementation challenges. Although not decisive, existence of evaluation or other extensive project analysis or tracking data was viewed as an advantage. The selection criteria also favoured projects that were viewed as successful or that tested innovative models, as these would offer the most material for responding to research questions. As a result, the sample is skewed towards older projects and what was deemed stronger or more successful programming.

The decision to select 41 projects as the review base was based on experiences in the prior two Thematic Reviews. While covering a greater number of projects would have allowed coverage of a greater range of PBF-supported work, it would not have been possible to go into depth in examining the programming strategies and lessons for each, which was deemed to be of greater value for the objectives of the study.

Other methodological points

Objectives and scoping: The YPS agenda is very broad, and this Review was only able to cover certain aspects of it. The primary focus is on programming, and specifically on a select subset of PBF-supported programming. While the PBF portfolio on youth is extensive, it does not cover all areas of YPS or youth-related work. For instance, although engagement of youth within mediation and peace processes is a theme within the YPS literature, only a very small fraction of projects proposed facilitate this. The one clear example, a project from Yemen, was included in the sample, but ultimately did not yield many results on this objective. In addition, for reasons of space and research scope (i.e. the participation pillar), some areas that are well represented in the PBF portfolio are not considered in depth in this Review.

Participatory approach: The Thematic Review took a participatory approach, involving relevant stakeholders such as PBSO, PBF secretariats, peace and development advisers, UN agencies, funds and programmes, secretariat entities, civil society (including youth-led organizations), donors, government partners and, to the extent possible, project beneficiaries. There was also a Peer Reference Group that provided feedback and input at the inception stage, during a validation exercise following the primary research phase, and at two points in the drafting process.

Cohort methodology: The project analysis was organized according to a cohort methodology, with 8 to 12 projects in each cohort. These were selected to have a degree of comparability and alignment with the cohort theme, but also some variance, to give a sense of different approaches. There were also four cross-cutting themes to be integrated into the research questions and analysis for all cohorts. These included how youth participation and engagement contribute to prevention; better understanding of how youth engagement contributes to social cohesion; the role of socioeconomic components or considerations; and evaluating the degree of youth input and youth partnerships. The last also involved collecting information about any subpartner funding that might go towards youth-focused or youth-led organizations.

Consideration of prior PBF Thematic Reviews: This Review built on the findings and recommendations from past and ongoing PBSO-wide exercises, such as the Cohort Evaluations of Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative projects, and the *2024 PBF Thematic Review: Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding in PBF-supported Programming* (2024), *Thematic Review on Local Peacebuilding* (2022), *Thematic Review on Gender-Responsive Peacebuilding* (2021) and *Climate-Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review* (2023). Efforts were made to diversify cohort selection so as not to completely duplicate the review of projects selected in these prior reviews; however, some overlap in the project samples enables deeper analysis, and for this Review to build off those commissioned previously.

Field research and key informant interviews: For each project, the research team interviewed PBSO staff involved, representatives of implementing partners and youth

organizations or subgrantees involved, and other UN staff or experts familiar with the project or young people in the country context. This included interviews with youth activists (operating at a global, national, and local or community level), and young people who participated in some of the programming examined or in other YPS programming. Interviews with youth were a particular aim of the three field research visits in CAR (February 2024) and in The Gambia and Guinea (both June 2024). UNU-CPR and one of the Review partners, UNFPA, jointly supported a youth research fellow in the latter's regional office in Senegal from April through August 2024.

The research team conducted additional background research on YPS and peacebuilding, including interviews with experts in the field of youth programming. Specific attention was given to exploring a wider circle of interviewees outside the project base for the cohort related to youth in CPS, given that this is a relatively new area for the PBF. In total, 181 interviews were conducted for this Review.

Field research criteria: Given the limited nature of field research funding, the preference was to conduct field research in countries with more than one project within the Review sample. Consideration was also given to the nature of youth and peacebuilding challenges in the country, whether the country represented a substantial PBF or review partner investment, and whether youth was considered a high priority within that peacebuilding context.

Interview methodology and ethics considerations: UNU-CPR has an internal ethics review process that guides procedures and safeguards in conducting interviews, including in relation to informed consent, information and data storage, and other risk mitigation measures. The default practice was to seek oral informed consent as a starting point, but written consent forms were also available. UNU-CPR adopted a "do no harm" approach in all research inquiries, and in particular, considered these implications in any interviews with project beneficiaries or youth organizations. Selection of interviewees took into consideration commitments to gender equality in addition to youth inclusivity and diversity.

Youth input in research processes: Given its focus on youth participation, this Review took steps to seek youth input and engagement at all stages of the process. Each implementing partner was requested to provide contact points of youth to interview who were involved in projects, or of youth organizations in the respective countries. Interviews and focus group discussions were a prominent part of the three field research trips, both in the national capitals and at field visit sites. The focus on youth input was reflected not only in the selection of interviewees but also in the research team, with a strong team of youth researchers involved in project selection, research design, interviews and field research, analysis and development of findings, and report drafting.

Project documentation review and data limitations: The research team reviewed all available documents related to the projects in question, including any independent evaluations (available in 22 projects), midterm and final reporting, or other related project materials. The degree of project information (e.g. existence of independent evaluations) was a factor in selecting the projects. Nonetheless, even given efforts to select projects with greater availability of data, there was large variation and significant gaps in the way that projects tracked key indicators or data that might be used to infer results or impact on youth empowerment or YPS advancement. From UNU-CPR's experience with past reviews, existing project data is insufficient to fully adduce impact.

Tracking of age in monitoring and reporting data: An analysis of all project documentation by UNU-CPR found that detailed age data was included in the project reporting (interim and final reports) of 8 out of 39 projects: Niger PBF/IRF-462, Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329, Somalia PBF/IRF-330, El Salvador PBF/IRF-414, Guinea PBF/IRF-264, Colombia PBF/IRF-455, Yemen PBF/IRF-270 and Cameroon-Chad-Gabon PBF/IRF-370, 369, 368. For three projects, data was only partially available: Western Balkans PBF/IRF-250, Chad PBF/IRF-263 and The Gambia PBF/GMB/B-2. Twenty-eight projects lacked any age-related information in their ProDocs.

Age data was found in progress reports and final reports or in evaluations in 8 out of 39 projects: Cameroon-Chad-Gabon PBF/IRF-370, 369, 368, Albania PBF/IRF-250, Colombia PBF/IRF-455, Guinea PBF/IRF-264, El Salvador PBF/IRF-414, Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329, The Gambia PBF/GMB/B-2 and Niger PBF/IRF-462. Six projects included data in their evaluations: Yemen PBF/IRF-270, Chad PBF/IRF-263, El Salvador PBF/IRF-414, Somalia PBF/IRF-330, Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329 and Niger PBF/IRF-462.

Most projects that provided age-related data on beneficiaries appeared to define youth as those aged 18–35 years, though this ranged from projects considering youth to be those as young as 14 (in Colombia PBF/IRF-455) or as old as 45 (in Yemen PBF/IRF-270, which defined youth broadly as ages 15–45). None used the age range that appears most commonly in UN official documents, which is 18–24.

Analysis of subgrantee funding data: Since 2022, PBSO has requested implementing partners to provide data on sub-implementing partners, including the type of organization involved, the amounts subcontracted and how they were involved in implementation. The categories include whether the organization was a national or subnational youth CSO. UNU-CPR was provided with this data to contribute to analysis of the participation pillar, and the research questions related to funding for youth organizations. In addition to this large data set (which extended well beyond the 41 projects examined), the research team asked implementing partners interviewed to provide information on their subgrantees or implementing partners, whether any were youth-led or youth-focused organizations, and how they were involved. Both of these data collection exercises offered some useful information, which has contributed inferences to the overall findings. However, neither were sufficient to respond meaningfully to the research questions about how much PBF funding goes to youth organizations.

Of the data collected by UNU-CPR from implementing partners for projects in this sample, partners from only 19 of the 41 projects provided data. Of those 19, many provided only partial data. This makes it difficult to develop holistic statistics about the amount of youth funding and participation even within this sample. However, the data that was provided was useful in providing more concrete examples of the role of youth-led organizations, including important inferences on how different funding models and approaches contributed to greater engagement of youth organizations as subgrantees.

The PBSO data sets were much broader, encompassing all PBF-supported projects that provided such reporting in 2022 and 2023 (not limited to those focused on youth). However, it was equally challenging to use this data to obtain an accurate sense of how many youth-led or youth-focused CSOs had received PBF funding as subgrantees, and from that, what percentage of PBF funds trickle down to youth-led organizations. First, the data set is still new, and collects interim or iterative reporting, collected during each reporting cycle, rather than cumulative data for each project. Moreover, the categorization of organizations creates a number of challenges. Although the categories include national and subnational youth CSOs, closer examination of this PBSO data for the 39 projects in the Review sample suggested a relatively high rate of miscoding or inaccuracy in coding. Additionally, the coding tends to be more generic – for example, national CSOs – and in many situations would not capture the degree of youth involvement or youth focus of that organization. Only one category is assigned per organization such that a local NGO that worked on women and youth would only be categorized as one or the other.

Endnotes

1 Additional supporting Security Council resolutions for the YPS agenda include: S/RES/2419 (2018); the Presidential Statement on YPS (S/PRST/2019/15) adopted in December 2019; and S/RES/2535 (2020). There were also references to the importance of youth in conflict prevention, and of youth inclusion in peacebuilding in the 2016 twin "sustaining peace" resolutions, S/RES/2282 (2016) and A/RES/70/262 (2016). Also relevant is a 2021 resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly, based on the report of the Third Committee, A/RES/76/137 (2021).

2 United Nations Peacebuilding, *Security-General's Peacebuilding Fund: 2020–2024 Strategy* (2020).

3 Information provided by PBSO, based on calculating the amounts allocated to all projects approved from 2018 to 2023 that were either funded through the YPI or had a primary focus on youth, as identified in PBSO internal tracking.

4 Previous PBF Thematic Reviews have also recommended to PBSO that it should consider iterative or serial projects, "particularly in situations where more adaptive and sequential programming strategies would be likely to advance strategic priorities and leverage particular moments or opportunities for peacebuilding advancement". Erica Gaston and others, *2024 PBF Thematic Review: Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding in PBF-supported Programming* (New York, United Nations University, 2024), p. 7.

5 Additional supporting Security Council resolutions for the YPS agenda include: S/RES/2419 (2018); the Presidential Statement on YPS (S/PRST/2019/15) adopted in December 2019; and S/RES/2535 (2020). There were also references to the importance of youth in conflict prevention, and of youth inclusion in peacebuilding in the 2016 twin "sustaining peace" resolutions, S/RES/2282 (2016) and A/RES/70/262 (2016). Also relevant is a 2021 resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly, based on the report of the Third Committee, A/RES/76/137 (2021).

6 Graeme Simpson and others, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security* (New York, UNFPA/PBSO, 2018).

7 Ibid., p. 120.

8 PBC, "Strategic Action Plan on youth and peacebuilding", 23 February 2021; AU, "10-Year Implementation Plan for the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) 2020–2029", 21 August 2020; UNOY Peacebuilders, *Mapping the Progress of Youth, Peace and Security in the EU* (The Hague, United Network of Young Peacebuilders, 2019); Sunyoung Hwang and Jiwon Kim, *UN and SDGs: A Handbook for Youth* (Bangkok, UNESCAP, 2017).

9 S/2020/167 (2020), paras. 58–62. It noted that these YPS National Action Plans were somewhat modelled on women, peace and security (WPS) National Action Plans.

10 S/2020/167 (2020).

11 In 2006, the AU adopted the African Youth Charter, outlining young peoples' rights, duties and engagement in decision-making, peacebuilding and conflict prevention. This was then operationalized with the Youth for Peace (Y4P) Africa Programme in 2018. At the subregional level, the Economic Community of West African States emphasizes youth empowerment in its Conflict Prevention Framework; the Intergovernmental Authority on Development integrates youth into its Regional Strategy; the East African Community has launched a Youth Policy and Ambassadors Program; the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa promotes youth participation in governance and development; the Economic Community of Central African States strengthens youth capacities in crisis management and peacebuilding; the General Secretariat of the Arab Maghreb Union amplifies youth voices for peace and development through its regional strategy and African Peace and Security Architecture-aligned action plans; and the Southern African Development Community addresses youth empowerment and employment via its Youth Employment Promotion Policy.

12 A/RES/79/1 (2024), paras. 58–63.

13 See UN and Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), *Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook* (New York, 2021); Graeme Simpson and others, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, paras. 9–16; S/2022/220 (2020), para. 32. See also S/2024/207 (2024), paras. 73–75.

14 S/2022/220 (2020); UN, *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3: Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes* (United Nations publication, 2023); UN, *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace* (United Nations publication, 2023).

15 African Union, "10-Year Implementation Plan for the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security 2020–2029", 21 August 2020; Mridul Upadhyay, *Assessing Youth Participation in Implementation of the YPS Agenda* (Geneva, Interpeace, 2022).

16 Information provided by PBSO, based on calculating the amounts allocated to all projects approved during 2018–2023 that were either funded through the YPI or had a primary focus on youth, as identified in PBSO internal tracking.

17 The YPI calls for project proposals in the last several years have given particular attention to youth participation in peace processes, and in promoting the political participation of diverse young people. In 2022 and 2023, for example, the YPI call focused on projects that would increase youth participation and inclusion in national institutions, national political dialogues, electoral processes, political parties, local governance, peace architecture and security sector reform. The Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative call for proposals did not take place in 2024, due in part to funding limitations but also because there were other available avenues for encouraging CSO engagement and also evidence of greater mainstreaming of youth (and women's) inclusion in other PBF-supported projects. As of the time of writing, there were no immediate plans to reinstate it. Interview with PBSO officer, Microsoft Teams, 6 December 2024 (Interview #180). Further discussion of this is in section 4.G.

18 Information provided by PBSO.

19 PBF, *Security-General's Peacebuilding Fund: 2020–2024 Strategy* (New York, 2020).

20 For more see: United Nations Interagency Network on Youth Development, "Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding", 21 November 2016; Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security, "Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security", 22 August 2015; Graeme Simpson and others, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*.

21 UN, *Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General* (United Nations publication, 2021), p. 39.

22 Interview with civil society expert on youth, Microsoft Teams, 16 April 2024 (Interview #15).

23 The Peer Reference Group was comprised of Andrea Torrens, Partnership Coordinator, United Network of Young Peacebuilders; Katrina Leclerc, Program Director, Global Network of Women Peacebuilders; Emilia Hannuksela, Team Lead – Youth, Peace and Security, UN Youth Office; Saji Prelis, Director – Children and Youth Programs, Search for Common Ground; Marie-Rose Tshite, National Coordinator, YPS Secretariat of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Gabriela Rentería Flores, Chair, EvalYouth.

24 As per the PBF Evaluation Policy 2022–2024, projects with budgets under or equal to $1.5 million are exempt from conducting individual project evaluations, and are instead included in PBF-commissioned

annual cohort evaluations. Peacebuilding Fund, "Peacebuilding Fund Evaluation Policy (2022–2024)", 2022.

25 Some UN entities and partner organizations prefer to use the term "participants" to describe those taking part in programming as opposed to "beneficiaries". However, the latter is still currently used by other organizations whose programming is examined so both will be used as relevant in this Review.

26 To facilitate project selection, there was an initial review of 153 youth-related projects supported by the PBF. In that sample of 153 projects, 73 per cent of the projects reviewed were implemented in Africa, particularly West Africa (42 per cent).

27 The need to ensure diverse participation, and inclusion of youth from different backgrounds, was emphasized in the initial *Missing Peace* study, as well as in subsequent Secretary-General reports and YPS studies. Graeme Simpson and others, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, pp. 63–100, 117–128; S/2022/220 (2020), paras. 6, 44, 70–71.

28 The amounts for cross-border or regional projects tended to be higher, ranging from $2.5 million to $4 million (including funding across all countries and territories involved).

29 The official project code for this regional project is Albania PBF/IRF-250 as this is the UN Country Office where the project originated and was coordinated from, as well as where the secretariat of the RYCO, the project's main partner, is based. However, the countries and territories involved spanned the Western Balkans region: Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo. All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). Hereinafter the project will simply be referred to as Western Balkans PBF/IRF-250.

30 In El Salvador (PBF/IRF-414), youth were integrated into existing Municipal Committees for the Prevention of Violence, which were engaged in regular consultations with local governance actors on ways to prevent or mitigate sources of violence.

31 This analysis was based on earlier analysis by the UN Country Team and a follow-on study by UNFPA. The latter also found that youth were almost completely excluded from political engagement at all levels – in part because of fear and suspicion on the part of many government officials given past altercations involving youth. Interview with implementing partner, Coyah (Guinea), 12 June 2024 (Interview #61).

32 Two of the 20 targeted communities were deemed "impenetrable" due to extreme tensions, with resistance from both youth factions and local authorities escalating into violence, ultimately preventing the implementation of project activities. Interview with implementing partner, Coyah (Guinea), 12 June 2024 (Interview #61).

33 Interview with implementing partner, Coyah, Guinea, 12 June 2024 (Interview #61).

34 Interview with the Mayor of Kolaboui, Kolaboui, Guinea, 13 June 2024 (Interview #62).

35 Interview with former members of the local youth council of Kolaboui, Kolaboui, Guinea, 13 June 2024 (Interview #62).

36 Interview with former members of the local youth council of Kamsar, Kamsar, Guinea, 13 June 2024 (Interview #63).

37 Interview with implementing partner, Coyah, Guinea, 12 June 2024 (Interview #61). Former members of the Kamsar local youth council recalled that the former Mayor, although initially reluctant to engage with youth within his council, was moved to tears during the handover ceremony at the end of their mandate, acknowledging the significant impact they had made. Interview with former members of the local youth council of Kamsar, Kamsar, Guinea, 13 June 2024 (Interview #63).

38 Interview with PBF Colombia, Microsoft Teams, 16 April 2024 (Interview #45).

39 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 12 June 2024 (Interview #47).

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 In DRC (PBF/IRF-262), the focus was to involve youth in mediating and peacebuilding efforts surrounding local intercommunal conflicts. In the project PBF/TCD/A-1 in the Lake Chad basin, youth took part in dispute resolution related to land and natural resources issues in a community with rising tensions between host and migrant communities.

43 The UNDP Guidance Note on insider mediators defines them as "individual or group of individuals who derive their legitimacy, credibility and influence from a sociocultural and/or religious – and, indeed, personal – 'closeness' to the parties of the conflict, endowing them with strong bonds of trust that help foster the necessary attitudinal changes amongst key protagonists which, over time, prevent conflict and contribute to sustaining peace". UNDP, *Engaging with Insider Mediators. Sustaining Peace in an Age of Turbulence* (New York, 2018), p. 5.

44 Joint interview with implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 2 July 2024 (Interview #33).

45 Evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-414 in El Salvador, pp. 35, 38.

46 Interview with the former coordinator of the National Action Plan on YPS in DRC, Microsoft Teams, 15 April 2024 (Interview #13).

47 Graeme Simpson and others, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, pp. 32, 63, 67.

48 One UN official involved in the project's implementation explained: "The involvement of local authorities was a strong indicator of success for this project. It took a lot of time and effort in persuasion to get them engaged, but in the end, it paid off." Interview with UNDP Tunisia, Microsoft Teams, 16 May 2024 (Interview #41).

49 Interview with civil society implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 20 June 2024 (Interview #128).

50 They noted a particular example of a Catholic clergy member "chasing out" a religiously diverse group of young women that had come to talk to him, and other opposition from religious representatives. Interview with civil society implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 7 June 2024 (Interview #127).

51 Ibid.

52 ProDoc for project PBF/GMB/D-1 in The Gambia, p. 11.

53 Interview with sub-implementing partner, Banjul, The Gambia, 20 May 2024 (Interview #110).

54 Interview with PBF Tunisia, Microsoft Teams, 12 April 2024 (Interview #40).

55 Interview with UNDP Tunisia, Microsoft Teams, 16 May 2024 (Interview #41).

56 Interview with implementing partner, Banjul, The Gambia, 18 June 2024 (Interview #152).

57 The idea that youth were better positioned to act as "change agents" or intermediaries between competing clans because their youth made them more neutral was prominent in both projects in Somalia (PBF/IRF-433, PBF/IRF-330).

58 Interview with implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 21 June 2024 (Interview #150).

59 These "youth coordination" ("*coordination des jeunes*") organizations managed multifunctional centres equipped with computers and sewing materials provided by the project. They also appointed "peace ambassadors" to act as sentinels who could help identify and prevent conflicts early. Interview with two implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 3 April 2024 (Interview #31).

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Sporting matches or events featured as activities in the Western Balkans PBF/IRF-250, Sierra Leone PBF/SLE/D-3, Uganda PBF/IRF-303, Tunisia PBF/IRF-288, The Gambia PBF/IRF-342, Liberia PBF/LBR/D-15, Niger PBF/IRF-462, Somalia PBF/IRF-433 and DRC PBF/IRF-262. The importance of sport as a peacebuilding tool was

stressed by several practitioners and implementing partners. Interview with UN officials, Microsoft Teams, 2 July 2024 (Interview #33); Interview with civil society representative, Microsoft Teams, 11 July 2024 (Interview #23); Interview with UN officials, Banjul, The Gambia, 18 June 2024 (Interview #151). The UN Inter-Agency Group on Sport for Development and Peace published a thematic paper highlighting how sport can foster intergenerational dialogue and social cohesion by encouraging collaboration between young people, elders, authorities and other community members, raise awareness of youth rights, and create an environment for youth to participate in conflict prevention, as well as a sense of belonging that aids in the reintegration of young people affected by armed conflict. See UN Inter-Agency Group on Sport for Development and Peace, *The contribution of sport to the youth, peace and security agenda* (United Nations publication, 2022), p. 2.

63 Interview with UN officials, Microsoft Teams, 15 May 2024 (Interview #156).

64 Interview with UN officials, Microsoft Teams, 16 April 2024 (Interview #45). The evaluation of the Uganda project highlighted peacebuilding through sport and music as a best practice to reach young people, with peace messaging shared around a football tournament and through the popularity of music. Evaluation for the project in Uganda (PBF/IRF-303), p. 54.

65 In the project PBF/IRF-433 in Somalia, sport and community events helped appeal to youth, and also to build community ties. Interview with UN officials, Microsoft Teams, 19 June 2024 (Interview #149). A recommendation of the evaluation of the project in Burkina Faso and Mali (PBF/IRF-292, 291) was to rely more on sport and artistic activities to build trust among communities and alleviate intergenerational tension, p. 42.

66 According to those involved in the project in Liberia (PBF/LBR/D-15), these were organized to demonstrate that the project's intent was not to criticize but to collaborate. Interview with UN official, Microsoft Teams, 20 May 2024 (Interview #35); Interview with UN officials, Microsoft Teams, 16 May 2024 (Interview #37).

67 Interview with project participants, Sambang, The Gambia, 22 June 2024 (Interview #154).

68 Ibid.

69 Focus group discussion with youth, Bangui, CAR, 10 February 2024 (Interview #179). The youth whose statements are reported did not participate in a PBF-supported programme at the time of the discussion or beforehand.

70 The training was carried out by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. Local Village Development Committees helped reach out to marginalized youth in the various regions. Interview with sub-implementing partner, Banjul, The Gambia, 20 May 2024 (Interview #110).

71 Human Rights Watch, "Sri Lanka: government backers attack peaceful protesters", 10 May 2022.

72 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 14 June 2024 (Interview #95).

73 In 2021, prior to the project and with seed-funding from the Carter Center, an initial mapping of youth organizations across Sudan took place, including a consultation process involving 1,300 youth-led organizations to nominate leading organizations as regional hubs for YCON. The ProDoc for the project in Sudan (PBF/IRF-471) noted that "this effort, including the electronic database of youth-led partner organizations created through mapping and surveying, is unprecedented in Sudan". p. 3.

74 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 13 May 2024 (Interview #83).

75 For more information see https://unoy.org/member/peace-hub-the-gambia.

76 Interview with founder of Peace Hub and former project beneficiary, Banjul, The Gambia, 19 June 2024 (Interview #109).

77 Ibid.

78 One participant in the project PBF/IRF-264 in Guinea observed, "Youth are not only poor in terms of capital, they are also poor in terms of knowledge and know-how. This is why there is such a high demand to reinforce capacities." Interview with former members of the local youth council, Kamsar, Guinea, 13 June 2024 (Interview #63). This challenge is particularly pronounced in Africa, where 71 per cent of the sample projects were implemented. According to UNESCO, in sub-Saharan Africa, over one fifth of children aged 6 to 11 years are out of school, along with one third of youth aged 12 to 14 years and nearly 60 per cent of youth aged 15 to 17 years. These gaps in foundational education persist into adulthood, depriving young adults of the skills and capacities needed to become credible and effective actors in their societies.

79 The research for this case study was supported by field research in CAR in February 2024. The research and drafting of this case study was led by Imane Karimou.

80 For example, an independent paper commissioned by the UN Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth in 2019 stresses that "[t]he inclusion of young people during all phases of peace processes likely increases the sustainability of the agreements" and that "[y]oung people's proximity to the table matters because young people are distinctively impacted by the results of decisions made at the formal peace negotiation table". Ali Altiok and Irena Grizelj, *We Are Here: An Integrated Approach to Youth Inclusive Peace Processes* (New York, 2019), p. 8. See also, UN, *Guidance for Effective Mediation* (United Nations publication, 2012).

81 The Accord Politique pour la Paix et la Réconciliation en République Centrafricaine (APPR-RCA, 2019) is also known as the "Khartoum agreement" and is importantly, the eighth agreement to have been signed between the Government of CAR and armed groups since the overthrow of President François Bozizé in March 2013, which marked the beginning of the civil war.

82 CAR, APPR-RCA (6 February 2019), sect. II, art. 4, para. (q). [Translation by author in English] "Initiate, through dialogue, local peace committees and transitional justice, a broad campaign on national reconciliation and social cohesion aimed at promoting coexistence and the reinforcement of the social contract."

83 One of the two national consultants involved in the project noted: "Given that the context in 2019 was the signing of the Khartoum Agreement, the project came at just the right time, as there was a clear lack of representation of youth and women despite their involvement in the violence." Interview with two national experts involved in the project's implementation, Bangui, CAR, 8 February 2024 (Interview #119).

84 The National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan was initiated following a government request in April 2016. The 5-year plan (2017–2021) outlined notable reform commitments intended to address the structural causes of the crisis. Under Pillar 1 of the plan, which centred on promoting peace, security and reconciliation, the promotion of youth inclusion had been identified as a cross-cutting objective and was considered "essential to addressing the factors of fragility, conflict, and violence", recognizing that youth marginalization "undermines stability and peace, making them easy targets for militias seeking recruits". CAR, National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan 2017–21 (2016), p. 21.

85 Interview with staff member from implementing agency, WhatsApp, 9 February 2024 (Interview #120).

86 The project's independent evaluation identified illiteracy, at a staggering rate of 13.03 per cent, as a major barrier to youth participation. Evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-334 in CAR, p. 24.

87 Ibid., p. 16.

88 Ibid.

89 Interview with two national experts involved in the project's implementation, Bangui, CAR, 8 February 2024 (Interview #119).

90 The lack of any response to participants' socioeconomic needs was cited as a deficit in the project evaluation of the project PBF/IRF-292 in Burkina Faso and Mali, pp. 6–7, 39, 43; Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 17 April 2024 (Interview #74). This was also cited as a critique in the evaluations of CAR PBF/IRF-334, pp. 10, 24, 45, 47; Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329, p. 19; and Niger PBF/IRF-298, p. 24.

91 In the project PBF/IRF-304 in CAR the rationale for involving youth in the project (both young women and young men) was cited as: "Youth is vulnerable to indoctrination and can therefore be drawn into insecurity." Interview with UN staff member involved in implementation, Bangui, CAR, 7 February 2024 (Interview #135). For the project in Sierra Leone (PBF/SLE/D-3), the project's conflict analysis recognized that at-risk youth and ex-combatants organized into cliques and gangs "are a source of insecurity for communities countrywide" and underscored that "high unemployment and pervasive poverty constitute the dominant motivating factors that draw youth to gangs/cliques", making such initiatives vital to preventing further instability. ProDoc for the project in Sierra Leone (PBF/SLE/D-3), pp. 13–14. The project PBF/LBR/D-15 in Liberia was framed in a way to ensure that youth ex-combatants did not return to participating in violence. One implementing partner observed that ex-child soldiers and young ex-combatants (also referred to as *Zogos/Zogesse*) present a risk of "undermin[ing] the peace of Liberia", and that they need to be "desensitized to the violence" and "reoriented to jobs and livelihood opportunities" to reintegrate into society. Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 20 May 2024 (Interview #35).

92 The skill-building and training in the project in Uganda (PBF/IRF-303) worked to guide youth towards employment opportunities in fields like hairdressing, tailoring and mechanics. In the project in Liberia (PBF/LBR/D-15), the project team partnered with private sector actors to help youth identify viable livelihoods and provided personalized career counselling, which proved to be highly effective. In the project in Sierra Leone (PBF/SLE/D-3), youth were connected with industry leaders through mentorships in fields like poultry farming, enabling participants to secure jobs or apprenticeships.

93 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 8 April 2024 (Interview #73).

94 Interview with PBF Liberia, Microsoft Teams, 20 May 2024 (Interview #34).

95 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 20 May 2024 (Interview #35).

96 In one of the villages in Sierra Leone's Kinema district, there was a notable example of youth raising questions about the intentions of an outside investor with regard to a local land allocation. When it was revealed that the land was intended for illicit drug cultivation, the community acted promptly, and the youth were commended for their proactive stance. Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 14 June 2024 (Interview #34). In Solomon Islands, youth were also brought into discussions about community resource management issues, which in the communities in question were heavily affected by the presence and activities of a number of extractive companies. Youth were directly involved in lobbying private sector members to raise issues of tangible benefits for the community, which according to those consulted, has led to improved relations with members of the extractive industry. Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 11 June 2024 (Interview #39).

97 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 21 May 2024 (Interview #141).

98 Interview with former members of the local youth council of Kamsar, Guinea, 13 June 2024 (Interview #63).

99 Ibid.

100 Interview with project participant, Bangui, CAR, 12 February 2024 (Interview #121).

101 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 8 April 2024 (Interview #73).

102 Ibid.

103 Over 3,690 young people, including 1,107 young women, came together to form the country's first-ever National Youth Council on 25 September 2023, representing both formal and informal youth organizations across 8 regional offices, 362 prefectural and communal offices, and 410 sub-prefectural offices.

104 Security Council resolution 2250 (2015) on YPS calls for "inclusive representation of youth in decision-making at all levels in local, national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict". The issue of young people's participation in national representative bodies has been highlighted in each subsequent Secretary-General report on YPS. The Secretary-General's 2023 agenda-setting policy brief *New Agenda for Peace* also called for governments to "encourage greater youth representations in decision-making and elected positions". See *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace*; Graeme Simpson and others, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, p. 120; UNDP, *Youth, Peace and Security: Fostering Youth-Inclusive Political Processes*, pp. 43–45, 61–63. In terms of participation in global forums, the Secretary-General's 2023 policy brief on youth engagement recommended making youth participation mandatory in UN decision-making processes. See *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 3: Meaningful Youth Engagement in Policymaking and Decision-making Processes*. There has also been an increasing focus on youth issues and representation before the PBC. For instance, the PBC convened an Ambassadorial-level meeting on YPS in June 2023 to focus on regional efforts in advancing the YPS agenda and to highlight connections between regional, national and local efforts. Peacebuilding Commission, "Ambassadorial-level meeting on youth, peace and security. Chair's Summary", 7 June 2023. See also Peacebuilding Commission, "Strategic Action Plan on youth and peacebuilding", 23 February 2021.

105 Some of the earliest recommendations for advancing the YPS agenda included support for youth-focused mechanisms and representative bodies, such as youth advisory boards, youth councils or other representative bodies. Graeme Simpson and others, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, pp. 65–66; Erike Tanghøj and others, *Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at Country-level. A Guide for Public Officials* (New York, Global Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security, 2022), p. 43.

106 The 2018 UN World Youth Report underscored the need that "young people be involved in all aspects of policymaking and decision-making through mechanisms such as youth advisory boards for government entities, youth parliaments, and regular meetings and dialogue with members of Parliament and local councils". *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations publication, 2018), p. 102.

107 Interview with representative of the National Youth Parliament, Banjul, The Gambia, 19 June 2024 (Interview #108).

108 Ibid. The sentiment that "younger youth" merit dedicated attention in the broader YPS agenda has been echoed by consulted youth in previous studies. For example, in a 2022 study assessing the implementation of National Action Plans on YPS, a Finnish youth observed that "young people already at the deep end of the YPS agenda implementation are already close to completing 30 years. So, we need to train others and let very young youth represent youth voices and take leaderships." Mridul Upadhyay, *Assessing Youth Participation in Implementation of the YPS Agenda*, p. 21.

109 See, generally, Karabo Mokgonyana and Emma Ng'ang'a, "The importance of National Action Plans in advancing Africa's youth, peace and security agenda", ACCOR, 29 June 2023; Marissa Fortune,

"To NAP or not to NAP: applying the model of National Action Plans to youth, peace and security", Canadian Coalition for Youth, Peace and Security, 15 July 2021; Helen Berents and Caitlin Mollica, "Reciprocal institutional visibility: youth, peace and security and 'inclusive' agendas at the United Nations", *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 57, No. 1 (2022); Mridul Upadhyay, *Assessing Youth Participation in Implementation of the YPS Agenda*; Luisa Kern, "Do National Action Plans actually lead to action on the youth, peace and security agenda", UNU-CPR, 28 January 2025.

110 The 12 countries with national youth policies and/or national youth strategies: Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, CAR, Guinea, The Gambia, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, DRC (as well as a National Action Plan). The nine countries and territories currently discussing or taking first steps towards the development of a National Action Plan are: The Gambia, Burundi, Somalia, Guinea, Chad, Liberia, Kosovo and North Macedonia, the latter two as part of a follow-on and ongoing PBF-supported project (PBF/IRF-479) to a previous project in the Western Balkans (PBF/IRF-250). A wave of countries within West Africa have recently been pursuing National Action Plans or national YPS strategies. See Luisa Kern, "Do National Action Plans actually lead to action on the youth, peace and security agenda?"

111 An expert also observed that some governments are reluctant to develop a National Action Plan or a specific policy or strategy on YPS, if they already have a youth policy or strategy in place. Interview with civil society expert on youth, Microsoft Teams, 16 April 2024 (Interview #15).

112 The Western Balkans projects in this sample did not work on the establishment of National Youth Councils but a follow-on and ongoing PBF-supported project (PBF/IRF-479) does. This was a direct follow-on to a perceived gap in the first project, so the first project, within this sample, could be said to lend support to this effort. The ongoing project is also supporting national youth action strategies in Kosovo and North Macedonia.

113 See also European Commission, "Participation: National youth councils", Youth Wiki, September 2019. Available at: https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/comparative-overviews/participation/national-youth-councils/2019 (accessed on 10 March 2025); Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security, *Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at Country-level: A Guide for Public Officials* (New York, Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, 2022).

114 Those countries and territories are: North Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, Cameroon, Gabon, The Gambia, Guinea, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Yemen, Chad, Colombia, DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, Uganda, Niger, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Honduras, Mauritania and Mali. National Youth Councils in El Salvador, Somalia and CAR have been disbanded.

115 The contrast with YPS coalitions is that National Youth Councils tend to be more structured and often formalized bodies that serve as an interlocutor for national stakeholders (often formal political stakeholders). For further discussion of these, see Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security, *Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at Country-level*, p. 43; UNOY and Search for Common Ground, "Translating youth, peace and security policy into practice: A guide to building coalitions", 2021; Katrina Leclerc, "Instrumentalizing the youth, peace and security agenda for meaningful impact and growth", in *Youth, Peacebuilding, and Sustainability: Connecting Theory to Practice*, Mary K. Witting-Acuesa and Primitivo III Cabanes Ragandang, eds. (Manila, Seeds for Mindanao's Advocacy and Youth Leadership, 2021), pp. 22–23.

116 These are the Cameroon National Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security, El Salvador's National 2250 network, the Sri Lankan Youth, Peace and Security Coalition, the Liberian National Youth, Peace and Security Coalition as well as the Gambian Coalition on YPS at the national level, and the Youths for Peace online community (Juventudes por la Paz) in Latin America and the MENA Coalition on YPS in the Middle East and North Africa at the regional level. See Global Coalition on Youth, Peace, and Security, *Implementing the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at Country-level*, p. 43–45. Abdullah O. Bility, "The Launch of Liberian Coalition on YPS", UNOY, 26 June 2024. Available at: https://unoy.org/a-yat-blog-series-the-liberian-coalition-on-yps (accessed on 10 March 2025); Interview with founder of Peace Hub and former project beneficiary, Banjul, The Gambia, 19 June 2024 (Interview #109).

117 In Guinea, the project PBF/GIN/B-12 launched a YPS coalition. The project in The Gambia was not focused on supporting the YPS coalition, but one of the key local youth organizations involved, the Peace Hub, was actively involved in this coalition and its efforts in The Gambia. As such, there was a linkage with the project activities. In the project in Yemen, the intent was to help facilitate a national YPS alliance through facilitating dialogues, although this did not fully come to pass.

118 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 1 March 2024 (Interview #71); Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 14 June 2024 (Interview #117); Interview with youth activist, Coyah, Guinea, 11 June 2024 (Interview #65). Emma Bapt, "Increasing youth participation and engagement at a national and regional level", UNU-CPR Policy Brief (New York, United Nations University, forthcoming).

119 Interview with member of the National Youth Council, Banjul, The Gambia, 21 June 2024 (Interview #113).

120 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 13 May 2024 (Interview #83).

121 Ibid.

122 Meeting featuring representative of YCON, New York, 29 October 2024.

123 See for example YCON's intervention at the UN Security Council 9761st meeting. Available at: https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1d/k1d2mxxn4n?_gl=1*12cmufi*_ga*MTk3_MDA5NjA0NC4_xNzI4_MjQ0NjgzMg..*_ga_TK9BQL5X7Z*MTczMDIxNzA0NS4xMC4xLjE3MzAyMTcxNzAuMC4wLjA (accessed on 10 March 2025).

124 For further discussion, see UNDP, *Youth, Peace and Security: Fostering Youth-Inclusive Political Processes*; Graeme Simpson and others, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, p. 65; Katrina Leclerc and Shayne Wong, *Beyond Tokenism: A Toolkit for Genuine Youth Participation in Civic Spaces* (Canadian Coalition for Youth, Peace and Security, 2024).

125 Interview with civil society expert on youth, Microsoft Teams, 16 April 2024 (Interview #15).

126 UNDP, *Youth, Peace And Security: Fostering Youth-Inclusive Political Processes*, p. 45; Graeme Simpson and others, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, p. 65.

127 The project expanded the election model to all 33 prefectures and 6 other regions of Guinea. It was designed to encourage interconnectivity between the different levels. To progress to higher levels of representation, such as subregional, regional, departmental and eventually national levels, candidates needed to demonstrate prior active participation at the preceding level. This ensured that those elected to the National Youth Council had already gained legitimacy, experience and recognition among their peers. Interview with implementing partner, Coyah, Guinea, 12 June 2024 (Interview #61).

128 As one implementing partner described it, it was important that "the first youth structures in Guinea would be young people not chosen at random but truly chosen by their peers… who therefore enjoy total legitimacy". Interview with implementing partner, Coyah, Guinea, 12 June 2024 (Interview #61).

129 The initial project was designed to organize a broad-based national consultation process that could help cohere a national YPS alliance, and enable the development of a Youth, Peace and Security Pact (which could in the long-term contribute to a YPS action plan or strategic framework). There also appeared to be a rationale that these processes could help give youth more of a platform, enabling them to take part in other peace and security processes (such as track II dialogues). Final Annual Report 2020 for the project in Yemen (PBF/IRF-270), p. 4; ProDoc for the project in Yemen (PBF/IRF-270), pp. 10–12; Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 6 May 2024 (Interview #78); Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 20 May 2024 (Interview #90).

130 Interview with implementing partner staff members, Microsoft Teams, 26 June 2024 (Interview #98). As of the time of research, the National Action Plan in South Sudan was still being validated, and would have to be approved by the Parliament in order to be endorsed as a national document.

131 Mridul Upadhyay, *Assessing Youth Participation in Implementation of the YPS Agenda*.

132 In total, 562 young people were selected for this project, including 65–75 per cent youth parliamentarians from the National Youth Services Council, and the remaining aspiring young leaders from beyond the council, although with low participation from female youth. Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 3 June 2024 (Interview #94).

133 As one implementing partner argued, health acted as "a converging point for youth, [was] neutral enough, not stigmatized, where youth could come together". Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 24 June 2024 (Interview #96).

134 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 3 June 2024 (Interview #94).

135 Interview with former coordinator of the National Action Plan on youth, peace and security in DRC, Microsoft Teams, 15 April 2024 (Interview #13). A 2023 impact report on the implementation of the YPS National Action Plan in Nigeria had also pointed to significant funding gaps encountered in the process and underscored the challenges of maintaining a locally led process without becoming overly dependent on external actors for funding. Nigeria Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security and Nigerian Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, *Impact report: one year into the implementation of the Nigeria National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security* (June 2023), pp. 16–17. For further discussion on funding and other challenges in implementation of YPS National Action Plans, see Marissa Fortune, "To NAP or not to NAP: applying the model of National Action Plans to youth, peace & security"; Mridul Upadhyay, *Assessing Youth Participation in Implementation of the YPS Agenda*; UNDP, *Youth, Peace and Security: Fostering Youth-Inclusive Political Processes,* p. 94.

136 Those countries and territories are: North Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, Cameroon, Gabon, The Gambia, Guinea, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Yemen, Chad, Colombia, DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, Uganda, Niger, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Honduras, Mauritania and Mali. National Youth Councils in El Salvador, Somalia and CAR have been disbanded or become mostly inactive.

137 Interview with the Executive Office of the National Youth Council, Coyah, Guinea, 11 June 2024 (Interview #65).

138 Ibid.

139 The move to repeal these protections did not pass a parliamentary vote in July 2024. This was not solely due to the work of the youth involved, but some observed that their voice on this was nonetheless important.

140 Interview with members of the National Youth Parliament, 19 June 2024, Banjul, The Gambia (Interview # 108).

141 Ibid. The evaluation for the project in The Gambia emphasized the need for subsequent financing strategies and recommended to "consolidate institutional capacities and to mobilize the financial resources necessary for sustaining activities post implementation". See evaluation for project PBF/GMB/D-1 in The Gambia, p. 8.

142 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 14 June 2024 (Interview #117).

143 Cross-border projects usually have a distinct project code for each country in which part of the project is implemented. These have been compressed in parentheticals throughout this Review as indicated, but the full project codes are: Burkina Faso-Mali (PBF/IRF-292, PBF/IRF-291); Cameroon-Chad-Gabon (PBF/IRF-370, PBF/IRF-369, PBF/IRF-368); and Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger (PBF/BFA/B-6, PBF/MLI/B-1, PBF/NER/B-6).

144 Many of the lessons and challenges of 14 cross-border projects in the 2023 *Climate-Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review* also appeared to be relevant to these projects, and so are also considered.

145 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 17 April 2024 (Interview #74).

146 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 25 September 2024 (Interview #163).

147 An additional, very specific implementation issue raised was that the common coordinating office for the project was set up in a border area of Gabon that was difficult to reach even from within Gabon.

148 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 8 April 2024 (Interview #73).

149 Ibid.

150 Interview with UN staff members, Microsoft Teams, 17 April 2024 (Interview #74).

151 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 8 April 2024 (Interview #73).

152 This was also observed to be a common issue within the cross-border projects examined in Erica Gaston and others, *Climate-Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review* (New York, United Nations University, 2023), pp. 21, 45–46. One UN Peace and Development Advisor familiar with PBF cross-border projects observed that another possible issue was that the agencies that tend to take these forward as implementing partners are not always the ones behind their conception, and are often more operational entities. Whereas a UN Peace and Development Advisor may have conceived of intergovernmental exchange and engagement as a critical element of the project, more operationally attuned entities that take the project forward might not have the necessary relationship or the same focus and mandate as a UN political officer, and might focus more on the other more projectized elements. This may be another factor for why this element tends to drop out of cross-border programming in implementation. Interview with UN Peace and Development Advisor, New York, 1 October 2024 (Interview #169).

153 Interview with three implementing partner staff members, Microsoft Teams, 25 September 2024 (Interview #161).

154 Mitigation measures in place were activities carried out through national NGOs and local associations, and relocation of certain activities to more accessible sites. The project evaluation argued that "the political and security situation remained a challenge beyond the control of the project". Evaluation for the project in Burkina Faso and Mali (PBF/IRF-292, 291), p. 38.

155 Ibid.

156 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 7 May 2024 (Interview #86).

157 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 8 April 2024 (Interview #73).

158 Interview with UN staff members, Microsoft Teams, 17 April 2024 (Interview #74).

159 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 9 January 2024 (Interview #1). In addition to these challenges in political will and alignment, there were also security issues in the border areas at this

time, as well as other implementation challenges and a lack of ability to engage in these areas on the part of implementing partners (who did not all enjoy a strong presence in-country).

160 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 16 May 2024 (Interview #87).

161 Erica Gaston and others, *Climate-Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review*, p. 45.

162 Ibid.

163 Interview with UN staff, Microsoft Teams, 25 September 2024 (Interview #163). See also Erica Gaston and others, *Climate-Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review*, pp. 21, 45–46.

164 These are: Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo. The project was implemented by UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF.

165 Interview with UN staff member, New York, 17 January 2023 (Interview #69).

166 The follow-on and ongoing PBF-supported project (PBF/IRF-479) that includes the same countries and territories (except Montenegro) has involved a combination of regional and in-country youth and community exchanges. Regional exchanges in PBF/IRF-250 only took place online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while in-country exchanges only materialized in the second project. The project is also supporting national youth action strategies in Kosovo and North Macedonia.

167 As one implementing partner noted, ongoing political tensions, particularly between Kosovo and Serbia, translated into a "fear of talking" among some youth involved in project activities. However, overall, the majority of young people said these were small successful steps in bringing youth from the region together. Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 26 April 2024 (Interview #76).

168 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 3 June 2024 (Interview #84).

169 Ibid.

170 FBA, UNDP and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Beyond Vulnerability: A Guidance Note on Youth, Climate, Peace and Security* (New York, 2024); UNDP, *Bridging Generations: Pathways to a Youth-Inclusive Climate, Peace and Security Agenda* (New York, 2024); Seydou Lakoande and others, *Resilience Rising: Youth Research Informing Global Climate and Conflict Responses* (Geneva, Kofi Annan Foundation, 2024).

171 Interview with expert in CPS programming, Geneva, Switzerland, 27 June 2024 (Interview #159).

172 This observation was true both in the sample examined and more broadly. PBF staff that monitor climate-related projects observed that most of these projects end up involving youth substantially as beneficiaries, even where they are not designed as a "youth-focused" project. Interview with PBSO staff members, Microsoft Teams, 9 January 2024 (Interview #1).

173 For example, although the project PBF/TCD/A-1 in Chad was not explicitly a youth-focused project, the final evaluation found that 60 per cent of the beneficiaries were young people. Evaluation for the project PBF/TCD/A-1 in Chad, p. 30.

174 Ibid., p. 6.

175 Interview with climate-security advisor, Microsoft Teams, 26 September 2024 (Interview #166).

176 No significant examples of youth engagement and involvement at the project design and inception stage arose in any of the interviews for projects in cohort 4, although this may have occurred, and simply not been documented or raised.

177 Interview with implementing partner, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 23 August 2024 (Interview #158); Interview with implementing partner, Geneva, Switzerland, 27 June 2024 (Interview #159). This project was not part of the original sample of projects for this Review because in its ProDocs it was not clearly focused on youth. It came to the attention of the research team later in interviews, and was included to provide an example of how these issues emerge organically in many settings.

178 Interview with implementing partner, Geneva, Switzerland, 27 June 2024 (Interview #159).

179 Ibid.

180 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 10 September 2024 (Interview #160).

181 Interview with AU representative, WhatsApp, 13 August 2024 (Interview #167); Interview with United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel representative, Microsoft Teams, 1 August 2024 (Interview #165).

182 Interview with AU representative, WhatsApp, 13 August 2024 (Interview #167).

183 Some of the community trust-building activities related to environmental clean-up and preservation, such as joint community clean-up activities, reforestation and tree-planting, while others focused on more traditional social cohesion-building activities, such as sporting events and film screenings, as described in box 1. Even the trainings (on alternative livelihoods and sustainable agriculture methodologies) were designed in a way to foster trust-building and community dialogue, by virtue of being hosted by alternating (competing) communities so that they became a forum for exchange. Through these overall trust-building exercises, there was greater space to make breakthroughs on community conflicts, for example, related to one long-standing dispute between two communities over a tract of land, and one related to shared forest use. Interview with implementing partner, Banjul, The Gambia, 20 June 2024 (Interview #153).

184 Interview with implementing partner, Banjul, The Gambia, 18 June 2024 (Interview #152).

185 Examples of some of these results are laid out in the evaluation for the project PBF/GMB/B-2 in The Gambia, pp. 36–39.

186 Ibid., pp. 31–32.

187 Interview with implementing partner, Banjul, The Gambia, 18 June 2024 (Interview #152).

188 Ibid.

189 Focus group discussion with community members, Sambang, The Gambia, 22 June 2024 (Interview #154).

190 One implementing partner described two types of tensions: a lack of livelihoods and food sources among the displaced populations, as they no longer had land to grow cocoa for export or their own food products; and for the host populations, increased strain on water resources and public services, because of the influx of people: "If before we had a water pump or 1,000 inhabitants with the number, this same pump must be used by more than 5,000 inhabitants." Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 13 May 2024 (Interview #137).

191 Evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-259 in Côte d'Ivoire, pp. 19, 27.

192 These themes of countering or preventing engagement in violent extremism or other forms of criminality came out in many of the interviews and ProDocs for these projects (CAR PBF/IRF-304, Honduras PBF/IRF-435, Chad PBF/TCD/A-1, Mauritania PBF/IRF-441, Mali PBF/MLI/C-1, Niger PBF/IRF-462). For example, in the project PBF/IRF-304 in CAR the rationale for involving youth in the project (both young women and young men) was that "youth is vulnerable to indoctrination and can therefore be drawn into insecurity". Interview with UN staff member involved in implementation, Bangui, CAR, 7 February 2024 (Interview #135). The context surrounding the project in Honduras (PBF/IRF-435) was that Indigenous youth had long been involved in land conflict and violent protests, and were viewed as more susceptible to being recruited by criminal groups because of their economic disenfranchisement and exclusion. This was also viewed as a key driver of migration.

193 To give one example, the evaluation of the project PBF/TCD/A-1 in Chad (which combined a focus on community dispute resolution and dialogue with "hard" inputs such as replenishing water sources and training to 2,000+ in sustainable agriculture) found that the activities allowed "74.9% of beneficiaries to meet their food requirements, 59% to cover health needs, 43.31% to meet clothing needs, and 39.12% to guarantee educational needs", p. 6.

194 Most, if not all, of the projects examined in cohort 4 had some component related to youth livelihoods, "green jobs", or other consideration for youth socioeconomic needs. In the project PBF/IRF-259 in Côte d'Ivoire there was a dedicated focus on supporting youth livelihoods through agroforestry, and forest preservation and management work; in the project in Mauritania (PBF/IRF-441), it was opportunities in youth "green jobs" through the production and distribution of alternative energy sources (biogas); in the project PBF/IRF-304 in CAR, youth were involved in activities to support more sustainable agricultural practices and fisheries; in the project PBF/MLI/C-1 in Mali, there were efforts to offer youth alternatives to artisanal gold mining, by providing them financial management and literacy training and support for youth entrepreneurship. In the last example, entrepreneurship support included enabling loans through the village loan associations, networking with potential buyers and suppliers for their goods, and mentoring by members of the private sector.

195 This was a particular lesson learned from the case study of Yemen in the *Thematic Review on Climate-Security and Peacebuilding*, with entry points created for greater women's inclusion because of the way that communities welcomed the project. See Erica Gaston and others, *Climate-Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review*, pp. 33–37, 53–55.

196 Evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-304 in CAR, p. 56.

197 Interview with two implementing partners, Banjul, The Gambia, 20 June 2024 (Interview #153).

198 Evaluation for the project PBF/TCD/A-1 in Chad, p. 6.

199 ProDoc for the project PBF/IRF-433 in Somalia, pp. 10–13; Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 3 June 2024 (Interview #48).

200 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 3 June 2024 (Interview #48); Interview with two staff members of implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 21 June 2024 (Interview #50).

201 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 3 June 2024 (Interview #48).

202 Interview with two staff members of implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 21 June 2024 (Interview #50).

203 Interview with implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 21 June 2024 (Interview #150).

204 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 25 September 2024 (Interview #162).

205 Interview with implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 12 February 2024 (Interview #12).

206 Evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka, p. iii. See for example, Graeme Simpson and others, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, p. 12; Erike Tanghøj and João Felipe Scarpelini, *Youth, Peace and Security Adviser's Handbook* (Stockholm, FBA, 2020), p. 29; UN and FBA, *Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook*, pp. 20, 24, 28.

207 UN Women, *Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit* (United Nations publication, 2021), p. 50; Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, No. 1 (1989), p. 139.

208 UN Women, *Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit*, p. 9. The toolkit also outlines eight key intersectionality enablers: Reflexivity; Dignity, choice and autonomy; Accessibility and universal design; Diverse knowledges; Intersecting identities; Relational power; Time and space; Transformative and rights-based.

209 S/RES/2250 (2015), para. 10; S/RES/2535 (2020), para. 5; UN and FBA, *Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook*, p. 15.

210 The previous PBF Thematic Review on local peacebuilding considered the challenge of relying on the "usual suspects" in programming and recommended, among other things, increasing diversity and transparency in partner selection, strengthening country-wide stakeholder mapping, and exploring inception phase support to enable more informed and inclusive project design. Christof Kurz and others, *Thematic Review on Local Peacebuilding* (New York, United Nations Peacebuilding, 2022).

211 This idea of going beyond the "usual suspects" was an issue raised by several experts in youth programming as an outstanding issue in the field. Interview with civil society representative, Microsoft Teams, 22 April 2024 (Interview #16); Interview with UN official, Microsoft Teams, 24 April 2024 (Interview #17); Interview with UN official, Microsoft Teams, 10 July 2024 (Interview #22).

212 Interview with UN Official, Microsoft Teams, 24 June 2024 (Interview #96). This project is part of the second cohort.

213 ProDoc for the project in Guinea-Bissau (PBF/IRF-512), which noted, "Young women with disabilities experience an even more increased discrimination due to the perception of their condition and the limits on omission of their rights as women/girls, thus rendering them invisible and underrepresented in the processes towards strengthened gender equality." p.7.

214 This included capacity-building related to leadership and one that was planned (but had not yet been implemented at the time of the review) on conflict transformation facilitated by an intersectional approach. Interview with civil society representative, Microsoft Teams, 10 May 2024 (Interview #123).

215 Ibid.

216 The independent evaluation observed that the project significantly increased youth civic participation, and that more than half of the respondents considered the attention to diversity a particularly innovative aspect. Evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-414 in El Salvador, p. 4.

217 Evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka, pp. iii.–iv.

218 Both the independent evaluation and other interlocuters interviewed suggested that by bringing in young women from conflict affected areas the project was "breaking new ground". Interview with UN official, Microsoft Teams, 6 May 2024 (Interview #79); evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka, p. 15.

219 Evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka, p. 16.

220 Sophia Close, *Untapped Peacebuilders: Including Persons with Disabilities in Building Peace* (London, Conciliation Resources, 2021), p. 5. The research team also reached out to experts familiar with these issues for broader insights on challenges and best practices in the field, and this was a point raised by several interviewees.

221 The ProDoc for the project in Guinea-Bissau (PBF/IRF-512) noted that "young women with disabilities experience an even more increased discrimination due to the perception of their condition and the limits on omission of their rights as women/girls, thus rendering them invisible and underrepresented in the processes towards strengthened gender equality". p. 7.

222 Interview with PBF staff, Microsoft Teams, 3 June 2024 (Interview #148).

223 Staff in the project PBF/GIN/B-12 in Guinea worked with the Organisation des Jeunes handicappés en Guinée, whose trusted position helped to reach more youth with disabilities. Staff in the project PBF/IRF-414 in El Salvador relied on an organization named Los Angelitos, which had facilitated inclusion, serving as mediators between the project and youth with disabilities and ensuring that content and activities were more accessible and inclusive. Interview with UN implementing partner, Coyah, Guinea, 12 June 2024

(Interview #61); Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 7 June 2024 (Interview #49).

224 Evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka, p. 18.

225 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 16 May 2024 (Interview #87); Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 26 June 2024 (Interview #97).

226 Evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-330 in Somalia, p. 40.

227 Interview with civil society implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 29 May 2024 (Interview #126).

228 The project in Guinea-Bissau (PBF/IRF-512) had tools to work with youth with visual impairments, but lacked the necessary accommodations for youth with hearing impairments or with cognitive disabilities. Interview with civil society implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 10 May 2024 (Interview #123). The project PBF/IRF-414 in El Salvador made significant efforts to include youth with disabilities, with training materials and venues that were accessible to all participants; however, they deemed that the pace and means of instruction of the course were not accessible to some facing cognitive challenges. While they were able to adapt it to some degree, with visual aids, simplifying complex concepts and adding more one-on-one support, implementing partners said they needed more resources and more preparation. Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 9 May 2024 (Interview #48); Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 7 June 2024 (Interview #49); Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 12 June 2024 (Interview #50).

229 In the project PBF/GMB/D-1 in The Gambia, the facilities identified for a project activity were not accessible to some of the identified participants with disabilities; implementing partners described having to move a meeting that was actually on the topic of inclusion due to site access issues. Interview with UN implementing partner, Banjul, The Gambia, 18 June 2024 (Interview #105).

230 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 10 May 2024 (Interview #80); Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 14 May 2024 (Interview #85). Two participants involved in these trainings, mostly online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, also pointed out that these were "largely focused on inter-ethnic issues at the expense of exploring other narratives (gender, LGBTQI+, persons with disabilities)". Evaluation for the project in the Western Balkans (PBF/IRF-250), p. 37.

231 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 14 May 2024 (Interview #85); Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 17 May 2024 (Interview #88).

232 The project PBF/GIN/B-12 in Guinea (in the national cohort) enlisted young women of the "*Club de Jeunes Filles Leaders*" to speak with the parents of potential participants to encourage trust in the project. Interview with UN implementing partner, Coyah, 12 June 2024 (Interview #61). The evaluation of the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka noted that parents should have been targeted more with awareness efforts to ease their concerns about their daughters' participation. p. 41.

233 Evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-298 in Niger, pp. 61, 72.

234 Interview with PBF staff, Microsoft Teams, 9 May 2024 (Interview #48).

235 Ibid.

236 Interview with UN implementing partner, Banjul, The Gambia, 18 June 2024 (Interview #105).

237 ProDoc for the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka, p. 7; Interview with civil society implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 29 May 2024 (Interview #126).

238 It also noted that strengthening existing solidarity mechanisms between young girls could decrease the exclusion of vulnerable community members and thus increase social cohesion. ProDoc for the project PBF/IRF-298 in Niger, p. 6.

239 Some of the project strategies involved engaging with religious leaders or other members of the community to try to shift negative perceptions or stereotypes that had resulted in the exclusion of young women. The project also recruited women mentors to serve as role models of female leadership.

240 ProDoc for the project PBF/IRF-433 in Somalia, p. 11. This assumption was based on evidence from consultations with elders conducted by the IOM.

241 Ibid.

242 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 3 June 2024 (Interview #48).

243 Independent evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-330 in Somalia, p. 5. A caveat to this is that it was difficult to fully judge the results given that on certain key indicators, there was no original baseline, and/or no follow-through in monitoring. For example, there was no baseline data on key indicators, such as how much the youth had engaged in peacebuilding-related issues or organized collaborative peace initiatives, prior to the intervention, and much of the endline data was a summation of the project activity outputs. There was also no baseline data on markers like "verifiable changes in behaviour" or the degree of baseline skill and capacity level across multiple indicators; most of the final indicators on these also shared activity outputs rather than assessing levels of change. Independent evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-330 in Somalia, pp. 47–48, 50–57.

244 Interview with two staff members of implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 21 June 2024 (Interview #50).

245 According to implementers, "Many young participants had experienced significant loss and had a strong desire for revenge." Interview with implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 7 February 2024 (Interview #125). Implementing partners and beneficiaries also noted another potential conflict point: after the departure of some of the members of the community in 2020, their lands had been occupied by others. With their return, this could generate land disputes.

246 The ProDoc explains the dynamics in the following terms: "Tensions between returning Muslim internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Kaga Bandoro and Sibut's predominantly Christian inhabitants have been primarily framed along religious lines … If unaddressed, these tensions bear a serious potential for conflict. However, if managed in a conflict-sensitive way, the initial phase of IDPs return could open the window for peaceful cohabitation and more large-scale returns." ProDoc for the project PBF/IRF-467 in CAR, p. 11.

247 Interview with implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 7 February 2024 (Interview #125).

248 Ibid.

249 Focus group discussion with project beneficiaries, Sibut, CAR, 15 February 2024 (Interview #161).

250 Ibid.

251 The average duration of the projects examined in the cohort on intersectional approaches (cohort 3) was 21.63 months, compared with 24.3 months for the sample as a whole. The average funding amount was $1.36 million for projects in cohort 3, compared with $1.82 million in the sample as a whole. When the Sri Lanka project is removed from both the cohort 3 average and the sample as a whole, the average funding amount for cohort 3 is $1.5 million, compared to $1.86 million for the sample as a whole.

252 Written comments submitted to UNU-CPR, 31 October 2024. This may include personal liability or penalties for the individuals working for these organizations.

253 As one illustration of this, in the initial project selection process, of the 153 PBF-supported projects analysed, very few dealt explicitly with the needs of LGBTQI+ youth, or efforts to encourage their participation and inclusion. The strongest of these (El Salvador PBF/IRF-381, El Salvador PBF/IRF-414) have been included in this sample. See also further discussion of the "do no harm" implications and

trade-offs in Erica Gaston and others, *2024 PBF Thematic Review: Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding in PBF-supported Programming* (New York, United Nations University, 2024), pp. 23, 53.

254 Interview with civil society expert on WPS/YPS, Microsoft Teams, 22 May 2024 (Interview #18).

255 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 9 May 2024 (Interview #48).

256 Interview with UN implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 7 June 2024 (Interview #49).

257 Written comments submitted to UNU-CPR, 11 November 2024.

258 Graeme Simpson and others, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, p. 16.

259 An illustration of this can be seen in the final reporting for the Yemen project, with one of the framework benchmarks (output 1.4) listed as "A strategic framework for UNSCR 2250 in Yemen is developed, reflecting the UNSCR 1325 model". However, in the reporting against that benchmark, or in other parts of the reporting, there is no subsequent comment or evaluation on whether such linkages or modelling proved beneficial. PBF final project report for the project in Yemen (PBF/IRF-270).

260 Written submission by YPS activist, 31 October 2024.

261 "I don't know what I would have done without the help of the women in the WPS community, they helped me a lot in my early days." Interview with former coordinator of the National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security in DRC, Microsoft Teams, 15 April 2024 (Interview #13); Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, *Young women in the lead: a thematic paper on actualizing the nexus between women, peace and security (WPS) and youth, peace and security (YPS) on the occasion of the UN Secretary-General's third report on YPS to the Security Council* (2024).

262 Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, *Young women in the lead: a thematic paper on actualizing the nexus between women, peace and security (WPS) and youth, peace and security (YPS) on the occasion of the UN Secretary-General's third report on YPS to the Security Council*.

263 ProDoc for the project in Niger (PBF/IRF-298), p. 6. Further discussion of the results of these projects is included in the separate brief for cohort 3.

264 Interview with YPS focal point in the MENA region, Microsoft Teams, 10 July 2024 (Interview #22); Lauren McGowan with contributions from Adam Day, "Hate speech case study", in Erica Gaston and others, *2024 PBF Thematic Review: Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding in PBF-supported Programming*.

265 Interview with youth expert, Microsoft Teams, 22 April 2024 (Interview #16); Interview with civil society expert on protection, Microsoft Teams, 30 July 2024 (Interview #26); Interview with civil society expert on youth, Microsoft Teams, 16 April 2024 (Interview #15). Experts noted that while most organizations had a safeguarding policy for children, they often did not extend to youth.

266 Such strategies were deployed in Sri Lanka PBF/IRF-329, Niger PBF/IRF-298, Guinea PBF/GIN/B-12 and The Gambia PBF/GMB/D-1. For further discussion, see the full cohort 3 brief.

267 The ProDoc noted not only that 90 per cent of the prison population were youth, but that they reported protection risks and rights violations at the hands of law enforcement. ProDoc for the project in Sierra Leone (PBF/SLE/D-3), p. 13. In response, the project team developed dedicated capacity-building workshops for security personnel, especially correctional officers, to foster respect for the human rights and dignity of youth at risk and to improve interactions between security forces and these youth.

268 Ibid., p. 14.

269 Interview with civil society expert on protection, Microsoft Teams, 30 July 2024 (Interview #26). This was in relation to non-PBF supported work.

270 Very few projects within the sample explicitly or openly addressed the LGBTQI+ community or queer youth. The projects that did were the two projects in El Salvador (PBF/IRF-381, PBF/IRF-414) in the intersectional cohort. In the project in Colombia (PBF/IRF-455), youth from the LGBTQI+ community were involved in community dialogues. During the initial lightning review, the researchers did not come across any other projects with a focus on LGBTQI+ youth.

271 Interview with civil society expert on protection, Microsoft Teams, 30 July 2024 (Interview #26). The project in question was not a PBF-supported project.

272 Interview with PBF staff, Microsoft Teams, 9 May 2024 (Interview #48); Interview with civil society expert on protection, Microsoft Teams, 30 July 2024 (Interview #26).

273 Interview with civil society expert on protection, Microsoft Teams, 30 July 2024 (Interview #26).

274 Ibid. There were some examples of this being put into practice. Those working on one of the projects in El Salvador noted that the project had successfully developed a "fabric of protection" to ensure the safety of their participants, among them vulnerable groups. Interview with UN staff, Microsoft Teams, 9 May 2024 (Interview #48).

275 Interview with UN expert on youth, Microsoft Teams, 12 April 2024 (Interview #14).

276 Interview with UN expert on youth, Microsoft Teams, 10 July 2024 (Interview #22).

277 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 6 May 2024 (Interview #78); Interview with YPS focal point in the MENA region, Microsoft Teams, 10 July 2024 (Interview #22).

278 Interview with civil society expert on youth, Microsoft Teams, 16 April 2024 (Interview #15); Interview with youth expert, Microsoft Teams, 22 April 2024 (Interview #16).

279 Interview with civil society expert on protection, Microsoft Teams, 30 July 2024 (Interview #26). Search for Common Ground also noted that the budget line can be kept flexible such that if it is not needed for protection contingencies, it can be used for other project uses – to support extra trainings, capacity-building or learning investments at the close of project.

280 Interview with civil society expert on protection, Microsoft Teams, 30 July 2024 (Interview #26).

281 Interview with YPS expert, New York, 13 February 2025 (Interview #182).

282 The projects in cohort 4 where the risk of youth involvement in violent extremism was noted as a factor in either the ProDocs or in discussions with implementing partners included: CAR PBF/IRF-304, Chad PBF/TCD/A-1, Burkina Faso PBF/IRF-446, Niger PBF/IRF-462, Mali PBF/MLI/C-1, Mauritania PBF/IRF-441, Burkina Faso-Mali-Niger PBF/BFA/B-6, Somalia PBF/IRF-433.

283 These were also noted as contributing to farmer–herder conflicts, as well as tensions between migrant and sedentary populations.

284 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 12 August 2024 (Interview #103).

285 As PBF Mali noted, the impact at the community level was visible: "For a certain time period tensions were reduced." Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 17 April 2024 (Interview #74).

286 Interview with senior staff member of former implementing agency, Microsoft Teams, 6 May 2024 (Interview #42).

287 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 6 May 2024 (Interview #78).

288 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 20 May 2024 (Interview #90); Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 6 May 2024 (interview #78).

289 PBF final project report for the project in Yemen (PBF/IRF-270); Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 20 May 2024 (Interview #90); Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 6 May 2024 (Interview #78).

290 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 20 May 2024 (Interview #90). This initiative is currently being supported by UNFPA.
291 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 6 May 2024 (Interview #78); Interview with YPS focal point in the MENA region, Microsoft Teams, 10 July 2024 (Interview #22).
292 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 3 June 2024 (Interview #75).
293 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 6 May 2024 (Interview #78).
294 The research for this case study was supported by field research in Guinea in June 2024. The research and drafting of this case study was led by Imane Karimou.
295 Interview with former National Director in the Ministry of Youth, Coyah, Guinea, 10 June 2024 (Interview #60).
296 Interview with the Mayor of Kolaboui, Guinea, 13 June 2024 (Interview #62).
297 Interview with local YPS specialist, Coyah, Guinea, 12 June 2024 (Interview #61).
298 Ibid.
299 Interview with the executive office of the National Youth Council, Coyah, Guinea, 14 June 2024 (Interview #65).
300 Ibid. During initial discussions with the newly established regime, interviewees were consulted in their former capacity as members of their respective local youth council.
301 Today, Guinea's youth, represented by the National Youth Council, actively participate in all major national meetings and gatherings. The President of the Council noted that he is regularly invited to high-level discussions – an important milestone for youth representation in Guinea. Interview with the executive office of the National Youth Council, Coyah, Guinea, 14 June 2024 (Interview #65).
302 One of the project implementing team members remarked, "The biggest success was really our ability to go from local to national." Interview with staff member of implementing agency, Coyah, Guinea, 12 June 2024 (Interview #61).
303 Ibid.
304 Bautista Logioco, "PBF catalytic effect guidelines", Peacebuilding Fund, March 2024.
305 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 20 May 2024 (Interview #34). As of the time of writing, the funding was not yet forthcoming.
306 Interview with civil society representative, Microsoft Teams, 7 June 2024 (Interview #127). The Royal Norwegian Embassy and UNDP provided funding for the following projects.
307 This example was only captured when the evaluation team asked for the "unintended consequences" of the project. Evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka, pp. 29, 36.
308 United Nations Environment Programme developed a follow-on project in the same community, but with European Union funding. Interview with UN staff member, Geneva, Switzerland, 27 June 2024 (Interview #159). The amounts funded were not provided. The subsequent IOM project was also supported by the PBF, and so is not considered a "catalytic effect" according to PBSO internal accounting.
309 Interview with implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 25 September 2024 (Interview #161).
310 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 2 May 2024 (Interview #77).
311 For example, one implementing partner noted that an organization in north-west Bosnia and Herzegovina supported by RYCO in the project has obtained funding from an Australian aid programme to work on peacebuilding projects. Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 14 May 2024 (Interview #84).
312 Interview with UN implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 21 June 2024 (Interview #150).
313 Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church and others, "Catalytic programming and the Peacebuilding Fund", PeaceNexus Foundation, September 2010, p. 7.
314 Interview with former members of the local youth council, Kamsar, Guinea, 13 June 2024 (Interview #63).
315 Interview with founder of Peace Hub and former project beneficiary, Banjul, The Gambia, 19 June 2024 (Interview #109). For more information see United Network of Young Peacebuilders, "Peace Hub The Gambia". Available at https://unoy.org/member/peace-hub-the-gambia (accessed 13 March 2025).
316 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 25 September 2024 (Interview #162).
317 Interview with sub-implementing partner, Banjul, The Gambia, 20 May 2024 (Interview #110). The National Council on Civic Education supported trainings (carried out by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education) for out-of-school and marginalized youth to enhance their understanding of their political and civic rights to increase youth participation and prevent engagement in future violence.
318 The project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka recruited three young researchers to accompany and document the project for 18 months, resulting in an extensive "important and useful" learning document in addition to the independent evaluation. This also contributed to "capacities for change, with the three researchers then becoming local champions for women's peacebuilding abilities". Evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka, pp. 29, 36. Because of the remoteness of the Liptako-Gourma project, some of the civil society and youth organizations involved also had to be more engaged in monitoring and evaluation.
319 In addition to working with the project participants, the project team utilized mental health and psychosocial support data gathered during implementation and collaborated with an international research organization to produce and disseminate knowledge on mental health and peacebuilding, as well as on the intersections of gender, mental health and reconciliation in CAR. This work helped inform national policymaking on mental health service provision. The two reports produced are: Conciliation Resources, *Gender, mental health and reconciliation in the CAR: implications for policy and practice* (London, 2023); Conciliation Resources, *Mental health and peacebuilding in the Central African Republic* (London, 2023).
320 The evaluation for the project PBF/IRF-329 in Sri Lanka recommended "systematically" connecting future participants to existing youth networks for post-project support, p. 40.
321 In the project PBF/CIV/A-5 in Côte d'Ivoire there was already a tradition of having youth representatives within local village councils. The project brought these youth representatives more frontally into environmental planning and adaptation strategies. In the project PBF/IRF-263 in Chad the project worked to involve youth more in community decision-making and dispute resolution mechanisms that already existed, by linking them with traditional chiefs. Efforts were made to give these traditional chiefs a significant role in the project (e.g. helping select participants, enabling town hall meetings and other processes), which created a greater degree of investment in the project. As of project closure, they had verbally committed to continuing a dialogue on intergenerational challenges.
322 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 23 May 2024 (Interview #147).
323 Interview with PBF Tunisia, Microsoft Teams, 12 April 2024 (Interview #41).
324 The project closed in December 2020, but implementing partners, encouraged by the initial gains, said they had continued to work on extending or replicating it until the changed circumstances brought about by the July 2023 coup.
325 Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 14 May 2024 (Interview #155).

326 Within Côte d'Ivoire, it was already common for communities to have local youth councils led by a president ("*président de jeunes*"). As a result, when it appeared beneficial for those implementing the project PBF/CIV/A-5 in Côte d'Ivoire to bring youth into community discussions around environmental planning, they worked with these existing structures and representatives. The project in DRC (PBF/IRF-262) worked with "*baraza*" peace committees of youth that had already been set up by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in DRC as part of the latter's Community Violence Reduction framework.

327 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 25 September 2024 (Interview #162).

328 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 13 May 2024 (Interview #83).

329 UNESCO also requested to include this social enterprise model, spearheaded by the project, in a subsequent civic education project. Interview with UN staff member, Microsoft Teams, 8 April 2024 (Interview #73).

330 For example, when the project team faced logistical difficulties in equipping partner radio stations, the Ministry of the Interior facilitated the transportation of generators by train from Kalemie to Nyunzu. Joint interview with implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 2 July 2024 (Interview #33).

331 The Chief of Lenge village in neighbouring Lualaba Province approached the project team to explore new initiatives. Joint interview with implementing partners, by Microsoft Teams, 2 July 2024 (Interview #33).

332 The project was PBF/IRF-386, implemented in Burkina Faso by UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA between 27 January 2021 and 27 December 2022.

333 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 28 June 2024 (Interview #133).

334 Ibid.

335 Ibid.

336 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 22 May 2024 (Interview #142).

337 He provided material support by purchasing a motorcycle for their transportation needs and a generator to cope with frequent power outages. The CEO reportedly told members of the local youth council: "I understand that it is your presence that has brought peace to Kamsar." Interview with former members of the local youth council, Kamsar, Guinea, 13 June 2024 (Interview #63).

338 One minor example surfaced in the project PBF/GIN/B-12 in Guinea, with the African Development Bank providing funds for an "experience-sharing" trip for members of the National Youth Council with their counterpart in Senegal. UNICEF and GPPAC, *Financing for young people in peacebuilding* (UNICEF, 2021); Benjamin Claeson, Mohamed Ghanem and Catherine Howell, *Investing and Partnering with Youth for Peace (IPYP)* (Uppsala, Dag Hammarsjköld Foundation, 2023).

339 Claeson, Mohamed Ghanem and Catherine Howell, *Investing and Partnering with Youth for Peace (IPYP)*, pp. 4–5.

340 Joint interview with multiple CSOs, Coyah, Guinea, 11 June 2024 (Interview #67).

341 "Attempts to obtain direct funding from the PBF were unsuccessful (prior to this project) because of restrictive eligibility criteria. The problem is that this limitation of funding can hinder the full realization of the project's objectives, despite the will and expertise of local players like ourselves." Interview with office members of prominent local NGO, Bangui, CAR, 9 February 2024 (Interview #53). Similar comments were also shared by Guinean youth activists during field research there. Joint interview with multiple CSOs, Coyah, Guinea, 11 June 2024 (Interview #67).

342 Interview with founder of prominent youth-led NGO and former youth activist, Bangui, CAR, 9 February 2024 (Interview #57).

343 Salif Nimaga and Anne Moltès, *Final Report: Mid-Term Review – UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund Strategy 2020–2024* (New York, PBSO, 2023), pp. 23, 35–36; A/76/668, paras. 13–15. Some of the recommendations for addressing this include greater PBSO and UN outreach to local organizations, encouraging consultation with young people at project design and implementation stage, and different grant modalities that might enable local organizations to overcome capacity or resource barriers.

344 PBF, *Security-General's Peacebuilding Fund: 2020–2024 Strategy*, pp. 7, 10.

345 This had been identified as a significant barrier for smaller organizations because they may not have the financial means to cover the staff time and costs involved in developing complex project applications. Some of these inception grants were intended to also provide support in terms of capacity-building at this design phase.

346 Funding via the PBF Gender and Youth Promotion Initiatives has become open to civil society organizations since 2016. The YPI has received praise for its innovation and risk-tolerance, its openness to integrating capacity-building for youth organizations and CSOs within the project activities, increasing support for methodologies that encourage greater youth input and consultation, and increasing support for direct funding or other collaboration with youth-led civil society. A/76/668 (2022), pp. 4–7; E/AC.51/2023/7 (2023), pp. 16–18; United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and PBF, "Investing in youth, peace and security: a review of lessons learned from the Youth Solidarity Fund and Youth Promotion Initiative", 16 June 2022.

347 Information provided by PBSO internal tracking.

348 The information available in PBSO's data suggested 17 CSOs were provided funding as sub-implementing partners, including large national NGOs like the Gambia Red Cross Society, more technically oriented organizations such as a farmer's association (given the project focus on natural resources), as well as smaller co-operatives and CSOs like the Colony of Bees and Tresor Women Warriors.

349 Interview with office members of prominent local NGO, Bangui, CAR, 9 February 2024 (Interview #53); Interview with ACCORD programme manager, WhatsApp, 9 February 2024 (Interview #120).

350 Interview with ACCORD programme manager, WhatsApp, 9 February 2024 (Interview #120). In addition, there was an intention to build the administrative and financial management capacity of the two organizations during and after the project so that they could continue this work on their own in the future, and potentially bid for funding independently, whether for the PBF or other donors. Unfortunately, funding for this capacity-building was not made available and so did not happen.

351 Because of the cumulative nature, the data might better be described as "money that went out the door" in 2022 and 2023 rather than the sort of tracking that would facilitate an assessment of total funds that went to subgrantees for each project. Because of the cumulative means of tracking, and because such tracking was only available for 2 years, there was only complete information on 9 projects in the existing databases. Within these, PBSO tracking suggests that 0.8 per cent of the funds went to youth CSOs, as coded in the PBSO database.

352 Information received on 25 June 2024 from representatives of the Life and Peace Institute.

353 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 16 May 2024 (Interview #41).

354 In CAR, for example, youth helped map out the exact locations in the Bamingui-Bangoran region they would patrol, identifying the most conflict-prone. In terms of what strategies or messages to deploy, in both projects, youth resorted to community radios to spread peace messages they developed themselves. In terms of other youth-led strategies, in CAR, youth proposed establishing a community store, primarily managed by women, to aggregate agricultural and livestock products, with the profits reinvested into the local economy. In DRC,

youth took the initiative to organize inter-community soccer matches with mixed teams, which they formed themselves.

355 Implementing partners of the project in DRC (PBF/IRF-262), for example, emphasized this strategy, noting, "We wanted young people not only to receive peace messages but also to carry them." Joint interview with implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 2 July 2024 (Interview #33).

356 Detailed information was not available for all, but information collected from UNDP identified that it had provided $105,000 in these grants, with most awards approximately $5,000 each.

357 The project was led by UNFPA and Interpeace, but data collected by PBSO suggested that some 26 per cent of the funding had been allocated to a national organization, Voz di Pace, which played a key role in engaging youth NGOs in the consultation and design of the project, and would subsequently manage these micro-grants.

358 The decision to adopt this micro-grant modality was in large part because of lack of access to the Liptako-Gourma subregion. Due to its remote location and the security situation, the area is not even accessible to government officials and other national actors, much less international organizations. One of the project staff observed that in some of the districts, their project was the only externally supported activity going on. Interview with three implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 25 September 2024 (Interview #161). Subgranting in such areas inevitably brings up questions of risk and risk mitigation, as invoked in many of the contexts in which PBF-supported projects are implemented, regardless of the funding modality.

359 The data submitted to PBSO's subpartner tracking platform and to UNU-CPR suggested between 64 and 70 subgrantees. The variation is due to a change in staffing in the Burkina Faso project. This made it impossible to confirm whether the lower of two grantee counts received with regard to Burkina Faso was due to a difference in when subpartners were reported, or due to an error in the initial count that was subsequently corrected.

360 Interview with implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 12 February 2024 (Interview #12).

361 The data submitted to PBSO's subpartner tracking platform suggested that as of the last mid-year reporting cycle, some $558,848.43 of the $2.5 million funding amount had been provided to subgrantees. The project closed in August 2024, so some additional subgrants could be reported during the next reporting cycle.

362 Interview with three implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 25 September 2024 (Interview #161).

363 For example, the grantee amount shared with UNU-CPR by an implementing partner involved in a project in the same region suggested that $556,561 out of a total $2.5 million dollar grant went to national or local CSOs, including a $10,000 grant to a youth-focused CSO.

364 Interview with three implementing partners, Microsoft Teams, 25 September 2024 (Interview #161).

365 The new grants included funding from the United States Agency for International Development for initiatives aimed at strengthening social cohesion and peacebuilding among youth, leveraging its established presence through the AILP programme. It also received support from the Child Protection Cluster to conduct rapid protection assessments during population displacements in the communes of Gueladjo, Tamou, Say, Makalondi and Torodi for a 6-month period. Lastly, it received funds from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the distribution of non-food item family kits to IDPs in the communes of Tamou and Gueladjo.

366 This quote was included in follow-up written information received from the implementing agency via email on 26 September 2024.

367 Erica Gaston and others, *2024 PBF Thematic Review: Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding in PBF-supported Programming*, p. 16; Christoph Kurz and others, *Thematic Review on Local Peacebuilding*, pp. 3, 44–45.

368 Interview with UN youth expert, Microsoft Teams, 24 April 2024 (Interview #17). Experts also raised the issue during the inception presentation. This topic is also prominent in the YPS literature. See UNICEF, "Financing for young people in peacebuilding", p. 4; Benjamin Claeson, Mohamed Ghanem and Catherine Howell, *Investing and Partnering with Youth for Peace (IPYP)*, p. 5.

369 This definition dates to 1981, when the UN Secretary-General first proposed it in his report to the General Assembly on International Youth Year (A/36/215, Annex B, para. 5). Even back then, the Secretary-General acknowledged that the concept of "youth" is context-dependent and varies across societies worldwide (Annex A, para. 25; Annex B, para. 5). See also A/RES/50/81, para. (II)9. United Nations, *Youth 2030 – The United Nation's Youth Strategy* (New York, 2018), p. 4. For further discussion of definitions, see Graeme Simpson and others, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, pp. 9–10.

370 Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 14 May 2024 (Interview #84). A similar issue arose in Serbia, where national policy defines youth as those aged 15–30. Implementing partners said this came into question during implementation and sticking to the standard UN definition led them to exclude some individuals who were considered to be "youth" locally, because they were above the age of 24. Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 10 May 2024 (Interview #80).

371 Focus group discussion with youth, Bangui, CAR, 10 February 2024 (Interview #179). The idea of youth as a "transitional" period also contingent on "relative autonomy and recognition of adult status" and social standing was also raised in the consultations for the *Missing Peace* study. Graeme Simpson and others, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, pp. 10–11.

372 This was mentioned during a meeting with a Gambian organization involved in the project PBF/GMB/D-1 in The Gambia as a key strategy to interact with youth from more marginalized communities. Interview with civil society implementing partner, Banjul, 19 June 2024 (Interview #106).

373 Interview with governmental sub-implementing partner, Banjul, 21 June 2024 (Interview #113). The idea of meeting youth where they are also arose in projects that attempted to leverage or connect with participants (both youth and elders) by harkening back to traditional or customary practices. In Solomon Islands, the project team effectively engaged traditional chiefs and leaders in intergenerational dialogues by utilizing culturally sensitive communication tools, labelled the "talk story" mechanism. It was deemed to be "meeting them halfway" by using community practices they are already familiar with. Interview with implementing partner, Microsoft Teams, 11 June 2024 (Interview #38).

374 *Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General*, p. 13.

375 Previous PBF Thematic Reviews have also recommended to PBSO that it consider iterative or serial projects, "particularly in situations where more adaptive and sequential programming strategies would be likely to advance strategic priorities and leverage particular moments or opportunities for peacebuilding advancement". Erica Gaston and others, *2024 PBF Thematic Review: Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding in PBF-supported Programming*, p. 7.

376 Examples that arose during the consultations were efforts and statements on youth in CPS by the AU, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in Eastern Africa, and the subregional Liptako-Gourma Authority. UN regional offices have also increasingly developed resources and capacities to develop regional work, including the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the Special Envoy's office for the Horn of Africa, and the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa.

377 This eligibility package, often developed in cooperation with the UN Country Team, will establish certain priorities in conjunction with peacebuilding risks and goals identified. The smaller percentage of projects in this sample coming through the PRF is relatively consistent with PBF youth support overall. Within the 153 projects examined in the initial review, only 35 per cent of projects came through the PRF.

378 In the PBF's 2020 Guidance Note on cross-border and regional programmes, a key recommendation for improving the quality and impact of cross-border projects was to "put women and youth at the core of decision-making processes and empowerment". See United Nations Peacebuilding, *Guidance Note on PBF Cross-border and Regional Programmes* (2020), p. 5.

379 An expert observed that while youth may be consulted at the beginning of a project's design to identify problems and then to support implementation, they are not involved in developing its activities, for instance, and are thus excluded from "the meat of the sandwich". They also raised the issue of youth no longer being considered beneficiaries and the need to evaluate the equality of partnerships between youth sub-implementing partners and donors or other implementing partners. Interview with civil society expert on WPS and YPS, Microsoft Teams, 24 May 2024 (Interview #18).

380 An expert emphasized the need to rethink how impact is measured across the field, given the various indicators among actors, as well as to consider young people's impact on peace generally and to show the return on investment of youth programming. Interview with civil society expert on youth, Microsoft Teams, 6 September 2024 (Interview #28).

381 The Thematic Review on transitional justice, for example, noted the lack of a sufficient subfocus on youth inclusion in transitional justice. The Thematic Review on human rights and peacebuilding identifies sustainability issues in several youth-related hate speech projects, and lack of consideration for barriers that youth human rights defenders faced. The climate-security and peacebuilding Thematic Review identified the need to "interrogate assumptions about youth rationales and motivations" and consider barriers to exclusion. Salif Nimaga, *Thematic Review: PBF-supported projects on Transitional Justice* (New York, United Nations Peacebuilding, 2020); Erica Gaston and others, *2024 PBF Thematic Review: Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding in PBF-supported Programming* (New York, United Nations University, 2024); Erica Gaston and others, *Climate-Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review* (New York, United Nations University, 2023).

382 United Nations Development Programme, *Youth, Peace and Security: Fostering Youth-Inclusive Political Processes* (New York, UNDP, 2024).

383 For a sample of some of these critiques, see African Union, *10-Year Implementation Plan for the Continental Framework on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) 2020-2029* (Addis Ababa, AU, 2020); A/76/668 (2022), pp. 13–15 (including specific citation of the need for greater tracking and reporting on youth participation within the YPI); Michael McCabe and others, *Promising practices in engaging youth in peace and security and P/CVE* (Washington, D.C., YouthPower Learning, 2020).

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