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Embracing the Margins: Working with Youth amid War and Insecurity

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The growing size of a young generation among the general population in the Muslim world will magnify existing regime failures to find solutions to socio-economic and political problems. In the coming decades, these failures are certain to hasten the moment of regime crisis, causing eventual collapse in many cases with unknown consequences.

— Graham E. Fuller, *The Youth Crisis in Middle Eastern Society*¹

“Ronaldo” was a four-year veteran of Liberia’s civil war. He was first abducted in 2000 by Charles Taylor’s army at the age of twelve years. His captors took him to a military camp, where he found many of his friends already there. They immediately warned him that “you have to be brave to survive.” His subsequent bravery caught his general’s eye, and Ronaldo soon became the general’s houseboy and prize trainee. Ronaldo escaped but was later recaptured, eventually returning to his role in the general’s service.

Once, when the general left their upcountry military base for consultations with Taylor in the capital, he made Ronaldo base commander in his stead. Soon thereafter, Ronaldo’s military superiors ordered him to retreat to Monrovia with 3,600 soldiers and civilians under his command. The retreat lasted seventeen days and was labeled “Operation Dust to Dust” and “Man Moving, Man Dropping.” These two names were employed to remind those under his command that “if anyone says, ‘I’m tired, I can’t make it,’ you kill them.” After reaching Monrovia, Ronaldo was immediately returned to the war front. He was fourteen years old at the time.²

Why have commanders been able to unlock the astounding resilience and potential of youth like Ronaldo while most governments and international institutions have not? It is an unfortunate irony of the current era that armed groups tend to value the versatility and resourcefulness of youth while civilian societies marginalize them. From suicide bombers and spies to field commanders and frontline warriors, there seems to be no end to what ever-younger boys and girls can do in the service of war and political violence.

At the same time, the social role of youth within war-affected states seems to be narrowing. Many are undereducated and migrating to cities and appear to be unemployed. There are also more of them in poor and unstable regions of Africa and the Middle East, where it often seems that nations do not know what to do with their own young people while armed groups keep discovering new ways to make use of them.

These twin perceptions of youth—of their expanding utility to armed groups and of their limited utility to civilian societies—have conspired to create an image of young people as menaces to their own communities. It is an image that has been promoted by some proponents of the “youth bulge,” who view the rise in the proportion of young people in society, and their migration to urban areas, as a security threat. The post–September 11, 2001, world has further promoted the image of disaffected youth from certain areas of the world as potential terrorists.

Although there is no question that growing proportions of youth in unstable societies should be a priority concern, government and international policies may unintentionally be making the youth challenge worse. Youth are seen as dangerous in part because governments and international actors have misunderstood them and set youth priorities aside. Viewing young people through the youth bulge lens, moreover, can inaccurately fuel fearful connections between youth in certain areas of the world and terrorism.

This chapter argues that the perceived threat of youth to society is distorted and must be reassessed. It situates the youth bulge thesis in context, considers current policies that may be further marginalizing youth, reviews the central tenants of programming for marginalized youth, and concludes with recommendations aimed at reversing counterproductive policies and positively engaging youth to advance new policy directions.

The Youth Bulge in Context

We are promoting fear of the very people whom we should be positively partnering with: disadvantaged youth in poor and unstable nations. Though this

fear can inspire harmful assumptions about young people and promote misguided policy responses, it is also partly based on demographic evidence underlying what is known as the youth bulge. Setting the youth bulge into context promises to provide a starting point for examining how it has supported certain policy directions that are unhelpful to development, peace building, and youth themselves.

Urdal has defined the youth bulge as “extraordinarily large youth cohorts relative to the adult population” of a nation.³ Its particular significance stems from claims that youth bulges may cause political violence and even terrorism.⁴ The perceived volatility of youth bulges is characterized by situations where there are “too many young men with not enough to do.”⁵ “Too many young men” is primarily described in ominous terms, because, it is asserted, “a large youth cohort intensifies and exacerbates most existing [societal] problems.” Critical to arguments highlighting the youth bulge as a threat is the assertion that “young males are more prone to violence” than either older men or women.⁶

The youth bulge thesis, which reportedly originated with a geographer working for the Central Intelligence Agency in 1985,⁷ has many advocates in the U.S. security community. Though the specter of hordes of unemployed young men, threatening peace and development and milling about in cities, was advanced by writers such as Robert D. Kaplan and Samuel P. Huntington a decade ago,⁸ the employment of youth bulges as “a possible explanation for terrorism and increased global insecurity” dramatically increased following the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States.⁹ The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency’s inspector general, John L. Helgeson, is among those who have employed the youth bulge thesis to signal a prime security threat. “The inability of states to adequately integrate youth populations is likely to perpetuate the cycle of political instability, ethnic wars, revolutions, and anti-government activities that already affects many countries. And a large proportion of youth will be living in cities, where opportunities will be limited.”¹⁰

Much has been made of this highlighted demographic correlation between “too many young men” and instability, if not outright civil war and terrorism. Proponents consider it alarming,¹¹ while critics consider it alarmist.¹² Urdal considers the youth bulge as both “a blessing and a curse.” It is a blessing because youth bulges can energize economies by expanding the pool of available labor. Youth bulges can become a curse if they occur within stagnant economies. Such a result, Urdal warns, “can be explosive.”¹³ Significantly, Urdal also argues that autocratic governance “acts to reduce the risk of

conflict,” while steps towards democratization “may substantially increase the risk of conflict in the Arab world.”¹⁴ This conclusion differs from that of others who argue that authoritarianism lies at the root of problems in the Middle East.¹⁵

Although the correlation between unusually high numbers of youth in a country and insecurity calls out for careful attention, the argument also requires contextualization. The following brief comments about those who connect the youth bulge with insecurity are intended to set the stage for the subsequent consideration of next steps.¹⁶

First, the argument is overly simplistic. The threat of instability and war is contained in a statistical correlation. Youth, and male youth in particular, are thought to be menacing mainly because there are “too many” of them. But a population demographic is not a cause of war; it only suggests some degree of probability. Sublimating other possible contributors to violent conflict runs the risk of distorting understandings of the causes of civil unrest and rebellion.

Second, it is not necessarily predictive. Even if the statistical connection between youth bulges and civil conflict is “extremely robust,”¹⁷ the youth bulge does not explain the many situations where youth bulges do not lead to conflict. Moreover, most youth resist involvement in conflicts. As Barker and Ricardo note, “While the youth bulge argument is compelling, it is important to reaffirm that in any of these settings, only a minority of young men participate in conflicts. For example, the vast majority of young men, even those unemployed and out of school, were not involved in conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone.”¹⁸ Significantly, the youth bulge and insecurity literature neither highlights nor explains why most young men and women in unstable regions resist involvement in violence and terrorism.

Third, the depiction of youth is steadfastly negative. Youth are mainly described as threats to peace and stability, not potential forces for enhancing them. Goldstone illustrates this tendency when he states that “large youth cohorts are often drawn to new ideas and heterodox religions, challenging older forms of authority.” This makes them “relatively easily mobilized for social or political conflicts” because most have limited family and career responsibilities.¹⁹ The possibility that challenging older forms of authority might yield promising results, or be carried out through nonviolent means, is left out of the analysis. Positive youth involvement in confrontations against forces such as repression, corruption, exclusion, inequality, and injustice are not often mentioned by youth bulge and insecurity proponents. Sadly, the voices of youth resistance “are mostly in the shadows” while the actions of the violent minority “get the headlines and frighten the middle class.”²⁰

Fourth, despite statistics connecting young men to crime,²¹ young men are not inherently violent. This is no small point, because the specter of an excess of young men threatening stability is a crucial component of the youth bulge and insecurity argument. Yet Rowe and his colleagues report that adolescent males with high levels of testosterone in their blood merely make them easily influenced by peers. Though they may copy delinquent behavior, the researchers also found that the high testosterone levels were “related to leadership rather than to antisocial behavior in boys who definitely did not have deviant peers.”²²

Fifth, the combination of the youth bulge and urbanization, which is often cited as particularly perilous because it may accelerate movement toward insecurity and political violence,²³ is overstated. Male youth may be flocking to cities in the developing world, and in Africa most particularly,²⁴ where their presence “is widely regarded as overwhelmingly negative, leading to crime, unrest and the spread of HIV/AIDS.”²⁵ If it is assumed that young men are inherently violent, as claimed just above, then the cities to which they migrate in large numbers must therefore be explosive.

Yet in terms of security, youth migration to cities can be highly useful. Using the case of youth in Burundi’s capital, Bujumbura, Ould-Abdallah notes that the cosmopolitanism of urban living can water down ethnic identification and threaten extremists because urban youth “unable to identify with an ethnic group . . . constitute living proof of the possibility of peaceful coexistence.”²⁶ Moreover, excessive numbers of young men in African cities is nothing new. Many urban areas have been dominated by male youth almost since the colonial era. Colonial Nairobi, for example, had “an overwhelmingly male urban population,” in part because British colonialists recruited men to work in Nairobi while prohibiting them from bringing their families along.²⁷

Today, Kenya’s capital is hardly a haven of serenity, and Kenya has been cited as a country “under a particular risk of experiencing armed conflict” due to the presence of the youth bulge and other risk factors.²⁸ Nonetheless, Nairobi and many other cities in countries with youth bulges can sensibly be considered more stable and less threatening than some projections might suggest. Additionally, reviewing recent conflicts in Africa suggests that urbanization’s connection to violent conflict is not as strong as it is sometimes purported to be. Across the continent, from Burundi and Mozambique to Sierra Leone and Ethiopia, nearly every recent African conflict has arisen in rural, not urban, areas.

Sixth, the imagery that the youth bulge and insecurity argument can inspire—hordes of enraged young men in countries beyond the West—distorts

actual realities. Young men living in particular nations are not predictively angry or dangerous. It is this image that Hendrixson forcefully attacks. She cites supporters of the youth bulge and insecurity thesis who assert that young men are “driven to violence by their very biology.”²⁹ There is a racial cast to this argument, she contends, because the youth bulge threat has been personified as “a discontented, angry young man, almost always a person of color.” Such young men are believed to constitute an “unpredictable, out-of-control force in the South generally, with Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia and Latin America all considered hot spots.”³⁰

Female youth, in turn, are presented as threatened by young men and threats themselves because of their “explosive fertility,”³¹ which youth bulge and violence supporters directly connect to the “rise in numbers of young male terrorists.”³² The youth bulge and insecurity thesis, Hendrixson adds, is used to justify U.S. policies promoting population control (largely through programs for young women) and neoliberalism without examining whether such approaches support or compromise development. She concludes that such policies are “fraught with dangers”³³ and “punitive.”³⁴

Aiding Youth? Reflecting on the Current Record

If we looked at government policy in countries with youth bulges, would we know that their populations were increasingly dominated by youth? If we examined international agency policy in the same countries, could we tell that youth were demographically dominant? Probably not—although it is well known that youth constitute a massive proportion of developing nation populations, most governments and international aid agencies have been remarkably slow to fashion appropriate responses to their needs.

Most fortunately, this trend is beginning to change. Agencies such as the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the United Nations Development Program are among institutions that have recently released publications about youth, and youth facing unstable or conflict situations in particular, and how to support them.³⁵ A growing number of publications on this subject are emerging elsewhere as well.³⁶

Before turning to trajectories arising from this still-new literature, it is useful to first examine aspects of the current record of international aid. What follows are four ways in which current policy appears to contribute to the creation of counterproductive results.

The first is linked to insufficient knowledge about the unintentional effects of development and reconstruction assistance. Though evaluating programs

and projects is an issue attracting increasing attention, it is the quality of these evaluations that has been raised as a matter of particular concern. Recent contrasting information about USAID's evaluation record illustrates this tension between the quantity and quality of evaluations.

The USAID website highlights the fact that "USAID missions are evaluating their programs more often, enabling program managers to better understand how well USAID programs are working."³⁷ At the same time, however, a recent public discussion involving the former USAID administrator, Andrew Natsios, and the current deputy administrator, Carol Lancaster, highlighted the "inadequate" quality of USAID's evaluations. Natsios noted that USAID does not get "an objective analysis of what is really going on, whether the programs are working or not," while Lancaster stated that "everybody does a miserable job of evaluation" with regard to "figuring out whether we succeeded or not."³⁸

The comments of Natsios and Lancaster suggest that more evaluation is not the answer if the underlying impact of initiatives in question remains unknown. Easterly, for example, argues that Western aid agencies remain largely unaccountable because they rarely seek feedback from their primary target group: the poor. He asks, "If the main problem with foreign aid is the lack of feedback from the poor themselves, and accountability to these same poor, then why not attack the problem directly?."³⁹ Uvin highlights the tendency of evaluations to emphasize broader, aggregate outcomes instead of pinpointing exactly which people received assistance. "Who exactly obtained the jobs, the land, the credits, or the training?" from assistance programs, he wonders. If such questions are not asked, international assistance earmarked to help the impoverished can instead expand the gap between rich and poor by further enriching the wealthy. As Uvin warns, "The same actions that promote positive aggregate outcomes may coincide with increased clientelism, corruption, inequality, exclusion, or insecurity for certain groups."⁴⁰

The second way that well-intended policies can make matters worse is connected to precedent and speed. Field research in postwar Burundi indicated that "rebuilding damaged buildings, institutions, and authority systems without consideration of their geographic distribution runs the risk of simultaneously reinforcing structural inequities that were a root cause of civil war."⁴¹ For government and international agencies, the most efficient way to rebuild a rural area may be to work in zones that have historically received the lion's share of assistance. These "favored" zones are generally the most accessible, already have structures and institutions that can be quickly reconstructed, and house educated elites that can facilitate the process. Such

actions discriminate against the majority of rural residents who reside in “neglected” zones. The result may be an unintentional expansion of existing inequalities and a possible signal, in the eyes of the poor, neglected majority, of a government office or aid agency’s support for such inequalities. This sort of well-intended postwar peace-building assistance can instead help set the stage for “widespread discontent and possible violence.”⁴²

The third way that policies can generate counterproductive outcomes is linked to a preference for international agencies in some countries to concentrate postwar efforts in rural areas. The tendency is illuminated by the author’s 2005 fieldwork in Liberia, where many international donors were found to be earmarking their assistance for rural areas while support for integrating former combatants, most of whom lived in the capital city, was widely considered inadequate. One aid official supporting rural investment stated that “the way forward for youth is agriculture, whether they like it or not.” Drawing urban youth back to their rural villages of origin was one purpose of rural-focused programming. At the same time, there is little evidence that urban migrant youth in Africa return to reside in their former rural homes.⁴³

The fourth way that international aid policies may produce unfortunate consequences is suggested by recent evidence that gender policies favoring girls and women may be dangerously misguided. Correia and Bannon have argued that gender policies since the 1970s have focused on “the ways in which men exercise power over and dominate women.” But they argue that this is only half of the entire picture: “Gender is also about the way social structures and authority give men power over other men, thus resulting in their marginalization, discrimination, and subordination.”⁴⁴ Male youth are frequently at the receiving end of this uneven relationship, and it can be a cause of conflict.

Male youth—victims of exploitation and control by older men and the state—are often unable to own land, marry, and shed the youth label to become adults. Thus, male youth may be attracted to war because of “the promise of being able to marry, which they otherwise could not do” and to avoid the frustration and humiliation caused by “their inability to meet societal expectations of manhood.”⁴⁵ Correia and Bannon further warn that

unrealistic, unattainable, and rigid norms of conduct and expectations placed on men contribute not only to disparities and inequities on women, but to men’s discontent—and when these expectations are combined with factors such as racism, adultism, and weak states—to the underdevelopment and destruction of nations and regions, and even to terrorism.⁴⁶

Responses to unstable countries with youth bulge demographics that recommend explicit responses to the needs of women but no corollary recommendations for supporting men may make a dire situation for young men and the larger society much worse.⁴⁷

Youth as Resources for Stability and Growth

The strength and the weakness of the youth bulge and insecurity argument is that it highlights challenges confronting states with disproportionately large youth populations. It both spotlights an important issue involving youth while overshadowing the realities that youth face. This imbalance has invited depictions of youth as dark security threats, which Kaplan memorably illuminated in his description of young men in urban West Africa as “out of school, unemployed, loose molecules in an unstable social fluid that threatened to ignite.”⁴⁸

Given the fear and disquiet that youth can inspire, a central component of the youth challenge involves providing a balanced, accurate picture of youth themselves. This has proven difficult for the youth bulge literature to present, partly because it contains little or no interviews with the young people that the authors are so worried about. Left without a voice, restive, unemployed young men from unstable regions serve to embody the threats of violence and even terrorism in the West without securing a chance to explain how things look from their perspective.

In addition to being characterized as threats, youth are also highlighted as victims (together with children), most prominently in Graça Machel’s report *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* and her follow-up study.⁴⁹ Both perspectives have been challenged by growing evidence that war-affected youth are remarkably resilient actors for improving their own lives.⁵⁰ There are increasing calls for positioning youth as primary social and economic resources for peace building and stability instead of “assuming that young people are themselves the problem.”⁵¹

International agency work with at-risk youth, particularly those in poor, unstable, and conflict-affected nations, remains new. Its strength lies in its advocacy for engaging directly with youth and addressing their needs. Inclusion and quality concerns remain persistent challenges. There is an apparent tendency to include more higher-class (and mostly male) youth than members of the marginalized majority, and more male youth than female youth. The field is also plagued by insufficient numbers of good-quality youth program evaluations, which have made it difficult to determine which youth programming approaches are even reasonably effective.⁵²

At the same time, certain issues repeatedly surface as central to working successfully with youth. Young people want access to education, training, and work. Many already work in informal economies, are small-time entrepreneurs, and seek access to capital.⁵³ Direct engagement with youth in program development and evaluation is widely considered as central to successful youth programming. Because youth have a myriad of issues confronting them, holistic programs that address many concerns (for example, basic education, vocational training, and health concerns) are thought to have a higher chance for yielding a positive impact among young people.⁵⁴

This is precisely the approach adopted by the “two most powerful forces of youth mobilization [which] have emerged in recent years—Islam and Christian Pentecostalism.”⁵⁵ In addition to providing spiritual and moral guidance, security, structure, and community, these two religious groups address grievances that youth regularly highlight, particularly regarding education and employment.⁵⁶ Religious programs often draw from the advantage created by states that are unable or (much more likely, it often appears) not interested in or afraid of engaging with youth. As Singer suggests, many Muslim madrasa schools “also provide social welfare services, such as free food to poor students. They gain students and popularity by filling the state’s void.”⁵⁷

Taken together, the thrust of these approaches to the needs of young people is based on the contention that directly engaging members of the poor, socially marginalized, disenfranchised, alienated, and extremely frustrated youth majority with participatory, proactive, youth-centered measures is the only way to promote stability and growth for youth and the greater society that they may demographically dominate. This is obviously a considerable challenge in countries with huge youth populations—no program can address the needs of a multitude of youth in need. But it is also apparent that the sheer size of youth populations makes positive engagement with them essential to the promotion of lasting peace and development.

Recommendations for Learning and Action

A necessary component of successful security, governance, and development policy for war-affected and other insecure nations is an effective method for including and engaging with youth. As reviewed in this chapter, there is a need to reverse trends toward viewing youth in negative terms, carrying out actions that unintentionally worsen situations facing youth and inadequately evaluating youth programs. The concluding section offers a general approach

and specific recommendations for addressing these concerns and developing a policy framework.

Creating Choices

“Julius” and “James” were among the former soldiers I interviewed in Eastern Congo in 2005. Tired of war and enticed by the promise of peacetime life, they left the bush and entered a demobilization program. But aggravation soon followed. The money they received from the program did not last long. They searched for work but, given their wartime experience, no one would hire them. “We don’t want to become beggars or thieves,” Julius explained, “but with no job and no money, how are we going to live?”

Frustrated with his marginal social status and increasingly desperate economic situation, James reminisced about life in the military. “When I had a gun,” he recalled, “life was more interesting. I could have anything—money, food, girls—any time I wanted.” But Julius added that dignified civilian work was what they now sought. “Even if you give me twenty dollars,” he explained, “it won’t help me because I didn’t work for it. But if I make my own money, I’d spend it with intelligence.” After a few short weeks of civilian life, with little money and few options, desperation was setting in. “Without a job,” James speculated, “at some point we’re going to return to the military. We have no choice.”

We have no choice. Working with young people in poor and unstable areas hinges on providing them with viable, appropriate choices. They are often justifiably frustrated with their situation and the regime they must endure, feeling stuck for reasons that are entirely sensible. War also changes lives. Youth are often pitched into roles that they traditionally are not expected to perform. Many marry early, become entrepreneurs, migrate to cities, create youth-centered networks, and have no intention of ever returning to cultural roles or rural homes that they may view as confining.

Wars alter youth lives in ways that leaders and institutions may find difficult to accept. Indeed, there is a tendency for them to mark territory before knowing it well. This is underscored by the use of the term “reintegration” to characterize a common objective of postwar programming, particularly for former soldiers. As a USAID publication states, “The problem of reintegrating former combatants into community life is a standard feature of post-conflict settings.”⁵⁸ Yet “reintegration” implies some sort of return to how pre-conflict communities operated, the sort of thing that many youth seek to avoid. Youth often emerge from war with new skills, experiences, and identities, and they may have no interest in a return to the past. Employing “reintegration”

as a conceptual starting point for engaging with war-affected youth is thus inappropriate because it creates an expectation that many young people do not want and may resist. “Integration” is a far more broadly applicable and appropriate term.

The task before both governments and nongovernmental institutions is to learn from youth about their lives and what they seek *before* employing stop-gap or prefabricated measures, and then work with youth to build a positive future. This sounds unrealistic: There are too many young people with too many problems to reasonably deal with. However, the opposite is also true: There are far too many young people in unstable areas to ignore.

A prominent challenge confronting nations with youth-dominated populations is that their governments’ policies are rarely youth centered. Indeed, some governments of nations with swelling urban youth populations view them as something equivalent to, in the words of a former Tanzanian minister for labor and youth development, “anti-socials.”⁵⁹ The logic of survival and the search for a dignified existence often puts youth at loggerheads with governments yearning to preserve a social status quo where youth are subordinate. But as the stories of Ronaldo, Julius, and James illustrate, war and instability can change all that. Meanwhile, government attitudes toward youth in cities where many young people migrate “might not extend much beyond a sneer and a curled lip.”⁶⁰ This is not, to say the least, a useful starting point for productively engaging with large numbers of youthful citizens.

Ten Recommendations

The problem with the youth bulge lies not in its accuracy but how it is employed. If it is used to promote security from youth instead of security for them, then it will likely advance insecurity. If it is used to support (and not reform) regimes featuring policies and actions that both constrain and repress young people and demonstrate exclusion, injustice, inequality, corruption, and nepotism, then it will probably exacerbate existing youth frustrations with that regime. The following ten recommendations suggest ways to positively and productively engage with young people in countries where most are poor, frustrated, and alienated.

First, prioritize “youth bulge” countries. More youth should mean more investment for them, and it should be carried out in a way that is youth-centered, participatory, and empowering.

Second, stop making it worse. Institute lessons learned about counterproductive aid policies. Avoid employing a security framework toward youth because it runs the risk of further alienating already alienated youth.

Third, create a learning environment. Employ evaluators with emphatically independent, unbiased perspectives and evaluation techniques that do not aim to please their employers but, instead, search deeply into the broader context of a program's impact, whether it is positive, negative, or negligible, and how long the impact might last. Make the program accountable not to government and other elite agendas but to the target group; in this case, poor youth. Carry out baseline assessments of youth lives, learn about how youth view their challenges and place in society, and examine government and economic conditions in advance of programming involving youth. Explore why most youth resist engagement in violence. Invite youth to assist in evaluation work.⁶¹

Fourth, develop a national youth policy and make its implementation a high priority. The process should be inclusive of excluded youth voices and concerns. As Richards urges, "Basic requirements are a national youth policy and a serious budget to allow, among other things, experimentation in youth activities designed to foster social cohesion."⁶²

Fifth, highlight youth inclusion as a test of democratization and good governance. Large numbers of marginalized youth in many developing countries challenge representative governance because they tend to be inadequately represented in both government and civil society and may not vote in large numbers. Widely recognized youth leaders are often educated elites whose ability to represent and advocate for the needs and views of the marginalized youth majority is questionable. Many youth may be both victims of government misconduct and passionate advocates for responsive, accessible, and democratic governments, making them essential partners for political reform.

Sixth, expect to fail (at first). Working with alienated, disenfranchised young people is challenging. Given the still-weak evaluation record of youth programs, it is not entirely clear what will succeed. Search out and admit to existing failures, keeping the mind Vartan Gregorian's warning that "if you don't concede you have failed, everything is suspect."⁶³ Create well-resourced, participatory, adaptable programs for youth that can adjust to changing conditions and problems surfacing from the monitoring process.

Seventh, aim for the marginalized youth majority. Ensure that investments in youth are balanced by gender and directed at the particular needs and concerns of male and female youth. This should include understanding and addressing the near-invisibility of female youth and the emasculation of male youth in the many societies where this persists. Further empowering adult leaders is very likely counterproductive. Given a chance, many youth may seek to transform their cultural, social, and economic roles. Design strategic

approaches for identifying which youth should be targeted for programming, but highlight the needs of the marginalized majority.

Eighth, work with youth where they already are. Youth in cities may not be what governments and international institutions seek. Yet young people have good reasons to be in urban areas. Their presence might be a strategy for diversifying household investments, a preparatory stage before marriage, a location of choice, or a combination of these and many other factors. Large urban youth populations are a reality that must be accepted, in part because most urban youth are difficult if not impossible to move.

Ninth, network with and learn from those already working with youth. This would include religious organizations, which are often the only groups working effectively with marginalized youth.

Tenth, employ holistic approaches. Work with youth to design programs that address the most important of their concerns, which tend to include provisions for vocational training, education, and microfinance, while incorporating other needs (for example, health, basic skills, and peaceful conflict resolution).

Living in the Age of Youth

Whether we accept it or not, we are living in the age of youth. Today, the size of the youth population “is larger both numerically and proportionally than it has ever been.” Nearly half of all humans are under the age of twenty-five years, a billion are between ten and nineteen, and “with declining fertility in most of the world, there will likely never be in human history a youth cohort this large again.”⁶⁴

Yet this age of youth is contained within a climate of fear. The security orientation of most youth bulge and insecurity advocates helps to concretize the source of this fear: young men, particularly those in the Middle East and Africa. Mixing fear with youth bulge statistics is a counterproductive cocktail because it invites distortions of critical issues and distances government and nongovernmental institutions from youth, making it much tougher to discover and employ viable solutions.

The challenge confronting the global community, then, is how to accept and positively respond to the challenges and potential that young people embody. This is not going to be easy, because too many youth in developing countries occupy the ironic position of dominating societies demographically while seeing themselves as social outcasts. Providing more jobs, training, credit, and education for young people is a necessary step, because investments in youth are generally far too low in poor and war-affected nations.

But it is also likely insufficient, because the presence of a substantial proportion of a society who consider themselves to be outsiders creates important implications for governance, development, and security policy. Devising an appropriate response, in short, calls for getting government and nongovernmental agencies to think about youth in a different way; less as “leaders of tomorrow” and more as excluded citizens and essential partners.

Notes

1. Graham E. Fuller, *The Youth Crisis in Middle Eastern Society: Brief Paper* (Clinton Township, Mich.: Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2004), 12.

2. This was drawn from a first-hand interview with a former child soldier in Monrovia, Liberia.

3. Henrik Urdal, *The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict, 1950–2000*, Social Development Papers: Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction Paper 14 (Washington: World Bank, 2004), 1.

4. Ibid.

5. Richard P. Cincotta, Robert Engelman, and Daniele Anastasion, *The Security Demographic: Population and Civil Conflict after the Cold War* (Washington: Population Action International, 2003), 44.

6. Graham E. Fuller, *The Youth Factor: The New Demographics of the Middle East and the Implications for U.S. Policy*, Analysis Paper 3, Saban Center for Middle East Policy (Brookings, 2003), 2.

7. Anne Hendrixson, “The ‘Youth Bulge’: Defining the Next Generation of Young Men as a Threat to the Future,” *DifferenTakes*, Winter 2003, 2 (http://popdev.hampshire.edu/projects/dt/pdfs/DifferenTakes_19.pdf).

8. Robert D. Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey at the Dawn of the 21st Century* (New York: Random House, 1996). Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). Also see Robert D. Kaplan, “The Coming Anarchy,” *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994, 44–76.

9. Ian Bannon, “Foreword,” in *Devil in the Demographics*, by Urdal; Anne Hendrixson, “Angry Young Men, Veiled Young Women: Constructing a New Population Threat,” Corner House Briefing 34, December 2004, 2 (www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/pdf/briefing/34veiled.pdf).

10. The author was chairman of the U.S. government’s National Intelligence Council when he drafted this article. John L. Helgerson, “The National Security Implications of Global Demographic Change,” April 2002, 3–4 (www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/cia/helgerson2.htm).

11. For example, Helgerson, “National Security Implications.”

12. For example, Hendrixson, “The ‘Youth Bulge’”; Hendrixson, “Angry Young Men, Veiled Young Women.”

13. Urdal, *Devil in the Demographics*, 16.

14. Ibid., 17.

15. See Fuller, *Youth Factor*, 35.

16. In this chapter, those who highlight correlations between the youth bulge and some combination of insecurity, instability, political violence, warfare, and terrorism are referred to as “supporters” or “proponents” of the “youth bulge and insecurity” thesis.

17. Urdal, *Devil in the Demographics*, 16.

18. Gary Barker and Christine Ricardo, “Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa,” in *The Other Half of Gender: Men’s Issues in Development*, ed. Ian Bannon and Maria C. Correia (Washington: World Bank, 2006), 181.

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