



Gender, Youth, and Inclusive Peace Processes

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Abstract: While international frameworks increasingly advocate for the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda, the practical integration of young people and gender-sensitive perspectives remains inconsistent at the grassroots level (United Nations, 2015; United Nations, 2000). This study examines youth awareness of peace processes, attitudes toward gender equality, and the systemic barriers that hinder meaningful youth participation in peacebuilding initiatives. Utilizing a quantitative research design, data were collected from 75 student respondents, primarily aged 19–22, through a structured survey instrument. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to assess patterns in awareness, perceptions of gender inclusivity, and levels of youth engagement in peacebuilding activities. The findings reveal a notable “participation paradox,” wherein strong normative support for inclusion does not translate into actual engagement (Simpson, 2018). While a majority of respondents expressed support for youth-led peacebuilding and recognized gender equality as essential for sustainable peace (O’Reilly et al., 2015), more than half reported no direct involvement in peace processes. Additionally, uncertainty persists regarding whether participation opportunities are genuinely inclusive. The study concludes that positive attitudes toward inclusive peacebuilding have not translated into active participation due to structural and institutional barriers (UN Women, 2015). These findings highlight the need for stakeholders to move beyond rhetorical commitments by creating accessible and youth-centered platforms for meaningful engagement.

Keywords: *Youth Participation; Peacebuilding, Gender Equality, Youth, Peace and Security, Inclusive Peace Processes, Youth Engagement.*

1. Introduction

The inclusion of youth and gender perspectives in peacebuilding has gained increasing attention in global and local discussions on conflict resolution and social stability (United Nations, 2015; United Nations, 2000). Young people are now widely recognized as key contributors to sustainable peace due to their capacity for innovation, adaptability, and long-term engagement (Simpson, 2018). Similarly, gender equality is considered a fundamental condition for inclusive and effective peace processes (O'Reilly et al., 2015).

Despite these recognitions, the actual participation of youth—particularly young women—remains limited. This gap between recognition and implementation raises important questions about the effectiveness of current peacebuilding frameworks.

In Northeast India, these challenges are shaped by unique cultural and social contexts (Baruah, 2005). Meghalaya, for instance, is known for its matrilineal system, where lineage and inheritance are passed through women (Nongbri, 2003). Although this system suggests a relatively higher social status for women, it does not necessarily ensure equal participation in decision-making or peace processes.

This study examines this gap through the concept of the *participation paradox*, which refers to the coexistence of strong support for inclusion and low levels of actual engagement (Simpson, 2018). By focusing on student perceptions, the research aims to assess awareness, attitudes, and barriers related to youth participation in peacebuilding.

2. Literature Review

The perception of youth in peacebuilding has evolved significantly. Earlier perspectives often portrayed young people as potential sources of conflict or instability (United Nations, 2015). However, contemporary research increasingly recognizes youth as active agents of peace capable of contributing to social transformation (Checkoway, 2011; Simpson, 2018). Their participation is associated with innovative approaches and more sustainable outcomes.

Despite this shift, youth participation in formal peace processes remains limited. In many cases, Youth involvement is symbolic rather than meaningful, with minimal influence on decision-making (Hart, 1992). This highlights a gap between inclusion in principle and inclusion in practice.

Gender inclusion is another critical dimension of peacebuilding. Evidence suggests that peace processes are more effective and sustainable when women are actively involved (O'Reilly et al., 2015). However, structural barriers such as gender norms, limited access to resources, and exclusion from leadership positions continue to restrict participation (UN Women, 2015).

These challenges are particularly pronounced for young women, who experience overlapping forms of marginalization based on age and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality provides a useful framework for understanding how these multiple identities shape experiences of exclusion.

In Northeast India, cultural systems such as matriliney complicate the relationship between social status and actual participation. While women may hold symbolic or familial authority, formal decision-making structures often remain male-dominated (Nongbri, 2003; Baruah, 2005).

A key limitation in existing research is the lack of quantitative studies that measure youth perceptions of peacebuilding and inclusion (Simpson, 2018). This study addresses that gap by using survey-based data to identify patterns and trends.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by three key theoretical perspectives: youth participation, gender inclusion, and intersectionality.

Youth participation theory emphasizes the importance of involving young people as active contributors rather than passive recipients in decision-making processes (Checkoway, 2011; United Nations, 2015).

Gender inclusion highlights the need for equal access to opportunities, leadership roles, and resources in peacebuilding (United Nations, 2000; O'Reilly et al., 2015).

Intersectionality, as conceptualized by Crenshaw (1989), explains how overlapping social identities—such as age and gender—create unique experiences of marginalization.

Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for understanding the gap between support for inclusion and actual participation.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design to examine youth perceptions and participation in peace processes.

4.1 Sample

The study is based on data collected from 75 respondents, primarily aged 19–22. All participants were students, reflecting a youth population engaged in formal education. Approximately 60% of respondents were male and 40% were female. The sample does not represent non-student or marginalized youth populations, which should be considered when interpreting the findings.

4.2 Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended responses. The instrument was designed to assess awareness, attitudes toward gender equality, participation levels, and perceived barriers.

4.3 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical methods, including percentages and frequency distributions, were used to analyse the data and identify patterns in responses.

5. Results

The findings indicate a clear pattern consistent with the participation paradox. A majority of respondents expressed strong support for youth involvement in peace processes and recognized gender equality as essential for sustainable peace.

However, this support does not translate into action. More than half of the respondents reported no involvement in peace-related activities. Additionally, while many participants believed that opportunities for participation are equal, a significant level of uncertainty remains regarding whether these opportunities are genuinely accessible.

These results suggest a gap between awareness and engagement, even within a relatively educated population.

6. Discussion

The findings highlight a significant disconnect between the recognition of youth and gender inclusion and their actual implementation in peace processes (Simpson, 2018).

One important insight is that this gap exists even among students, who are generally more exposed to information and institutional opportunities. This suggests that barriers to participation are not solely due to lack of awareness but are deeply rooted in structural and institutional limitations (UN Women, 2015).

Gender dynamics further complicate participation. While respondents perceive equality in opportunities, underlying social norms may still influence who participates and whose voices are heard (O'Reilly et al., 2015).

The uncertainty expressed by participants regarding inclusivity indicates a lack of transparency and accessibility in participation mechanisms. This can discourage engagement and reinforce passive support rather than active involvement.

Overall, the findings suggest that achieving inclusive peacebuilding requires not only awareness but also the removal of systemic barriers and the creation of meaningful participation opportunities.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that strong support for inclusive peacebuilding does not necessarily translate into active participation. The persistence of structural and institutional barriers creates a gap between perception and practice, reinforcing the participation paradox. By focusing on a student population, the study reveals that even relatively advantaged youth face challenges in engaging with peace processes. This underscores the need for more effective strategies to facilitate meaningful participation.

8. Recommendations

- Develop accessible platforms for youth engagement
- Promote the participation of young women
- Increase awareness through education and outreach
- Strengthen institutional support for youth initiatives
- Ensure transparency in participation opportunities

9. Limitations

This study is limited by its reliance on a student-based sample, which may not fully represent the experiences of all youth. The relatively small sample size and use of self-reported data may also affect the generalizability of the findings.

10. Future Research

Future studies should include more diverse samples, particularly non-student and marginalized youth populations. Comparative and qualitative research approaches could provide deeper insights into participation dynamics.

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