

The Demand for a Holistic Approach to Peace: Recognizing the Role of Youth in Peace Building in Ethiopia

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Contents

Abbreviations and Acronyms	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Abstract.....	18659
1. Introduction	18660
2. Concepts of Peace Building	18661
3. The Role of Youth in Peace Building in Ethiopia.....	18662
4. The Challenges of Youth in Peace Building in Ethiopia	18664
5. Approaches on the Roles of Youth in Post Conflict situations	18666
6. Approaches to Peace Building	18667
Conclusions	18668
References	18668

Abstract

The study investigates and boldly reflects the role played by youth in the area of peace building in Ethiopia. It also briefly discusses approaches which encourage and positively promote the untapped potentials of youth in relation to peace building. In Ethiopia, youth constitute the lion share from the total population. Ethiopia has recorded impressive economic growth over the last decade and is ranked among the ten fastest growing economies in Africa. Despite its fastest economic progress in the continent the positive role of youth are not well documented. For instance, the roles played by Fano, Queerroo and other youth organizations to bring change in the country are not fairly documented. Since youth are seen as dynamic and open, they have potential to have a role both in violence promotion and in peace building. If they are provided with opportunities to socio-economic development, they can transform their roles and become actors in peace building. However, much of the literatures focus by reflecting negativity about youth towards peace building. For instance, the right based approach and economic approach link youth with violence. As the right based approach see youth as a victim of violence, the economic approach link youth as a threat of peace. However, keeping the equilibrium about the role of youth in peace building is very pivotal. Accordingly, reflecting via keeping both roles of youth as an actor of peace and vector of violence should be discuss in a fair manner. Factors which affect the role of youth in peace building in Ethiopia includes unemployment, lack of youth autonomy in decision making (dominated by top down approach of the federal government), quantity oriented

18659

educational policy and negative attitude towards the role of youth (considered as an actor of violence either victim or perpetrator). To break the vicious circle of violence a holistic approach to peace which integrates youth (by recognizing their positive role) in peace building is very important in the era of human security.

Key words: Demand, holistic, peace building, recognizing, youth, Ethiopia

Abbreviations and Acronyms

IICBA =International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa

UNESCO = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNOY = United Network of Young Peace builder

UNPFN = United Nations Peace Fund Nepal

UNR = United Nations Reports

USAID = United States Agency International Development

1. Introduction

Definitions of youth are contested (debatable), in particular by youths themselves, and fail to capture the diversity, multiplicity, complexity and divisions inherent to a category too often approached as homogeneous. As such, the justification behind young peoples' meaningful attachment in peace and security processes needs to be based on a multiple understanding of their specific and diverse needs, interests and positions (Life & Peace Institute, 2017). So as there is no common agreement as far as the definition of youth is concerned. The United Nation defines youth as those persons between the age of 15 and 24 without prejudice to other definitions by member states. The Ethiopian youth policy defines youth between the ages of 15 to 29. South Africa has used 14 to 28, India has used 15 and 35 and Uganda has used 12 to 30. The term youth is not a homogenous category and several other social factors and identities, including culture, ethnic origin, disability, gender, position as an ex-combatant, status as a refugee or migrant, role as a caregiver of younger siblings (Christian, 2019). Despite the variation in relation to who are youth, the key point is empowering youth in all areas of life can flourish development and durable peace. Accordingly, holistic approach to peace building plays a vital role in order to consolidate the skill and knowledge of youth. Youths have an indispensable link with peace building.

The issue of youth is the most urgent and pressing issue for African countries. Basically, sixty percent of the African population is inhabited by youth which is below the age of twenty five (UNOY, 2015). Majority of the Ethiopian population is inhabited by youth. Out of the total population in Ethiopia 41 percent of the population is below the age of 15, whereas more than 28 percent is aged 15 to 29 (USAID, 2017). However, youth in Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular are marginalized from policy formulation, from decision making process, many of them are unemployed. Those factors make those energized forces to involve in serious violence (Jalata, 2014). African governments should be open and pave the door for those energized group to see peaceful and prosperous Africa and the Ethiopian government too. This is supported by AU agenda 2063.

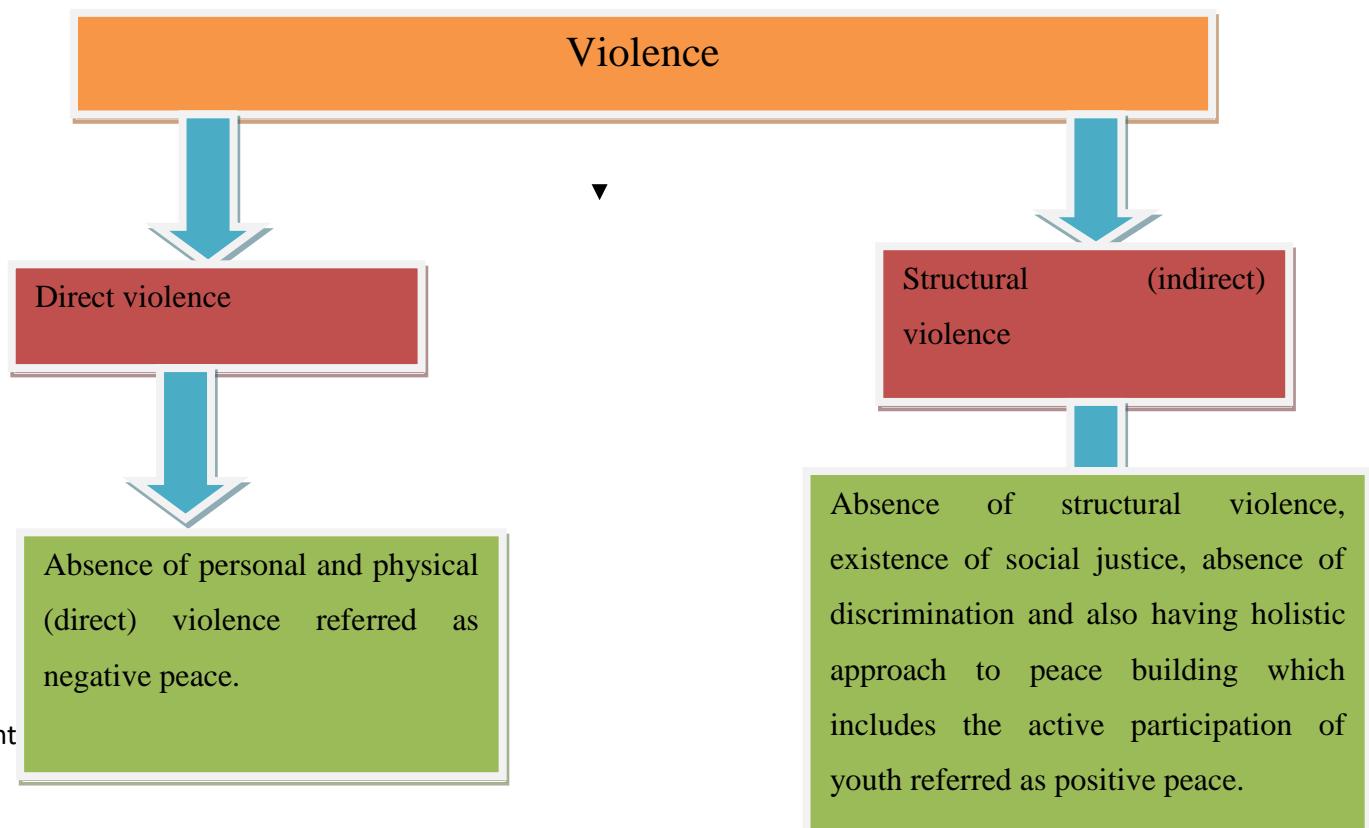
AU agenda 2063 have seven aspirations. Two of the most important are the following:

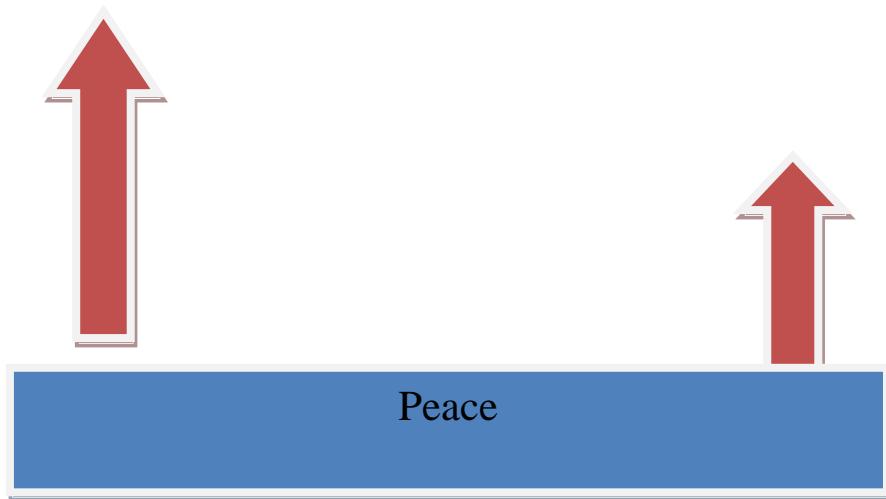
- ✓ A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.
- ✓ An Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of its women and youth. Mainly agenda 2063 give due emphasis for the role of youth in peace building and conflict resolution.

Having young population provides opportunities for development and economic growth. Contemporary, youth are subjected to violence i.e. either perpetrators or victims of violence (UNOY, 2015). The predominant image towards youths are negative i.e. they are seen as the actor of violence. Much of the studies have focus on the role of youth in violence promotion not on the promotion of peace building. If we provided opportunities to engage them in socio economic activities, they can transform their energy to peace building than to violence (Sellevold, 2012). Therefore, before we condemn youth as a victim and perpetrators of violence it is better to integrate them in various policy agenda. Are we are all interested to say welcome those youths in various issue? We should give clear answer for such questions before condemn youth as the owner of violence.

2. Concepts of Peace Building

Before going to define peace building it is better to look at the definition of peace itself. According to John Galtung,(1996) who is a well-known peace scholar, there are two types of peace: negative peace and positive peace. According to Galtung, the former type of peace refers to the absence of direct violence which is a short term solution (May or may not lead to sustainable peace). Whereas, the later types of peace according to Galutng refers to beyond the mere absence of direct violence i.e. the mere absence of direct violence i.e. the absence of both direct and indirect violence.





Source: Galtung, 1969 extended concepts of peace and violence

There are many more definitions found as far as peace building is concerned. Peace building refers to the practice and process of building and rebuilding of new relationships or the transforming of old ones. The aim of peace building is the building of peaceful, stable societies at the local, national and international arena. Peace building can be takes place either pre violent conflict erupts or post violent conflict (UNESCO-IICBA, 2017). Peace building includes all activities which are intended to tackle direct (visible), structural and cultural (invisible) violence. Peace building can only be possible if diverse needs, interests and expectations of the conflict party are addressed. As it is recognized by the United Nations Security Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security and Sustainable Development Goal, the inclusion of youth in peace building process is crucial for ensuring sustainable and inclusive peace. Young people are also often at the forefront of movements and community-based efforts around the world to advance peace, promote more equitable societies, and demand greater inclusion in decision-making for themselves and others (Christian, 2019).

3. The Role of Youth in Peace Building in Ethiopia

Ethiopia, known as the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, is a country located in the Horn and Eastern part of Africa and its capital is Addis Ababa. Ethiopia is often referred to as “the cradle of civilization.”

The economic performance of one country is mostly depending on its energetic labor force (youth). If they are well used, utilized and managed, energetic, courageous and qualified youth can make changes to the social, economic political development. Investing in youth now will lay the groundwork for Ethiopia’s future. Strategies to continue progress toward harnessing the potential of its youth will help Ethiopia to attain a demographic dividend and foster sustainable development (Abebaw, 2020). Youths from different ethnic groups play a vital role for the current Ethiopian political transition and peace building. For instance, Qeerroo and Qarree of the Gadaa system emerge from Oromo ethnic group to resist the TPLF cruel activities and guard their society and land. Similarly, different youth group like Fanno in Amhara region, Ejetto in Sidama, Berberta in Somali, Jeldim in Gambela, Yelaga in Wolaita

and others from different ethnic groups raised for the equal economic and political benefit of their respective ethnic group (Mulualem, 2019). Despite their positive contribution played by youth for the current political change in Ethiopia, their roles are not acknowledged and recognized by policy makers and academicians. Accordingly, the demand for a holistic approach to peace building which keeps the equilibrium and balance of youth as an actor of violence and peace building is fundamental.

“If youth can be such a powerful force that can destroy a whole nation, why do people overlook this resource in building peace?” (Rwandan Youth Movement Leader cited in Elaine, 2011).

According to the 2004 Ethiopian youth policy, the active participation of all segments of the society is an important element to bring about speedy political, economic and social development for any countries of the globe. Youth are not solely the receiver of new idea, but they can also innovate and create new idea like others. In order to change their energy in to fruitful activities youth are need suitable environment which is free from discrimination and other social evils. If youths cannot have favorable and conducive environment, they become passive observer of the society and will open to many more social problems. The 2004 Ethiopian youth policy has been introduced to reduce the problems of youth and to integrate them in various issue of the country. Most African countries have their own policies to address youth’s issue, but there is no success story which is true also in Ethiopia.

Low levels of socio-economic and political chances are the main contributing factors which drive the youth to engage in violent conflict. But, this does not express all youths, because many youths in conflict and post conflict situation are working to bringing peace (UNOY, 2015). Youth are underestimated as positive actors of change and key agents in peace-building, both by policy-makers and academics. They are overestimated as agents and actors of violence (Felice&Wisler, 2007). Integrating youth in various policy formulation as well as implementation is important to silent violent conflict. No need of judging and seeing youth based on their age and physical appearance (UNPFN, 2017). The smallness of their age does not mean that they think and do lower than the elderly one. Basically, as UNOY (2015) pointed the main desire to incorporate youth in peace and security area is born largely out of the perception of youth as a potential security threat in instead of a desire to work with youth as equal partners. This is also true on the part of decision makers. Decision makers talk a lot about youth but not work with youth.

Instead of incorporating youth in peace building by fearing as a potential threat it is better to think that they are play a key role for every activities of the country. Thus all stakeholders should recognize the need and involvement of youth in all area of life. A young man can be prime minister, a young man can be a manager, and a young man can do what an elderly man is doing. The same is true to a young woman. Social exclusion is the main contributing factors for the relapsing of conflict. Therefore, bringing those youth on the table and making them to involve in decision making is pivotal. Assuring the active and inclusive participation of youth (male and female) in the area of peace and security is the manifestation of democratic leadership. As aforementioned above the role of youth in peace building in Ethiopia is not well documented and recognized. Much of the literature emphasis youth as an actor of violence without keeping the truth in the ground as they can also stand to build peace.

Youth work reflects the value and principles of human right. The following are some of the value of youth work which is goes in line with human right (Commonwealth youth program, 2015).

- ❖ The liberty of individual (liberty of youth).
- ❖ Equal rights for all regardless of race, color, creed or political belief.

- ❖ The inalienable right of the individual to participate by means of free and democratic political processes in framing the society in which they live.

Africa, particularly Ethiopia and youth are similar. Both of them have untapped resources and potentials. Africa because of lack of well-developed technologies, its resources was not gives the required services, whereas youth because of absence of inclusive participation. That is why the call for an inclusive (holistic) approach to peace is really needed for Ethiopia.

4. The Challenges of Youth in Peace Building in Ethiopia

Challenges which faces youths are varied depending on circumstances. It depending on gender, age, religion and etc... For instance Muslim youths may be considered as terrorist. Female youths may be discriminate from different affaires based on their gender (UNPFN, 2017). Youth unemployment is a problem which faces most countries in Africa. This is true in the parts of Ethiopia.

Migration, unemployment, drug addiction, unfavorable policy environment and high population growth are the major problems of youth in Ethiopia (Abebaw, 2020). Asalfew, 2011 cited in Abebaw, 2020 further stated, lack of job creation skill, lack of a culture of work ethics, lack of knowledge and skill to perform jobs, rural urban migration, corruption, rapid population growth and quantity oriented educational policy are the major obstacles of youth in Ethiopia.

In Ethiopia it is usual to speak the Amharic word ‘tesfakortewal’ which is equivalent with the English word hopelessness to describe the condition of youth. Actually, to be hopeless one must have previously a good bright. It is this bright which can be cut when somebody hopeless. In steady of speaking their hopelessness of the youth the most recommended one is asking oneself what makes them to be hopeless and give clear answer for such question. If we always think as youth are the vector of violence, it can be culture and keeping going they are the owner of violence. Even such thinking pushes those youth to commit crime without their will. In Ethiopia unemployment is the main obstacle which retards the potential of youths. Youth unemployment is estimated at nearly 27 percent. The main justification behind the high level of youth unemployment in Ethiopia is low literacy rate (68 percent). The secondary school enrolment rate of Ethiopia is 39.8 percent which is inadequate for to meet the countries required man power (USAID, 2017).

A study conducted by Abyew in 2018, assessing the nature of homicide and its implication on human security a case study of Jama woreda, Ethiopia supported the above statement. Majority of the youth are unemployed. Land was distributed to the population in 1991. Only those individuals whose age was above eighteen got the land at that time, however those persons who were below the age of 18 at that time were neglected out of the land distribution, meaning people who were under the age of 18 at that time, when they became 18 year and above they start to claim land for themselves, because they cannot cover their and their family expenses. This makes the person hopelessness and in simple types of conflict the person reach at climax stage i.e. either kill or die (Abyew, 2018). One of the youth expresses the issue, why youth are more vulnerable to violence as follows:

We youth are always condemned as the owner of violence i.e. either offenders or victims. Yes of course we can be, but before making us the actors of violence there are a lot of issues the government should address. We are marginalized from decision making and various issues of the Woreda and many of us have not job. Before asking question like, why the youth are the

owner of violence? It is better to ask question like, are the youth included in various issue of the Woreda? Do they have access to job? For instance on the part of me I have one child, but I haven't anything to cover the necessary expenditure for me and my child. This makes me hopeless towards everything. Before condemning the youth the government should do its home work. In steady of making the youth as the central actor of homicide, the government should clearly identify the motives of the youth. Since there are different kinds of murder identifying motives are central. What the youth exactly would like to have? (Abyew, 2018).

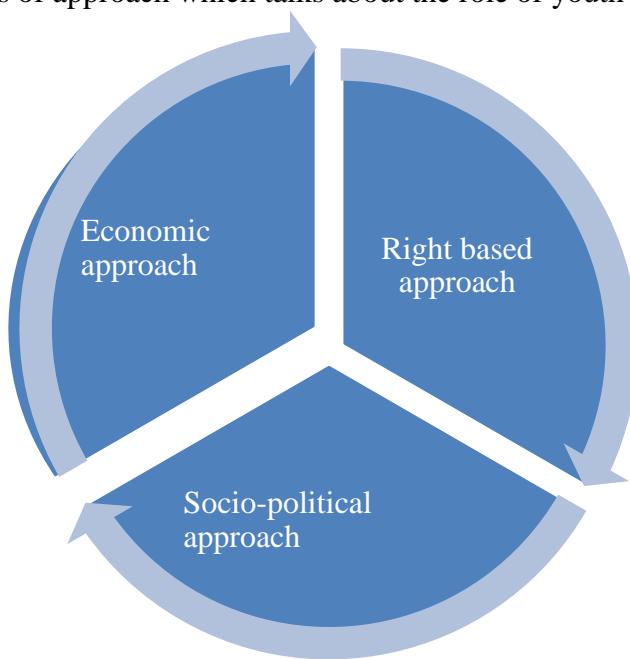
As Abyew, 2018 stated, young man is too hot when he speaks the above points. Instead of incorporating youth in peace building by fearing as a potential threat it is better to think that they are play a key role for every activities of the country. Thus all stakeholders should recognize the need and involvement of youth in all area of life. A young man can be prime minister, a young man can be a manager, and a young man can do what an elderly man is doing. The same is true to a young woman. Engaging youth in various activities are boosting the economy of one country. Actually it is not solely the enrolment of education but also the absence of job for the graduates. As Tsegaye & Broussar (2012) pointed; in Ethiopia there has not been as much job creation to provide employment opportunities to the educated job seekers. This makes youth to dissatisfied. Especially, the rural parts of the countries youth face a lot of problems. To mention some of them, primarily they are landlessness. This makes them to migrate either internally or externally for the search of job. Secondly, most of the rural youths are illiterate; this again makes them to live in harsh condition (World Bank, (2007) cited in Tsegaye & Broussar 2012). This underlined that effective youth employment policies and monitoring require understanding who are exactly unemployed youth, where they are located and types of jobs youth are engaged in. Because, having youth policy by itself is not enough to effectively engage youths in various issue of one country. This is because no monitoring program regarding on their policy. From sub Saharan African countries Ethiopia constitute the largest youth. The challenge of youth unemployment is vary from country to country. Even some country faces greater challenges than others.

Accordingly, rural youth in Ethiopia face a number of challenges including narrow skill sets, high level of illiteracy and restricted access to land. The other obstacle to youth in relation to peace building in Ethiopia is discrimination of youth in decision making. The socio-cultural context of Ethiopia is hierarchical with younger people being required to defer to those older than them in the family or community. Thus, decision making is mostly the prerogative of parents, teachers or other adults. Across the Horn of Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular, young women and men tend to be excluded from formal politics and decision-making processes. At the national level, in Ethiopia, high-entry obstacles to formal politics persist with high-level positions mostly held by older generations. This generational blockage prevents the majority of young people from accessing not only the political spheres, but also formal and informal decision-making processes at national and local levels. Formal and informal, traditional and more contemporary peace processes, comprising systems of conflict resolution, and peace agreements have mostly been the exclusive preserve of older male generations, across the Horn of Africa. This deep-rooted exclusion of young women and men from peace efforts, at different levels, is one of the most visible effects – and reinforcing factors - of the structural socio-political exclusion of youth briefly. Nevertheless, the growing recognition of the benefits of inclusiveness in peace processes, among international, national and local stakeholders, is leading to perceptible positive shifts in peace building theory and practice. (Life & Peace Institute, September, 2017).

As Rona, 2019 in his finding clearly shows that the basic and major obstacle which affect youth in the policy process is that, the state's influence on the policy environment which limited the role of youth participation to government affiliated national and regional youth federations and associations which are under the shadow of the government as they rely on it for their financial needs which in turn has affected their bargaining power. The autonomy of youth in Ethiopia is under threat due to the intervention of top down approach of the federal government (Rona, 2019). In a very general way, the absence of holistic approach to peace which is supported by discriminations of youth from decision making, from policy formulation, unemployment and lack of well documented role of youth in peace building in Ethiopia needs the demand for an inclusive approach to peace.

5. Approaches on the Roles of Youth in Post Conflict situations

There are three types of approach which talks about the role of youth in post conflict situation.

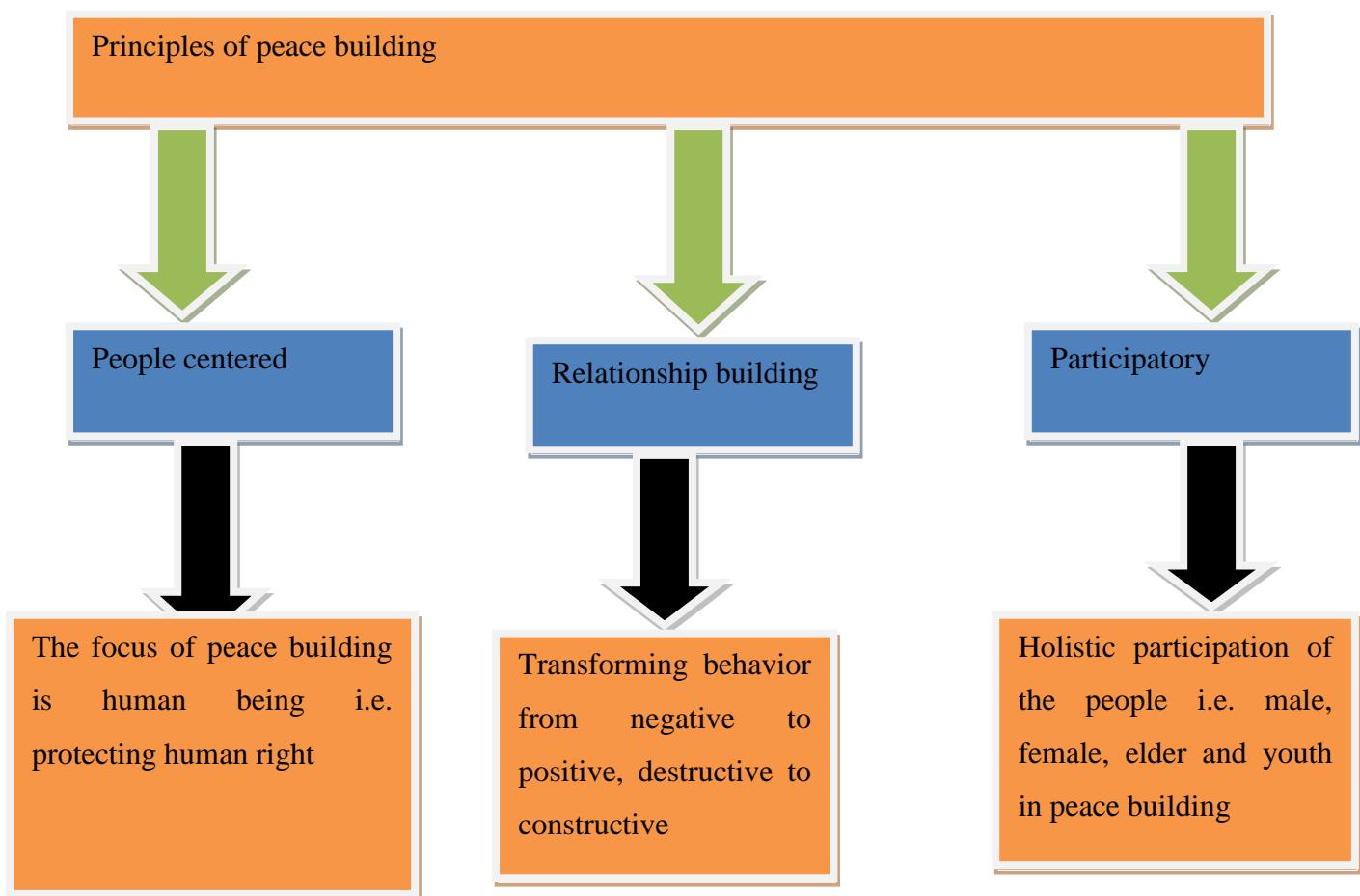


Source (Kemper, 2005)

The **right based approach** see youths as victim while the **economic approach** see youth as a threat. The third approach i.e. the **socio- political approach** see youth as a positive contribution of peace building, unlike the right based approach and the economic approach. Again according to socio-political approach youth can transfer their war capacities for promoting and consolidating peace if they are provided the different opportunities (Kemper, 2005). Youths have their specific qualities. They are energetic, dynamic, creative, resourceful and etc (Sommers, 2001). If we youth their qualities in appropriate way it is important to themselves and the society as well. But, if the needs of youth such as access to education, access to health, access to employment are not met, the qualities that they have could be used for conflict promotion instead.

6. Approaches to Peace Building

What types of peace building approach is required to integrate the youth in various issue of one country is the most urgent and pressing point. Developing an approach which see youth as potentially active in all spheres of the country is pivotal.



Source: UNESCO-IICBA, 2017

Integrating the top down and bottom up approach of peace building which is known as hybrid approach is important. Too much relying in either of the two is not important. Ethiopia should adopt a hybrid peace building approach to bring sustainable peace and development. Hybrid approach is people centered, participatory (elites, youths and NGOs) and relationship builds (Mac Ginty, 2010). The best solution is finding a sound **balance** between **top-down** and **bottom-up** strategies of peace building. The above principles of peace building are very crucial to integrate and to make the youth participatory in various issues of the country pave the road to democratization and durable peace.

- ❖ Youth are not always a vector of violence, but they are a vector of peace if we integrate them;
- ❖ Missing youth means missing development;
- ❖ Missing youth means missing peace;
- ❖ Empowering youth (men & women) means consolidating democracy and development.

Conclusions

The issue of youth in line with the concept of peace building requiring further studies from top to bottom line of the community in Ethiopia to develop brotherhood and sisterhood in all areas of peace and security. Youth can put all their efforts on valuable activities of one country if the road is open to them. Peace cannot be prevailing solely by political elites without integrating youth. It is through cooperation and integration peace can be flourished, since peace is the sum total of both the absence of direct violence (negative peace) and indirect violence (positive peace). A participatory and people centered peace building approach is pivotal. The other pressing issue is that, having youth policy is not sufficient condition to solve the obstacles of youth, but strict follow up and evaluation is requiring. Accordingly, policy implementation and evaluation (feedback) are important issue to be considered in every moment i.e. to bring durable peace. Factors which are responsible as an obstacle for youth participation in peace building includes unemployment, low level of education, discrimination from policy formulation and decision making process. In addition to the above all statements, recognizing and acknowledging the positive role of youth in peace building is very crucial for sustainable peace. All in all, in Ethiopia the role of youth in peace building is not fairly documented and acknowledged.

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