The Outcast Majority and Postwar Development: Youth Exclusion and the Pressure for Success

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Youth and the Status Quo

Across today’s developing world, unprecedentedly large youth populations are evident alongside a second predominant phenomenon: profound and persistent exclusion of youth. Rare is the case where national governments, or their international development partners, introduce a viable solution to address these dual challenges. Much too often, colossal cohorts of youthful citizens are considered security threats, to be counteracted with a mix of state repression and employment programs for a tiny fraction of the youth population. The approach is unintentionally counterproductive and heavily gendered. It is also often based on assumptions drawn from suspect evidence. The popular conception of demographic youth bulge populations as threats to social cohesion and stability is unfounded. Most female and male youth, it turns out, are peaceful, including in times of war. This chapter explains why the approach to youth exclusion isn’t working, and what can be done to transform it. The chapter draws mainly from the case of war and postwar Africa, where the distance between youth and governments and international development agencies tends to be pronounced, and where inaccurate stereotypes about young people pervade. The changes that are required necessarily move governments and international development agencies out of their comfort zone. The reason is simple: the extensive exclusion of youth underscores how the status quo doesn’t work. The proposed solutions of governments and development agencies promise to be inadequate or misguided, largely because their target group — excluded youth
majorities — usually has no say in the initiatives that governments and agencies implement. The state violence that occurs concurrently with this lack of voice merely fuels the disconnect.

The chapter concludes with a series of proposed remedies, mainly focused on the international development actors that promise to address youth exclusion by enhancing inclusiveness, relevance and receptivity in the development response. The chapter draws from the findings, analysis and reform framework of my book *The Outcast Majority: War, Development, and Youth in Africa* (Sommers 2015).

**Peaceful Youth?**

Why are most youth peaceful? The exact reverse has been a much more common perception: that youth (male youth in particular) are threats to their own societies. The starting point for this assertion begins with youth bulge demographics, a trend that has become a dominant force in recent decades in the developing world. By 2006, 86 percent of all youth (1.3 billion) were in developing countries (World Bank 2006, 4). The rate of youth in developing countries has slowed but is still rising: 90 percent of the world’s youth will be in developing countries by 2025 (Zeus 2010, 7). The youngest overall population on the planet lies in Sub-Saharan Africa, which “will remain the youngest region in the world in the decades to come” (Filmer and Fox 2014, 26).

A “youth bulge” is thought to exist when an unusually large proportion of the adult population is constituted of youth. One published source asserts that the youth bulge threshold arrives when youth comprise more than 40 percent of all adults in a population (Cincotta et al. 2003, 43). Current approaches to youth challenges during and after wars routinely emphasize the potential of male youth to promote instability and violence. Some commentators have emphasized the correlation between populations with youth bulge demographics and the likelihood of violence or social disturbance (Goldstone 2002; Mesquida and Weiner 1999; Urdal 2004; Zakaria 2001). Related to this assertion is the idea that many male youth are apt to rebel violently when given the chance (Cincotta et al. 2003; Collier et al. 2006; Kaplan 2000), in particular those in countries with strong urbanization levels (Goldstone 2010). Quantitative correlations have been highlighted, in short, to propose that when unusually large numbers of male youth are around, societies can become dangerously unstable and political conflict can result.

Further research has questioned this assertion. Among the key issues is that many youth bulge countries have never had major conflicts while others have emerged from conflict and never returned to it (as in Sub-Saharan Africa: Sommers 2011). In addition, when wars do take place, “only a minority of young men participate in conflicts” (Barker and Ricardo 2006, 181). Furthermore, large youth populations in cities have been found to moderate, not increase, the risk of social disturbance (Urdal and Hoelscher 2009). Recent research also has challenged the idea that male youth are the “protagonists of virtually all violent political action as well as political extremism with a potential to threaten democracy” (Weber 2013, 335). In contrast, researchers have uncovered a direct relationship between youth bulge populations and state repression. The research highlights a tendency for states to apply proactive force toward youth-dominated populations, as by restricting rights or instigating arrests, disappearances and violence (Nordås and Davenport 2013). Finally, questions have also been raised about the touted connection between youth unemployment and violent unrest (Cramer 2010; Izzi 2013; Walton 2010). Drivers of youth violence have been found to be tied more directly to issues of poor governance and exclusion than to unemployment (Mercy Corps 2015).

In the end, the tantalizing data on the perceived danger of “too many young men with not enough to do” (Cincotta et al. 2003, 44) largely surfaces when members of the target group — male youth/young
men — are not interviewed. Overwhelmingly, the data that supports the “youth bulge and instability thesis” is quantitative. Qualitative interviews with male (and female) youth could reveal how and why most youth resist engagement in violence, even when they live with inequality, state violence routinely directed against many of them, significant social and cultural constraints, and poverty. Nearly all youth experiencing all of this and more — and with no reasonable expectation of support or recognition coming their way from government or international actors — nonetheless regularly resist contributing to violence or conflict. Exactly why most youth resist engagement in violence — despite the prospect of exclusion and failed adulthood, as shortly will be explained — remains under examined. Fortunately, evidence highlighting the role of youth as agents for positive change is beginning to emerge (for example, Ankomah 2005; Ensor 2013; Law et al. 2014).

War and the Sea of Exclusion

Given the substantial attention paid to youth by so many researchers, governments and development professionals, the absence of an agreed-upon definition for youth is remarkable. The broad trend is to define youth by a simple age range. Richard P. Cincotta, Robert Engelman and Daniele Anastasion (2003, 43), for example, define youth (or young adults) as people between ages 15 and 29. However, the United Nations typically employs a 15-to-24 age range (UNESCO [n.d.]), while the United States Agency for International Development uses ages 10 to 29 (USAID 2012, 4). For a great many African governments, the youth category extends from age 14 or 15 up to age 35 (as in Sierra Leone, Rwanda and many others). No common definition for youth exists for the multitude of international institutions and governments that are concerned with them.

Cultural definitions of youth in Africa connect directly to a pervasive form of youth exclusion. Being a youth often is considered a stage of life between childhood and adulthood. The process has less to do with age than with gaining recognition as a man or woman. But in most (if not all) African countries, it is nearly impossible for most youth to attain womanhood or manhood. Male youth in Rwanda, for example, must build a house before getting married and becoming a parent. Yet, most can’t get off square one: completing a house is impossible for nearly everyone.

Three dimensions of the tragic situation in Rwanda are particularly notable:

• First, many male youth in rural Rwanda drop out of school to work. While the pay tends to be low, one primary purpose is to save money to build a house. Yet extensive field interviews with youth in Rwanda made it clear that male youth suspected they would never complete their house. A common comment from male youth was that they had no choice — cultural expectations forced many of them to try to build a house. In such a situation, failed manhood is practically guaranteed.

• Second, Rwandan government villagization policies have made the house construction task substantially more difficult. State mandates for where all new houses must be built (in collective imidugudu villages) and their size (a government official surmised that the state requirement for house size was six times what an ordinary male youth could afford to build [Sommers 2012, 128]) were considerable obstacles.2

1 The literature on the youth and instability thesis has been reviewed by the author at length in prior works (Sommers 2015; 2011; 2007; 2006).

2 The imidugudu villages and their impact on Rwandan youth are described thus: “There is a government regulation that directly and negatively affected youth efforts to construct houses: the national policy mandating that all new houses in rural areas should be built in community housing areas known as imidugudu” (Sommers 2012, 25).
The third notable dimension concerns how a female youth secures socially accepted womanhood. In Rwanda and very far beyond, female youth cannot gain social recognition as women if they don’t marry (and then have children). But if male youth can’t secure the necessary pre-marriage requirements, then neither male nor female youth can marry.

While Rwanda is on the cusp of having almost an entire generation of youth who are failed adults (Sommers 2012, 193), the failed adulthood trend reportedly is pervasive across all of Africa. As Alcinda Honwana (2012, 165) notes, “Youth are the majority of Africa’s population, but they have been pushed to the margins of their societies and live in a limbo between childhood and adulthood.” Even African youth who eventually attain adulthood may not be safe: Irit Eguavoen (2010, 268) finds in Africa that “there is growing empirical evidence that the social status of adulthood may be reversed if the individual falls back into poverty, which means that young adults are socially delegated back to youth status and, as a direct consequence, denied full adult rights, again resulting in low social status and limited access to resources and political decision making.”

The cultural exclusion of African youth (and the resulting social identification as a failed man or failed woman) is routinely overlooked by governments and international institutions. A second pervasive yet regularly sidestepped form of exclusion is systemic. State laws, policies and regulations, together with traditional practices, can prevent most female and male youth from gaining access to valuable assets such as land. In addition, education systems across Africa (and elsewhere) are structured to exclude most young people from attending secondary school. One relative success of the UN Millennium Development Goals has been Target Two: expanding access to primary school. Even war-affected countries in Africa have managed to secure high levels of primary school attendance. But across much of Africa, limited proportions of youth attend secondary school. A UNICEF survey, for example, reports that the average net attendance rate for secondary school in the Sub-Saharan African region (in 2009–2015) was 38 percent. More than half of the 43 countries (53.5 percent) had average rates that were less than a third of all secondary-school-age youth. Some war-affected countries had exceptionally low rates, in particular Somalia (5 percent) and South Sudan (8 percent), as well as Angola (19 percent), Burundi (17 percent), Central African Republic (18 percent), Chad (17 percent), Côte d’Ivoire (27 percent), Eritrea (22 percent), Ethiopia (15 percent), Liberia (26 percent), Mali (27 percent), Mozambique (24 percent), Rwanda (23 percent) and Uganda (20 percent). It is worth noting that much larger proportions of youth in a small handful of Sub-Saharan African nations affected by conflict attend secondary school: the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (48 percent), Namibia (60 percent) and Sierra Leone (45 percent). Despite these promising exceptions, 

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3 The youth situation described here is detailed in the author’s *Stuck: Rwandan Youth and the Struggle for Adulthood* (University of Georgia Press, 2012). A proposed remedy to Rwanda’s crippling adulthood mandates is as follows: “Local and national conversations about how youth gain acceptance as men and women promises to initiate a reconsideration of adulthood mandates” (Sommers 2012, 236–37). Such discussions also are required in other nations where youth struggle to gain acceptance as adults.

4 The African Development Bank describes the situation: “Most countries in Africa have achieved universal primary enrolment, with rates above 90 per cent. As a result, the continent as a whole is expected to achieve Goal 2 [of the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs]. Low completion and high grade repetition remain a challenge, however. Indeed, one in three pupils enrolled in a primary school will dropout. Reasons include late entry, poverty, poor quality of education and a lack of awareness of the importance of schools. Some 30 per cent of students with six years of schooling cannot read a sentence, and girls are more likely to drop out than boys” (African Development Bank [n.d.]).
nearly two in three secondary-school-age youth in Sub-Saharan African are not in secondary school (UNICEF 2016).

Most African youth know that their prospects for social acceptance and conventional success are exceedingly low. Securing adulthood is often even more difficult than gaining access to (and then graduating from) secondary school. The chances of gaining access to vocational school or a youth program of any kind also are slim. The following irony thus serves as the starting point for understanding African youth: while youth are demographically dominant, most see themselves as members of an outcast minority.\(^5\)

The awareness and reality of youth as outliers in their own societies was a pronounced trend in my field research in 15 war-affected African nations. It also has been noted by others about African youth. Eguavoen (2010), for example, introduces the concept of “adults without adult status” to describe the extended effort that is required to gain social recognition as an adult in Africa. He defines his concept as “individuals who have not succeeded in establishing themselves socially as adults by getting married, finding their own household and/or being able to take economic care of themselves and dependents.” He also warns that “The group of people who fail to become social adults because of poverty is constantly growing in number, as well as in age” (2010, 268). Mats Utas (2005b, 150) highlights the plight of male urban youth in Liberia to underscore how African youth can be trapped in a situation from which seemingly they cannot escape: “Due to economic crisis and increasing dependence on the central state in the 1980s an ever-growing number of young people in urban and semi-urban environments were excluded even from the possibilities of becoming adults. Possibilities to participate in the wage economy diminished and education ceased having any importance. With this crisis looming, many young men lost even the possibility to establish themselves as adults, by building a house, or getting married—even though they continued to become fathers, of children for whom they could not provide.”

The situation often is similarly dim for female youth. Research has found that in many African countries the ability of female youth to gain social recognition as a woman “depends on having a man or male youth to marry” (Sommers 2015, 77). Since frequently there are few male youth able to get married, many female youth cannot escape a future as a failed woman. The tragedies of failed manhood and womanhood are intimately and directly linked.

The inability to escape life on the edge of society is infused in accounts of the lives of both male and female youth in war and postwar Africa. The humiliating prospect of living as a failed adult pushes some female and male youth to join (or accept life in) military groups. Utas underscores how life as a soldier for former Liberian military leader and president Charles Taylor allowed youth to do things they otherwise could not achieve. He describes how male Liberian soldiers would wash their cars in beer, “a beverage most could not even afford to drink prior to the war — and that they could drive a car until it ran out of gasoline and then just dump it for another one. Likewise, the young girlfriends [also affiliated with Taylor’s army] got hold of commodities that they had only dreamt of before” (Utas 2005a, 66). Yet, failing to access a secondary school education, gain social recognition as an adult man or woman, much less secure stable employment, has created other difficulties as well. A significant field research finding in war-affected African countries such as Burundi, Rwanda and Sierra Leone is the presence of large numbers of unmarried mothers among the female youth population. This outcome is partly a result of a simple fact noted above: often there appears to be no one for many female youth to marry, since male youth struggle and frequently fail to secure the prerequisites of marriage. In the

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\(^5\) This irony marks the starting point for analysis, noted in Sommers (2015, 3).
meantime, female youth may have relations with male youth or older men that result in offspring. Some enter into informal, live-in arrangements with the father of their child or children. If the father cannot support his new family, he may leave. Unmarried motherhood and the resultant children constitute a profound yet largely overlooked youth phenomenon.6

Female youth also may be victimized by sexual violence during and after wars. The prevalence of sexual violence in war zones is thought to increase significantly if forced recruitment into military forces is prevalent (Cohen 2009, 21). That said, Dara Kay Cohen’s research also found that “levels of sexual violence in one-third of the wars in Sub-Saharan Africa were low” (ibid., 9). Where sexual violence is prevalent, one of its most tragic consequences is how it can undermine adjustment into postwar life for girls and female youth. Susan Shepler (2010, 97) dramatizes the difficulties that some girls and female youth faced in postwar Sierra Leone. She observed that “in many cases it is easier for a boy to be accepted after amputating the hands of villagers than it is for a girl to be accepted after being the victim of rape.” Girls and female youth who were associated with military groups during wars tend to face particular difficulties in postwar Africa. One review of former girl combatants in Angola, Mozambique and northern Uganda found that, following their return to civilian life, they encountered “profound invisibility and seemingly unrelenting victimisation... during and following armed conflict” (Denov 2008, 831). In eastern DRC, the level of social stigmatization for “girls formerly associated with armed forces and groups” was found to be so severe that “some of the girls see returning to [their former armed group] as an alternative to staying at home and [enduring] discrimination and insults” (Tonheim 2012, 287, 289). The findings are not, however, uniformly dispiriting. One field study of former women and girl combatants in northern Uganda found that, following their return to their homes, “social acceptance [of them] is high, many women and girls are psychologically resilient, and there is little evidence of aggression and violence” against them (Annan et al. 2011, 879).

A second irony about youth and war frames the frustrations that youth face after surfacing from the crucible of war. It is this: the military commanders who exploit children and youth during times of war (by abducting and exploiting them, often in extreme ways) frequently are the same ones who recognize their remarkable talents, resilience and sheer tenacity. Boys and girls fighting in militias fight on the front lines, may serve as combat commanders and perform dangerous, high-risk surveillance behind enemy lines. While many may become victims and perpetrators of extreme sexual violence, they also may be forced to develop skills as caregivers. Sometimes they must rely on ingenuity simply to survive in hostile environments, often without food or shelter. These youngsters, in addition to being abused in the extreme by their commanders, nonetheless demonstrate courage, shrewdness, smarts, toughness, imagination and resourcefulness. Military commanders (including notorious warlords such as Liberia’s Charles Taylor) recognize and make use of the diverse abilities of child and youth soldiers. War zones, despite their traumatic and debilitating dimensions, also can provide young people with opportunities for self-discovery. It is a sad fact of contemporary war that, perhaps more than any other group of adults, warlords and other military commanders recognize the talents and unsinkable nature of youngsters in their midst.

**Development Pressures and Tendencies**

According to some observers, governments and the international development enterprise seem to have hit their stride in recent years. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for instance,
has proclaimed that “all groups and regions” in the Global South “have seen notable improvement” in all features of UNDP’s Human Development Index (HDI). UNDP adds that “the South has risen at an unprecedented speed and scale” (UNDP 2013, 1). As for Sub-Saharan Africa, UNDP predicts that “By 2050, aggregate HDI could rise 52%” (ibid., 5). Similarly upbeat descriptions of Africa’s current and future situations have surfaced elsewhere (see, for example, One 2013 and Radelet 2010). Things seem to be going great.

An increasingly common trademark of institutions and experts trumpeting dramatic success in international development is their overwhelming reliance on quantitative data. A second tendency in many publications describing Africa’s positive transformation is that they emerge from institutions likely to benefit from pronouncements about such achievements. It is difficult not to imagine some degree of self-interest in the proclamations of progress from donor and implementing agencies. While such publications spotlight types of progress for Africa, it also is evident that little of this success has cascaded down to many members of its burgeoning youth population. Qualitative studies of African youth, including those affected by conflict, tend to tell a very different story. See, to name just a few examples, Christopher Maclay and Alpaslan Özerdem (2010) on Liberia, Desiree Lwambo (2011) and Koen Vlassenroot and Frank Van Acker (2001) on eastern DRC, Sommers (2012) on Rwanda, Danny Hoffman (2011) on Sierra Leone and Liberia, Henrik Vigh (2006) on Guinea-Bissau, Mike McGovern (2011) on Côte d’Ivoire, and Honwana (2012) on the entire continent. Too many African youth, the collective research suggests, appear to be in freefall.

Interviews with 28 officials from donor and non-governmental organizations, as well as youth, development and evaluation experts, support this general assessment of the gap between youth and development practice. There were numerous findings arising from these interviews. Two will be shared here. The first highlighted the narrow nature of development perspectives. The officials and experts who were interviewed highlighted how development institutions (as well as governments) tend to think in terms of sectors (also known as silos or stovepipes) such as health, education, agriculture, water and sanitation, economic development and governance. The sectoral prism for examining development challenges is narrow. As one donor official explained, “We have fragmented, siloed, sector-based programs” (Sommers 2015, 155). The sectoral stovepipes tend to predetermine what agencies will do and where they will invest their funds. The orientation runs the risk of cultivating unintended disjunctures with everyday realities. For example, while wars have been found to fuel youth movement into cities and informal sectors, international development work often focuses on the opposite: agriculture and the formal economy. Such decisions may not be driven by information on the ground as much as by what sector-dominated organizations aim to do.

A second orientation emerges from pressure on donor and implementing agencies to succeed. It is a striking and extraordinary expectation, as it implies that just about everything agencies invest in must work. The attitude is exemplified by the Canadian government’s Aid Effectiveness Agenda, which “delivers results and demonstrates value for every dollar invested in international development” (Canadian International Development Agency 2012, 1). The orientation on successful investment dovetails with an extraordinary fixation in the international development world on things you can count to demonstrate achievement. The fixation often is referred to as “numbers” or “metrics.”

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7 UNDP describes the Human Development Index as “a composite measure of indicators along three dimensions: life expectancy, educational attainment and command over the resources needed for a decent living” (UNDP 2013, 1).

8 The remainder of this section draws from Chapter Four of The Outcast Majority: War, Development, and Youth in Africa (Sommers 2015, 154–75).
Often it boils down to the concept of “indicators.” An evaluation expert defined indicators as “signs of change” that are quantifiable (Sommers 2015, 158): the numbers of people an initiative trained, for example, or how many people participated in a program.

The interview data indicated that pressure on donor agencies to demonstrate the success of a program from the first quarter of a youth program puts unusual pressure on implementing agencies. Privately, implementing agency officials related that, to respond to high expectations of success, they may be forced to pluck well-adjusted (and mostly male) youth to be participants of a youth program, since such youth have a better chance of engendering program success. Many donor officials who were interviewed reported that they were aware of this strategy. As one related, “Those youth in the greatest need are not often reached. Programs focus on elite youth because they’re easier to get” (ibid., 164).

In other words, a youth program producing upbeat indicators and touted by donors and implementers as successful could, in fact, do just the opposite by promoting inequality; undermining efforts to address youth poverty or exclusion; and demonstrating (in cases where the elite youth in programs are connected directly to influential government officials) support for unpopular, and perhaps nepotistic and corrupt governments. In addition, research with youth who are desperate for assistance but routinely are left out of such programs revealed an issue that program evaluations rarely examine: the impact of youth programs on those who can’t get into them. It is entirely conceivable that youth programs marked as successful (thanks to their positive indicators) simultaneously may promote rage or fatalism among youth left out of such programs. This particularly may be the case for initiatives where elite and favoured youth are participants while members of the outcast youth majority are, once again, left out and overlooked. Taken together, the findings suggest that international development work, in general, is currently not orientated to address the priorities of excluded youth.

A Framework for Reform

International development work is largely ineffective and inefficient in reaching marginalized youth, including war-affected African youth, who are among those most in need of acceptance and support. The development status quo does not appear to be working for most youth. It is unlikely that the current approach can succeed. Development techniques and approaches tend to reach tiny proportions of young people (many of whom may be elites) with initiatives that often are not informed by the priorities of outcast youth majorities. What follows are some ideas from the detailed framework featured in The Outcast Majority (Sommers 2015, 187–200), for collectively supporting a process to reverse this trend and tap into the reserve of tenacity, ingenuity and diverse skills that youth in war and postwar Africa, and elsewhere, have to offer. Here is a sampling of ideas from the framework:

- **Place excluded female and male youth at the centre of development work.** If colossal populations of young people (in Sub-Saharan Africa and well beyond) dominate developing country populations, and most of them endure systemic, cultural and other forms of exclusion, then focusing on their priorities and reversing the factors that exclude most young people should rest at the centre of development work.

- **Conduct sound assessment research of the priorities and circumstances of marginalized youth.** The starting point for development work should be what excluded youth majorities require — not what governments and development institutions are prepared to provide. The research should have two purposes. First, it should uncover both
the priorities of prominent subgroups of marginalized youth majorities (rural and urban, male and female, and so on) and the main causes of youth exclusion. Second, it should propose detailed policy and programming responses, with roles for governments and development actors, that address youth priorities and counteract the primary factors that exclude young people. High-quality, trust-based, mainly qualitative research methods rest at the core of this endeavour, as they promise to draw out and empower youth to share their views and detail the situations they face. Accordingly, the tendency to rely on focus group interviews for information on youth should be reconsidered. Focus groups tend to be structured and hierarchical settings that are prone to promoting the views only of those who speak (quite often, educated elites). Interviewing youth in peer groups, which are unstructured, informal gatherings of young people with similar backgrounds, is recommended. After conducting research with young people for more than two decades, I have found that youth in peer groups are much more likely to speak openly, honestly and frankly about their lives.

- **Rebalance policy and program work.** The development world seems to be awash with sophisticated programs that ultimately reach small numbers of people. Even a large youth development program may reach, at best, 0.001 percent of all youth in a country. This orientation toward programs for the few must change. The proposed initial research of marginalized youth lives (detailed above) promises to reveal the primary forces (that is, policies, practices and players) that are marginalizing youth and collapsing their options for stability and advancement. There may be policies that keep youth out of secondary and vocational school, make them vulnerable to exploitation in informal economies, severely limit youth access to land, marriage, credit, housing and adulthood, and deny them protection from predatory state actors (such as members of the police, intelligence or military). Working to reverse such policies and practices, and to limit the abuses of actors who exploit young people, should become a top priority for international development actors. Advocating to reverse forces that exclude youth is especially important in countries where it is too dangerous for citizens to do so. The case of Rwanda, detailed earlier, is instructive. Youth and government officials alike highlighted the profound and negative impact of the government's villagization policies (Sommers 2012). In countries such as Rwanda, where not even government officials dare question sacrosanct policies, international actors must advocate against policies and practices that debilitate and marginalize youth majorities. Programs for youth should, in turn, draw from youth assessments (again, noted above) to target particular subsets of excluded youth populations strategically and in line with their priorities. But development actors should keep in mind that policy and practice reform has the potential to reach exponentially more youth lives than nearly all programs. This work should become central to development practice.

- **Cultivate learning environments for policy and program work.** Pressures to demonstrate success may drive international donors and implementers toward practices that have little or nothing to do with reversing youth exclusion. Instead, the context for success may be internal, driven by institutional expectations and procedures. Such an environment is not conducive to learning how to reach youth majorities on the margins. Having the freedom to make and learn from mistakes is. A key component of
learning how to reach and support excluded youth populations — through effective advocacy and targeted programming — is to institute high-quality, independent evaluation research that pinpoints promising as well as challenging results (and, yes, failures). Such an environment rarely is allowed to exist, much less thrive: research for *The Outcast Majority* revealed how donor and implementing agency officials often have an exceptionally low regard for the quality of their own evaluations. As one donor official recalled about evaluations produced under his watch, most were “just whitewashing. As I look back on the M&E [monitoring and evaluation] of programs I was involved with, it was pathetic” (Sommers 2015, 174). All evaluations should investigate the impact of programs on those who cannot access them. Evaluators also should cease employing biased terms such as “beneficiary” until positive program impact has been established.

Prevailing trends in international development work call for significant improvements in how development is envisioned, implemented and assessed. Most fortunately, concern about the need to respond to huge youth populations — in war-affected contexts and in developing countries more broadly — is on the rise. Significantly, the tendency for most youth to support peace also is beginning to be recognized: the new United Nations Security Council Declaration 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security effectively turns the tables on perceptions of youth, especially male youth, as promoters of violence and instability. Instead, it highlights their real and potential roles as contributors to peace building (United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases 2015). Declaration 2250 underscores the need to position youth, excluded youth majorities in particular, at the centre of how peace building and development action is defined and practised.

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Works Cited


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9 www.youth4peace.info/UNSCR2250_


