

# POLICY BRIEF

## UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL FOR YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY

### THE IMPORTANCE OF OPERATIONAL CAPACITY FOR YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS IN CAMEROON



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## **Unlocking the Potential for Youth, Peace and Security: The Importance of Operational Capacity for Youth Organizations in Cameroon**

### **About us:**

Local Youth Corner Cameroon (LOYOC) is a youth-led civil society organization created in 2002. The organization currently applies research and capacity building among its methodologies to support youth and community development, peace building, conflict transformation, and countering/preventing violent extremism (P/CVE). Over the past years, LOYOC Cameroon has focused special attention on peacebuilding activities, facilitating dialogues and building social cohesion between communities, supporting livelihood programs as peacebuilding tools and putting young people at the forefront of processes.

### **Note:**

This paper draws from field opinions and exchanges captured during the series of Operational capacity-building sessions organised by LOYOC in the ten regions of Cameroon as part of the YOUNG Cameroon project implemented with Search for Common Ground with funding from the European Union. The paper brings forth solid recommendations on how operational capacity for youth-led organisations can be used in unlocking the potential of young people to implement the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) in Cameroon. The brief provides a concise analysis to inform current debates and decision-making. Key findings and recommendations are listed on the first and second pages to allow busy readers to quickly grasp the main points. **Copyright:** The brief as a whole is vested in Local Youth Corner Cameroon and the author, and no part may be reproduced in whole or in part without the express permission, in writing, of both the author and the publishers.

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## ❖ **Key Findings**

- Many youths peace-building organisations are not properly structured with the necessary systems in place to make them compliant with national and global standards for CSO organisations.
- Aside from internal rules and regulations, many youth organisations are not aware of and do not have policies that could effectively guide their programmatic, financial, and administrative functioning.
- Youth peace-building organisations hardly receive funding because they need to meet operational compliance requirements from donors. Most are not able to meet the need for audited financial statements, among others. 2% of organisations we spoke with have raised more than 100,000 USD per year, thanks to operational compliance with donors.
- Young people think that if they are trained in financial management and procedures, project management, and institutional management, they will become more impactful in their peacebuilding efforts.
- Upon engaging with youth CSOs, it was confirmed by 100% of respondents that there is a pressing need for assistance in formulating robust policies and procedures for their organizations. Such frameworks are essential for enhancing their capacity to engage effectively and efficiently in resource mobilisation efforts.
- Numerous young leaders within peacebuilding CSOs demonstrate remarkable passion for effecting change and addressing prevalent issues in their communities. However, amidst their fervour, there is often a tendency to overlook the importance of enhancing their skill sets and establishing sustainable structures necessary for the longevity of their projects and programmes.
- Many youth CSOs are faced with the challenge of sustaining themselves as youth organizations. Maintaining the youth-leadership component disappears as the founding leaders transition into adults and are not able to pass on their capacity to the younger generation.

## ❖ Key Recommendations

### For Development Partners, Government Structures and Youth Organizations

- Youth organisations indicated the need for development partners to provide training and resources to enhance their skills and knowledge in the areas of programming, resource mobilisation, financial management, reporting, and strategic planning. It is believed that development partners are endowed with the necessary operational capacity that fits international standards and that local organisations can benefit from their expertise.
- Development partners and donors are called upon to offer financial support through grants, seed funding, or access to investment opportunities to help youth organisations build their operations and enhance their programmes.
- There is a need to facilitate connections between local youth organisations and big organisations working on YPS who can serve as potential mentors and stakeholders within the development sector to help these small youth organisations expand their reach and impact.
- Development partners have to provide technical expertise and guidance in areas such as monitoring and evaluation, programme design, and organisational development to ensure that youth organisations are operating effectively.
- All organisations, governmental and non-governmental, should adopt policies and practices that support youth organisations in advocating for their causes and representing their interests at local, national, and international levels, helping them amplify their voices and influence policies, especially for organisations working on YPS.
- Youth organisations recognise the unique needs and opportunities for development partners to share best practices, research, and data to inform the work of youth organisations working on YPS as a way to enable them to learn from successful approaches and innovative solutions.

## **Introduction:**

“How can our organisation champion peace when our project proposals always get rejected because we do not have an audited financial statement or the necessary human resource or procedure manuals to convince a donor to finance us?”<sup>1</sup>. It is no longer a secret that one of the biggest challenges faced by young people in CSO is their operational capacity. Though young people are very passionate about bringing about change, it has been increasingly seen that their inability to properly run their organisation and manage their projects has affected their ability to mobilise resources and amplify their impact. A 2019 study noted that over 60% of youth-led peace-building CSO organisations operate under 300 USD per annum; so how do we expect young people with no ability to raise and manage resources to lead YPS in Cameroon?<sup>2</sup>

Today, it is undeniable that youth organisations play a vital role in leading and implementing transformative initiatives towards building a safe, secure, and prosperous world. These organisations serve as platforms for young people to voice their concerns, develop skills, and initiate projects that address various social, economic, and environmental issues. As noted in the UN Secretary General’s Second Report on YPS, the core challenges facing young people remain the structural barriers limiting their participation and their capacity to influence decision-making.<sup>3</sup>

However, for youth organisations to effectively carry out their missions and mandate in driving meaningful impact for peace and sustainable development, it is crucial to emphasise the significance of building and maintaining operational capacity. In this case, operational capacity refers to the ability of these organisations to manage their day-to-day functioning, manage the resources they mobilise, effectively deliver and report on their projects and programmes, and develop and use policies and procedures to ensure compliant management. Aantjes C. J. et al. (2022) reflect on the correlation between capacity development, processes, and outcomes to conclude that organisations with more operational capacity will have a greater impact on society. This is truer as, during Local Youth Corner Cameroon’s YOUNG Cameroon project, the 50 youth-led peace-building organisations that we piloted operational capacity-building training with from across the 10 regions affirmed that the training was an eye-opener since it allowed them to see where

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<sup>1</sup> This is the reflection a young CSO leader in the city of Douala shared

<sup>2</sup> Local Youth Corner Cameroon (2019), Youth and Peace Process in Cameroon: Opportunities and Challenges

<sup>3</sup> Second Report of the Secretary-General on Youth, Peace and Security (2022) [https://www.youth4peace.info/second\\_SGreport\\_YPS](https://www.youth4peace.info/second_SGreport_YPS)

they were failing and provided them with an understanding of how to manage their team and manage and report the resources they mobilize. They attested that they would become better peace-building organisations with the ability to do more impactful projects.

In one of these training sessions, a young person asked:

*“How do we effectively participate in developing and implementing the youth peace and security agenda when our organisation will not have the capacity to mobilise the resources and manage the projects that will lead us to this? Don’t only tell us about YPS; teach us how to manage our organisations, which will be key partners in advancing this agenda. We are passionate about peace, but we need to know how to manage our organisation and mobilise resources, which will help us achieve peace.”<sup>4</sup>*

This brief thus explores the evidence captured from field interactions with 50 youth-led peace-building organisations that participated in a nationwide operational capacity-building training organised by Local Youth Corner Cameroon as part of the YOUNG Cameroon project in response to the challenge facing youth organisations.

### **What does operational capacity mean to young peacebuilders?**

It is believed that enhancing the operational capacity of youth organisations is essential for maximising their potential as drivers of positive change. By investing in areas such as organisational development, financial management, resource mobilisation, communication and advocacy, and monitoring and evaluation, young people and youth movements can be more efficient in their peace-building efforts and in championing the YPS Process in Cameroon. For this reason, building the capacity of these organisations ensures their resilience, effectiveness, and ability to address pressing challenges faced by young people in achieving YPS in Cameroon. In the voice of a Cameroonian youth leader, operational capacity stands as a strong weapon in arming youth organisations to engage at the forefront of issues that concern them.

However, operational capacity building can sometimes be time-consuming and resource-intensive, diverting attention and resources away from more pressing issues around engaging the active participation of young people in peacebuilding. But still, it remains important, as we find many youth-led organisations in Cameroon often faced with limited resources and unique challenges, such as limited access to funding and experienced staff.

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<sup>4</sup> A Youth participant at the YOUNG Cameroon Operational Capacity Building training session, November 2023.

Therefore, it would be more effective to build the operational and programmatic capacity of youth-led organisations as a means to foster their engagement.

### **Why operational capacity is essential**

The question of why operational capacity is essential for young people working on peace and security remains complex; this is so because perspectives are shared from different angles, and there is a need to capture these opinions and thoughts in a way to understand the best approach needed in building capacities as a way to guide and track organisational change. In the spirit of this paper, diverse perspectives were captured by the LOYOC team leading the operational capacity training across the 10 regions in Cameroon. This included;

#### **1. Enhancing Organizational Efficiency:**

As noted by Atefor Jude, operational capacity encompasses the structures, systems, and resources necessary for an organisation to function smoothly and efficiently.<sup>5</sup> Investing time and effort into building the operational capacity of youth organisations will go a long way towards streamlining their internal processes, improving communication, and facilitating decision-making. By incorporating these strategies, organisations working on youth peace and security can enhance their efficiency, optimise their impact, and contribute more effectively to creating an engaging and appropriate platform for young people.

One of the training participants in the West Region noted that:

*“This training has helped me see where we were failing. It has been hard for me to even keep my volunteers. At times, I felt like I should stop doing this job and find something else. I was inspired to see that the trainers were young and sharing with us real-life examples and tools on how to keep an organisation running. The organisers should be proud of their work; it is great for the future of youth-led CSOs”<sup>6</sup>*

#### **2. Sustainable Growth and Longevity:**

Tsafack D (2022), in his publication ‘Youths and the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon: A Reflection on the Sociology of Social Movements in a Complex State’ demonstrates how youth organisations, due to bad management and resources, are unable to run for a period of more than 5 years. For this, there is a need for youth organisations to have a strong operational capacity to ensure their continued existence and growth. By having robust financial management and governance mechanisms in place, organisations can keep and recruit efficient staff, access funds, attract partnerships, and sustain their initiatives.

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Atefor Jude, programme Manager at LOYOC, November, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Elvis Mbeng, Training participant in Bafoussam, 2023

Building operational capacity enables organisations to demonstrate transparency and accountability, thereby increasing their credibility within the community and among potential donors or funders.

### **3. Amplifying Advocacy Efforts:**

Advocacy is a significant aspect of youth peace-building organisations in Cameroon. Their continuous exclusion from formal peace processes is a key concern. The reality on the ground shows the difficulty that most organisations face in making their voices heard. To achieve results in advocacy, evidence-based advocacy has proven to be more transformative. Many youth organisations cannot effectively capture the impact of their work and report on the evidence of their success. Operational capacity building thus provides an opportunity for these youth CSOs to learn how to monitor, evaluate, learn, and report their projects, which in turn will serve as a key tool for advocacy. It further strengthens their skills in research and data analysis, formulating advocacy strategies, and engaging with policymakers and stakeholders. Successful youth advocacy can open up the space for more youth participation in peacebuilding. Strong operational capacity allows youth organisations to amplify their voices and make a lasting impact on the policies and systems that affect young people.

### **4. Improving Opportunities for Collaboration:**

A key challenge within the youth movement in Cameroon is the lack of collaboration for a common agenda. It is common to see organisations working on peace carrying out activities in silos. This has greatly limited the opportunities for young people to have a common front towards advancing the YPS agenda. Operational capacity thus has the opportunity to take organisations back to the drawing board to reflect on the foundation of their institution while demonstrating to them the need to collaborate and share perspectives and capacity towards amplifying their efforts.<sup>7</sup> During operational capacity-building training, organisations identify their gaps and see the opportunity for complementarity with their peers. According to a youth participant, during the operational capacity-building training, he noticed that he needed someone to support his organisation with financial reports. Even though he does not have the resources to recruit someone, he has come to understand that he could partner with another organisation that has expertise in this.

### **5. Fostering Leadership Skills:**

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<sup>7</sup> Rubinstein, S.A., 2014. Strengthening Partnerships: How Communication and Collaboration Contribute to School Improvement. *American Educator*, 37(4), pp.22-28.



The leadership of a youth movement is as critical as the initiative they develop. Leadership, on its own, is an asset of skills and attitude that young people need to develop and sustain their organizations. Sources hold that the lack of these leadership skills and values has greatly contributed to the failure of many youth-led peace-building organizations. Operational capacity training thus provides an opportunity for youth CSO leaders to take a deep dive into accessing their personal and institutional limitations while triggering their interest in building new skills, which can amplify their impact. Operational capacity training reinforces understanding and interest in key leadership values such as humility, respect, transparency, accountability, and effective communication. *“Now I see why I could not keep staff. I did not set strategies to show that I was an accountable and transparent leader,”* said a youth participant.<sup>8</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The importance of operational capacity for youth peace-building organisations in Cameroon cannot be overstated. Mr. Saji Prelis noted that Search for Common Ground’s global success in peacebuilding and conflict transformation is tied to efficient systems, sound financial management, and strong operation structures to address the challenges of peace and security in the world.<sup>9</sup> We believe that by investing in operational capacity, youth organisations can unlock their true potential, making a lasting impact on the YPS conversation and contributing to the development of their communities.

While investing in the operational capacity of youth peace-building organisations, it should not be the primary focus for the way forward for youth-led organisations engagement in youth, peace, and security. An eye should be laid on other aspects of development and leveraging external resources that can ultimately yield greater results and sustain the long-term success of youth organizations. By embracing their energy and ideas, youth-led organisations can have a greater impact on addressing the issues that affect them and their communities.

Nevertheless, though the dedication and passion of youth-led organisations in Cameroon are very important in driving change, it is evident that systemic challenges hinder their

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<sup>8</sup> A youth participant in the East Region shared during Operational Capacity Building Training, November 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mr Saji Prelis, Director of Children and Youth, Search for Common Ground, December 2023.

ability to achieve a meaningful impact in the communities they operate in. To rectify this, concerted efforts are required to provide targeted capacity-building programmes, mentorship opportunities, and access to resources that empower youth organisations to enhance their effectiveness and sustainability. Additionally, fostering collaboration between these organisations and established institutions, including governments, NGOs, and international agencies, can facilitate knowledge sharing and the adoption of best practices. By prioritising these interventions, we can unlock the full potential of youth-led initiatives and catalyse positive change in communities affected by conflict and insecurity in Cameroon.

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