Youth Empowerment through Peace and Peaceful Coexistence: A Case of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa

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Abstract

There is no agreed definition of youth and the age groups. For statistical records, the United Nations define the youth to range from the ages of 15 and 24 years while the 2010 Constitution of Kenya records that the youth are from ages 18 and 35 years. These youth form 25 percent of Kenya's population and most of them are found in the different institutions of learning. The paper looks at how the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) empowers the youth in institutions of learning and the informal settlements in Kenya to enable them to live in peace, act as peace ambassadors and promote peace and peaceful coexistence despite their religious differences, the effects of radicalization and violent extremism and the challenges thereof. The idea is to enable them to bring change to their respective institutions, the community, their families and their country, Kenya. The impact of the youth empowerment is leading to deradicalization and is focused on enabling them gain current and useful information and develop their skills which will enable them to change their lives and be good citizens. The paper analyses youth empowerment methods and strategies which have been put in place and are being used by PROCMURA to empower the youth on peace and peaceful coexistence in Kenya through establishment of PROCMURA university chapters, celebration of peace days, organization of workshops, seminars and conferences. It also analyses the factors why the young people join the different extremist groups, the importance of youth empowerment which enables them to understand the importance of education, peace and peaceful coexistence, reduction of conflicts, and attainment of skills which will lead to the reduction and prevention of conflicts and radicalization. Library research was used to collect qualitative data, organized, facilitated and trained the youth during peace programmes and days like seminars, workshops, peace walks. Carried surveys of the youth.

Introduction

The Programme For Christian-Muslim Relations In Africa (Procmura)

The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) is a Pan African Christian organization that stretches a hand of friendship to the Muslim communities in sub Saharan Africa. PROCMURA is the sole Christian organization in Africa that is dedicated to building mutual relationships between Christians and Muslims in the entire continent. It is neither a multi-faith organization nor an interfaith one, but a membership organization rooted in the Churches (PROCMURA Constitution and By Laws, 2003). It works towards constructive Christian and Muslim relations for peace and peaceful coexistence. Its focus is only on Christians and Muslims who have the largest numerical strength in Africa and therefore are the major religious actors in the continent. With its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, most of its coordination of programmes is done here, whereas its regional offices are in the West Africa Anglophone, Nigeria and Francophone, Togo.

It was founded in 1959 by the missionary churches in Europe, North America and Africa. It covers countries in sub Saharan Africa that are predominantly Christian and Muslim in population. These include countries in East, Central and Southern part of Africa and West Africa; Francophone and Anglophone regions.

PROCMURA's presence is felt in twenty countries, while ten countries have contact persons and are being explored for substantive interfaith work. PROCMURA works with and through National Councils of Churches (NCCs), membership churches, ecumenical movements and interfaith networks. It collaborates with government and non-governmental organizations, Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), and Regional bodies whose goals and aspirations are in part or in whole that of PROCMURA's. It consults with the African Union (AU) and diplomatic agencies on matters of peace, security and interfaith relations.

Alliances with World Council of Churches (WCC) and other similar global religious organizations such as multilateral and bilateral institutions are very important to PROCMURA given the global nature and interest in the issues of inter-faith. PROCMURA upholds the pursuit for a just and peaceful society for all, affirms freedom of religion where everyone is free to practice their faith and co-exist with other faiths peacefully; believes in the equality of all people, that as a Faith Based Organization (FBO), truth and love are paramount values for peaceful co-existence; acknowledges mutual respect, good neighborliness, and tolerance as critical components in the search for a peaceful, compassionate, and just world; and strives to serve as a resource pool for the churches to interpret the gospel faithfully in an interfaith environment of Christians and Muslims.

The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA)'s key strategic focal areas include learning and skills development, women and Peace Building, Youth and Religious Tolerance, Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), Conflict Prevention, Peace Building and Reconciliation, PROCMURA's Ambassadors Recognition, Literature and Communication, Research and Documentation, Finance and Administration and Financial Sustainability (PROCMURA Strategic Plan, 2020 – 2024, p. 8). The strategic focus is in line with its Vision: "A continent where Christian and Muslim communities in spite of their differences, work together for justice, peace and reconciliation, towards the holistic development of the human family and the environment" (PROCMURA Strategic Plan, 2014 - 2018). The programme endeavours to promote peace and peaceful coexistence between the two religious groups (Christians and Muslims).

Today, the youth encounter many obstacles including poverty, violence, and marginalization – that often result in feelings of hopelessness and despair leading to harmful behaviours (Ardizzone, 2003, p.420), actions towards the youth involvement in these harmful behaviours has called for youth empowerment through different forums. The environment at which the youth operate both in the private and the public is key in mobilizing and minimizing these risks and thus fostering relationships despite their religious affiliations, and this leads to building structures where the youth can practice peace and peaceful coexistence.

Youth who practice peace appreciate the role the avenues created by different organizations to attain current and up to date information and skills. PROCMURA identifies with the importance of youth empowerment as an essential factor in uplifting the livelihood of the youth and ensuring that they do not indulge in these harmful behaviours.

Concept and Dimensions of Youth Empowerment

The term empowerment has become increasingly used especially when referring to young people. We can also say that empowerment is the road to peace. Youth empowerment which was mainly applied to adults over the years, has begun to be applied to young people, and particularly to those who, for a number of reasons, can be considered to be vulnerable or at risk (Martínez, Morales, Masó, & Bernet, 2016). The dimensions of youth empowerment range from educational, employment, political, social well-being, conflict and disability but PROCMURA's empowerment programme approach takes peace and peaceful coexistence education as key. As Martínez et al. (2016) put it "Education includes a range of concepts, including learning, awareness raising and skills acquisition", PROCMURA's endeavour is to empower the youth with current information on peace and peaceful coexistence, create awareness on the effect and impact of radicalisation and violent extremism and skills to enable them bring change to the society, the information received will lead to the youth living in peace despite their religious affiliation. Empowerment processes are the result of an interaction, negotiated to a greater or lesser degree, between the capability or capabilities of a person, group or community and the options provided by the physical and sociocultural contexts in which they manage their lives (Martínez et al., 2016), the level of empowerment differs from one person to the other thus PROCMURA targets youth from institutions of learning and the informal settlements differently. Each young person is a unique individual with their own beliefs, attitudes and they respond differently to the challenges and opportunities accorded to them.

In peace and peaceful coexistence education programmes, the youth are empowered with skills and information to confront and resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner. Education programmes are developed and implemented at different stages where peace educators employ a range of

methods including dialogue, music, peace walks, conferences, workshops, seminars and drama in order to build skills through communication, collaboration, and consensus building to help the youth manage interpersonal conflicts and enhance their lives and well-being and societal change. Young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow – they have great untapped potential for responsible leadership today (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Bockern, 1990, p.118). Many of the empowerment frameworks emphasize capacity building and skill development which for PROCMURA also helps the organization to come up with programmes on capacity building for the youth to make them deradicalised. The youth need to be encouraged to be leaders of today rather than leaders of tomorrow thus the need to be empowered to exercise their leadership skills in the different capacities they find themselves in. The youth are being referred to as the "torchbearers" of the 2030 Agenda and have a pivotal role to play both as beneficiaries of actions and policies under the Agenda and as partners and participants in its implementation (World Youth Report-2030 Agenda, 2015).

Youth empowerment is a concept whose definition surrounds the youth expansion of opportunities to participate in all aspects of life, education, employment, decision making, and access to information to improve their lives. At key moments, younger generations have repeatedly acted to overthrow and dismantle systems of oppression, subordination and injustice (World Economic Forum, 2019). PROCMURA and other stakeholders empower the youth to combat these global and local challenges. Young people are at the forefront of change (World Economic Forum, 2019) calling on organizations to set up strategies and efforts to develop their skills, knowledge and support needed to enable them make informed decisions about their bodies, lives, families, communities, countries and the world (UNFPA, 2017). The United Nations Millennium Declaration adopted in 2000 also commits world leaders to help the youth between the ages of 15 and 24 who remain marginalized from social and economic opportunities and represent the group which the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aim to reach. The impact on young people can be far greater than on their older counterparts as they are faced with poverty, hunger, and lack of education, maternal mortality, unemployment, environmental degradation or HIV/AIDS. In Kenya, in particular, many young people often lack access to current information, schooling, social influence and basic rights, and are often overlooked in national development

agendas. Therefore, young people's participation and inclusion in efforts to achieve all of the goals are crucial to ensure a successful and sustainable outcome (United Nations, 2000). SDG 16 – Building Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions – brings a new element to the SDGs.

A specific "peace and justice" goal was not included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but many of the countries which lagged behind on achieving the MDGs were conflict affected states (United Nations, 2016).

As most of the SDGs focus on the youth empowerment from the economic, political, social, technological, educational approaches (which are also PROCMURA's fivefold approach), the role of religion on youth empowerment is lacking, this is because if religions and non-religions team up they will be able to come up with models and strategies required to promote peace. Interfaith activities give the youth a chance to sit and listen to each other, provide opportunities for personal and interpersonal transformation required to build peace, to learn about each other's hopes, dreams, fears, needs and anxieties. Parental guidance should also be considered since parents play a critical role in empowering the youth from the family point of view. When young people are empowered with information and skills, they become a major force behind people's participation in life and the society at large through the formation and emergency of youth groups, organizations and form active clubs which will enable them take charge and make decisions on how to improve their lives. Empowerment will improve their access to resources, information and transform their decisions through their beliefs, values and attitudes. This is done through the participation in youth empowerment peace programmes organized by the Faith Based Organizations (FBO), government organizations, schools and media practitioners who involve, incorporate and give them an opportunity for development, acquisition of current information on peace and conflicts, programme retention, sustainability and continuity. Organizations need to listen to the youth voice to enable practitioners to come up with programmes that the youth will participate in and communicate their views openly. These programmes can be workshops, peace walks, create a platform where they can come together and learn the tenets of peace and how to avoid conflicts. Organizations can use resource persons who will present papers and answer questions during plenary sessions. They need to create confidentiality and trust among them. One's culture excludes the youth from responsibility

which has led them to be blamed for their irresponsibility, thus the need to build a positive culture through youth empowerment and be able to take care and contribute to the betterment of their families, friends, schools and the community at large.

The young people are faced with different challenges ranging from sexual issues, difficulty to control a tendency to light fires, while others might be struggling with issues related to membership of a cult group (Geldard, 2009). All these issues have made the society to live in fear of the unknown, lack of employment, some are not enrolled in education. Fortunately, there is now increasing recognition that a young person can be both an "offender" and a "victim" and success in enabling them to learn and develop socially adaptive behaviours is most likely to be achieved through empowerment and helping them to take responsibility for the choices they make themselves (Geldard, 2009). Increasing youth capability calls for providing the youth with relevant skills and information they need to enter the job market will sway them away from indulging in conflict activities.

Empowerment Theory

This theory contribute to the counselling of students whereby it expands the knowledge, stimulates a healthy development and empowerment (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007) of students. At the community level, empowerment entails an action to improve the quality of life and provides the link between the organisation, agencies and the community. Strategies of empowerment theory is to raise groups of students for school based psychoeducational and life skill training initiatives (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007), which will enhance the participation of students to achieve goals and gain access to resources. Zimmermann (2000) states that Empowerment theory provides principles and a framework for organising knowledge to enable the youth not to be manipulated.

Empowerment theory includes processes to enable the youth to participate fully in peace programmes in the community and cause change. It also enables them to enhance decision making, increase capabilities and confidence, learn and practice skills, exert control (Zimmerman et al., 2011, p. 2) thus making them not to be involved in conflict but bring change to the community that they live in. A process is empowering if it helps the youth develop cognitive

and behavioural skill necessary to critically understand and become independent problem solvers and decision makers (Zimmerman, 2000, as cited in Zimmerman et al., 2011).

Today's generation of young people is large if they are empowered and given the right opportunities, they will be effective drivers of change. Organizations who have partnered with the youth helping them to participate in decision making, strengthening their ability to advance in education and employment they have made the youth have access to information, made them better citizens, improved their economic and social development in the country and the community at large. They will also be able to participate and be involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives. Above all, the youth will have constant access to decision making and power. Through youth empowerment programmes, the youth will learn how to take more responsibility for their actions and control of their lives (Geldard, 2009), make them solution focused and replace negative thinking with positive action. When the youth participate in the empowerment programmes, the lessons become part of their daily life where they become involved in the community they live in. The organizations also benefit from the empowerment programmes by making the youth their peace ambassadors, agents of peace, and also enable the youth to continue to participate in the programmes. The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) empowers the youth and believes that this will enable them become peace ambassadors to promote peace, peaceful-coexistence and reconciliation among Christians and Muslims in Kenya.

Theory of 'active Peace'

This theory of active peace posits in part that peace is part of a triad, which also includes justice and wholeness ('Peace', 2020, p. 1), positive peace is the process which covers internationally supported peace operations and local approaches to peace in societies emerging from violent conflicts (Zarkov & Hitjens, 2015). It is true that peace missions are used to bring peace to those who need it since the youth require peace programmes for empowerment and development (Zarkov & Hitjens, 2015) of their skills.

PROCMURA and Youth Empowerment Programmes and Activities

The world has suffered and lost the youth to radicalization and violent extremism and our country Kenya is not an exception. Since the 11th September 2001 Al Qaeda attack in the United States of America, Boko Haram killings in West Africa, Al Shabaab attacks in Kenya and ISIS among other groups, peace has been threatened and the youth have either been recruited to join the extremist groups, some killed and some living in fear of the unknown.

Kenya has suffered a number of attacks, some high profile, in organizations and institutions and others on public transport and at the boarders between Kenya and Somalia. The most recent ones include the August 7th 1998, United States Embassy bombing in Nairobi (*Accountability Board Report: Nairobi-Tanzania Bombings -- Nairobi*, n.d., p. 1), September 21st 2013 Westgate shopping mall attack (*Terror in Nairobi*, 2013, p. 1), April 2nd 2015 Garissa University College attack (Garissa University College Attack in Kenya, 2019, p. 1), Nairobi DusitD2 Complex attack in 2019 and several others (Botha, 2014) which are not included in this paper. In all these attacks, peace and peaceful coexistence of our country was threatened, the youth either lost their lives or were involved.

In an attempt to promote peace in Kenya, political, religious and non-governmental leaders need to play a key role, they need to come up with strategies and actions to ensure that peace is achieved in Kenya. The youth are vulnerable citizens as the extremist groups in Kenya radicalize and recruit them with a promise that they will be given jobs and high pay. Botha (2014) says that many Muslim youth join extremist groups as a reaction to the Kenyan government's collective punishment or assassination of their religious leaders, which means that the government, organisations and religious leaders have to find intervention strategies that will create peace and peaceful coexistence between them and the youth.

They use the real life experience of economic instability, marginalization and social oppression among others to lure them. Some youth are also lured through the promise that they will be given scholarships to study in institutions of their choice. PROCMURA saw the need to empower the youth in institutions of learning and the community to deradicalise them, raise awareness on the ills of violent extremism and conflicts and enhance their capacities to be peace ambassadors in the environment they find themselves in.

PROCMURA's youth empowerment programme takes two major dimensions that include workshops, seminars and conferences. This is whereby PROCMURA brings the youth from the two religious groups - Christians and Muslims from institutions of learning and the community to impart them with skills and information. During these forums, PROCMURA brings Religious leaders, government officials, media practitioners, and key people from institutions of learning and PROCMURA resource persons who have studied Islam and Christian Muslim Relations (ICMR) to empower the youth with tenets and information from all perspectives of life.

These important information enables them to master ways in which extremist groups lure them to join the groups and also to deradicalize them. The organization through these platforms enables the youth to learn from one another and share ideas on what different institutions, churches, mosques, clubs, societies and institutions of learning are doing to empower the youth in different sectors. These are also used to create contacts amongst themselves and also the organization as a way of follow up.

Another dimension is the Masters in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations (ICMR) course which is offered in collaboration with St. Paul's University. This is offered under the programme, Learning and Skills Development where PROCMURA enhances the development of human capacity and a pool of knowledgeable ministers and scholars. In order for PROCMURA to continue to be effective at the grassroots and relevant in a rapid changing African context, and for the churches to have informed engagements with their Muslim neighbours, PROCMURA sponsors and facilitates the training of Christian theologians in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations (ICMR) up to master's degree level. These trained specialists serve PROCMURA in various capacities in the field as Area Advisers and Regional Coordinators and at the Central Office. PROCMURA has a number of technical experts who have completed their ICMR course and they act as resource persons and team of experts to support and strengthen the various countries and regions.

1. Youth and Religious Tolerance

PROCMURA has a Youth Programme which mainly addresses the areas on youth and religious tolerance and skills development for the youth. They are innovative entrepreneurs that have

contributed in peace building across the globe. PROCMURA has adopted the Vision of Agenda 2030 which requires strong partnerships between young people and stakeholders to address the challenges faced by the youth and ensure that their contributions are recognized and that they are included at all levels of decision making. This is an inter-Christian and Muslim Youth Programme, bringing together the youth - Christians and Muslims to address issues of common concerns to them. On Religious tolerance the programme raises awareness on the growing religious intolerance, the growth of radicalisation and violent extremism, and build their capacity on peace and peaceful co-existence especially those in learning institutions and the community through the PROCMURA university chapters and in the communities through youth diapraxis initiatives. We understand that peace education as promoting the awareness of the nature of conflicts (knowledge and attitudes) and providing people with the means (tools and skills) of managing conflict without violence (Harber & Sakade, 2009). Youth tolerance is geared towards handling conflicts in a peaceful way without causing harm, these skills are given through vocational development. The youth in institutions of learning find themselves confronted with moral and spiritual challenges which include finding employment in competitive environment, developing relationships with others and adaptation to technology. All these challenges cause stress and anxiety, thus we will be successful in youth empowerment if and when the interventions and strategies put in place will be geared towards those challenges that they confront. These challenges made PROCMURA to organize empowerment activities to identify the needs of the youth and as an organization working with the youth both politically, socially, culturally and economically, to find solutions to the challenges facing them, the importance of providing opportunities in the institutions of learning, the community to build and maintain the relationship. It is important to consult and work with the youth in every process to find interventions which will enable the organization build on their strengths. Peace and peaceful coexistence strategies should focus on the attitude change and ensure that they can live peacefully with all despite their religion, values and the environment. Policy makers need to be concerned about the difficulties the youth are facing and recognize the consequences for the youth if they are not empowered.

2. International Day of Peace

"Peace is the greatest weapon for development that any person can have" - Nelson Mandela[1]. Peace is vital to the survival of human family. Every human being has the right to peace. Hagmann (2014) defines peace merely as the absence of violence or as co-existence among people. Peace of a country is tied to development, where it cannot develop when peace does not prevail in that country and Kenya is not an exception. Many towns and counties have not developed because there is no peace. "Without peace there is no development and without development there can be no peace" Jan Eliasson, UN Deputy Secretary General 2012–2016[2]. When a country has peace, it is easy for development which takes different dimensions will be experienced. Peace therefore has been threatened around the world since 11th September 2001when Al Qaeda attacked the United States of America. Kenya has lost hundreds of youth through conflicts and they are either victims of non-peace environment or even used to perpetuate violent acts. Despite this lack of peace in Kenya and the world at large, PROCMURA has also been affected especially since its mandate is to enhance peace and peaceful coexistence in Africa. The situation continues to cause fears and suspicion among the youth from the Christian and Muslim background thus affecting peace, peaceful coexistence and sustainable development and security. This reality has led to untold sufferings among the youth and women who are direct encounters with radicalized violent extremists feeling vulnerable and living in fear of the unknown. The International Day of Peace (Peace Day) which is observed around the world each year on 21st September, established in 1981 by unanimous United Nations resolution (United Nations, 2018) provides a globally shared date for all humanity to commit to peace above all differences and to contribute to building a culture of peace. PROCMURA with other community stakeholders in Kenya saw the need to promote peace and community cohesion, raise awareness on peace building and enhancing capacities on peace and peaceful coexistence among the youth. To empower the youth, PROCMURA brings key leaders from the government, religious leaders, media practitioners, leaders from institutions of higher learning and the PROCMURA resource persons. Peace education is key in these forums where the young people are offered opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge and values required for the practice of conflict resolution, communication and co- operation in relation to issues of peace, war,

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[1]https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/achieving-sustainable-development/0/steps/35497
[2]https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/achieving-sustainable-development/0/steps/35497

violence, conflict and injustice (Harber & Sakade, 2009). This education will go a long way to make different communities to live peacefully with all. The values impacted on the youth through peace education enables them to be more responsive and inclined towards cooperation to join peace programmes so as to be empowered despite their religious affiliation (Ohanyan & Lewis, 2005 as cited in Chinyere, 2013), which will also enable them tackle diverse problems in the society.

In 2018 in particular, PROCMURA commemorated the International Day of Peace in Kenya (PROCMURA, 2018). The theme of the year was "The Right to Peace – The Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 70", (United Nations, 2018). PROCMURA brought together the youth from different institutions of learning and the informal settlement (Kamukunji and Eastleigh) to learn from one another and share information. PROCMURA on her part, together with key resource persons, shared information on peace building on the context of radicalization and violent extremism, approaches of the Kenyan government on countering radicalization and violent extremism, the religious perspective of peace and peaceful coexistence from both the Christianity and Islam. The lighting of the peace candles was also done to show that Christians and Muslims can live in peace as good neighbours. Live experiences were shared both from the youth and from the resource persons. I agree that "despair, hopelessness, and apathy among young people are also prevalent and are an indicator that they feel marginalized and left out of the conversation" (Ardizzone, 2003), the youth need to be involved in all conversations which involve them so that they can learn from other tenets regarding peace. Trust and confidentiality of the presenters was key during and throughout the commemoration. The youth were empowered and encouraged to live at peace with one another. At the climax of it all was the animation and edutainment which carried the day. Different youth groups were allowed to showcase their talents through peace songs, peace talks, peace skits. A peaceful peace walk was also organized to commemorate the Peace Day (PROCMURA International Day of Peace Report 2018).

The different organizations were able to empower the youth from several learning institutions and to share ideas on how they ccould bring change in the society on peace and peaceful coexistence, aid implementation of peace virtues in the school system thus leading to the

cultivation of peace in their societies (Chinyere, 2013, p. 2). This information and ideas shared include building their capacities on countering and prevention of radicalization and violent extremism, the negative impact it has caused to peace, youth mobilization and reintegration factors on attitude, who they are, recruitment of the youth to join extremist groups and armed conflicts. The organization empowered the youth to be agents of peacebuilding and challenges they tend to face due to lack of peace. Both Christians and Muslims present during the commemoration were advised that Islam and Christianity do not forbid them from living in peace with others. Trust is an essential ingredient in building effective relationships (Brendtro, et al., 1990, p.79).

The youth were also empowered to use their youthful energy, capabilities and ability to adapt to the new technological trends. Young people's conversation on peace and sustainability issues usually happen on social media. The Internet provides access to peer support, factual information and therapy. It is also a source of misinformation and extreme points of view.

There should be a concern on what the youth are using the internet for since it has been realized that they use the internet to learn how to enter sites that are not educative. Social media is being used by Al Shabaab and other extremists to recruit the youth, fundraise and pass information (UNDP-RAND- Social Media AFRICA-Research Brief_final_3 Oct.pdf). The youth use it too to get clarifications on their questions which usually is dependent on what the recruiters want. Social media is key to youth life thus the need for follow up on what the youth are using it for. The youth were informed to use social media for empowerment and skills development. They need to be empowered to act as mediators, community mobilisers, humanitarian workers and peace brokers. The youth and the community were sensitized and their capacities enhanced on countering and prevention of radicalization and extremism. The youth were also informed of the government's commitment to ensure peace and security in the nation. The goal of the programme was to empower youth to break down their barriers and religious differences that caused hatred and conflict over time. It also aimed at providing a forum for the youth and resource persons to share experiences (indoor and outdoor adventure education) for Kenyan youth to create peace and peaceful coexistence as well as facilitating the psychosocial well-being of the youth affected by conflict and radicalization and violent extremism.

3. PROCMURA University Chapter

In order to build a peace culture among the youth PROCMURA taught of creating peace and peaceful coexistence in institutions of higher learning. This is because the young people in universities are vulnerable to manipulation by ideologies of conflict by political and religious leaders. The program was called PROCMURA university chapter (PROCMURA, 2019). The creation of the university chapter which is a bottom-up education programme incorporates the voice of the youth in their design and development. These university chapters are geared towards building peaceful relationships among the youth to enable them live in peace. Harber and Sakade (2009) state that, "building peaceful relationships involves emotional literacy, skills for good communication, co- operation and problem- solving, and positive attitudes towards themselves and others (for example, getting on with each other, learning about each other, understanding and respecting other people, in particular, from different backgrounds as well as recognizing something common to everybody)".

The programme promotes peace and peaceful coexistence in a room setup and also extends to the outdoor environment where different interactive activities are carried out. This is a safe environment for the youth to practice their everyday peace and peaceful coexistence despite their religious affiliation. Peace education cultivates peaceful attitudes among the youth (Chinyere, 2013, p. 2) and creates conducive climates in tertiary institutions that will promote its effective and efficient management for optimal performance, modify behavioural change and strengthen the capacities of the youth in institutions of learning and the community at large. The recruitment of youth into extremist groups as soldiers, suicide bombers in some countries, has increased youth violence across the religious divides in learning institutions and in the public space. Thus, the growing religious intolerance among the youth threatens the future of Christian and Muslim relations in Africa and Kenya in particular. There is need to realize that the challenges and risks are the primary tools the youth use to find out who they are and what they will become in future since they tend to experiment with whatever they find in their environment.

One of the university chapters which is worth mentioning here is the PROCMURA Garissa University Chapter. This came about after Garissa University was attacked in 2015 and one hundred and forty eight people, mostly students were killed. The university which opened its

doors nine months later (January 11th 2016[3]), has students who could not be redeployed to other universities, returnees from the extremist groups, and youth from Christian and Muslim communities, and management who experienced the attack. After several discussions with student leadership and management PROCMURA launched the University Chapter – PROCMURA Garissa University Chapter in September 2019 during the International Week of Peace. This was well attended by both the university management, government officials and students. Both Christians and Muslims were represented. The day's programme was educative where students were empowered on matters of peace, radicalization and violent extremism and development of skills. PROCMURA created a platform where students, management and resource persons from the government shared their experiences and encouraged one another to live in peace.

The climax of the day was a peace walk through the streets of Garissa town by students and staff holding and chanting peace songs and slogans informing the community that peace and peaceful coexistence is key in any community. Different institutions of learning in and around Garissa participated in this launch. This university chapter will enable the youth to embrace many virtues such as peace, courage, acceptance of responsibility, honesty, integrity, tolerance, appreciation of individual differences, and caring about others. Confidentiality of the respondents and returnees was promised and kept more so the voluntary consent of the youth was accorded confidentiality. PROCMURA university chapters which have been established in different institutions of learning came about after a workshop which was organized for student leaders. This form also brought together key stakeholders from different institutions as resource persons. The student leaders saw the need for PROCMURA to empower the vulnerable youth with information on radicalization and violent extremism and put in place mechanisms in institutions of learning to provide safe spaces and platforms for the youth to learn from one another. PROCMURA has established university chapters in different institutions of learning.

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[3]https://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00040648.html

The PROCMURA University Chapter which is based in a learning institution is an important intervention whose advantage is reaching out to the young people from different backgrounds including age, class, ethnicity and religious backgrounds doing different university programmes. The chapter which is inclusive of lecturers provides a space for learning and also sharing issues of common concern. The University Chapter has included lecturers' education sessions not only about the programme, but what will be experienced by the students and also about their developments in empowering the youth with information on drivers they need to look for to combat their challenges. The university chapter also has a programme for the returnees who had joined Al Shabaab group if they need to be supported. The PROCMURA University Chapter provides room for sharing as they seek ways of being a peaceful community. Learning institutions need to help the youth to disengage from the conflict cycle (Brendtro et al., 1990, p.79) and promote peace. This especially happens when students who are returnees are allowed to nurture a relationship with others. Institutions of learning will have to create safe space for them to communicate freely and supported without being victimization, they also need to create trust and confidentiality with them.

The programme acknowledges that the youth in institutions of learning are faced with challenges of joining extremist groups and it attempts to facilitate them in making informed decisions when faced with the choices.   It is built on research done by PROCMURA indicating that comprehensive information and education tends to delay (rather than encourage) the youth to be involved in the conflict activities. There is thus the need to mobilize the power of peers (Brendtro, et al., 1990, p.116) where the experience of the youth can be used to in leadership roles in clubs and youth associations, which are set to address matters of religious intolerance, peace and peaceful coexistence amongst students in institutions of learning, this reality involves the youth in preventing the challenges. Eliminating violence require the establishment of just and inclusive institutions where students will live in peace and harmony with one another. This school based programme is tailored to train and empower the youth in institutions of learning in ways to manage their feelings. It is within this context that their relationship begins (Geldard, 2009). When Christians and Muslims are exposed to each other in different activities and allowed to discuss difficult issues in a safe space, they are challenged to seek a peaceful co-

existence. By listening to the life stories of the youth in Garissa University, PROCMURA was empowered as well to increase their trainings for the young people.

4. Workshops, Conferences and Seminars

Peace and peaceful coexistence programmes can be carried out in classroom forums where participants gather together to learn from resource persons whose specialty is peace, peaceful existence and conflict resolution**.** Botha (2014) says that education or a lack thereof has been identified as a crucial contributing factor to relative deprivation and from his research, al-Shabaab respondents are better educated than Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) respondents thus when a youth is educated and empowered to attain high quality of education, it is possible in preparing the youth for a career than joining al Shaabab. Peace-building programmes include dialogue efforts, negotiations, mediation, transitional justice, peace education and training in conflict resolution skills (Ooko, Muthomi, & Odhiambo, 2015), PROCMURA brings the youth together in peace education forums (seminars, conferences and workshops) to educate and empower them on how to become peace ambassadors, live peacefully with one another. The forums bring together youth leaders from the two religions, youth from institutions of learning and informal settlements in Kenya. Key resource persons are those who specialized in Islam and Christian Muslim Relations. Some of the information shared include lessons that will promote peace and peaceful coexistence, the role of education to promote reconciliation, the strategies involved in change of attitudes to see each other as brothers and sisters thus peaceful coexistence. The organization also uses these forums to share information on radicalization and violent extremism and how the youth are able to refrain from joining the extremist groups.   At the end of the forums, education manuals are circulated to the participants. The youth are also given certificates to show that they have participated in these forums. Understanding societal issues and taking action for social change is one of the main goals of peace education (Ardizzone, 2013, pg. 422), PROCMURA uses these forums to educate the youth to be peace ambassadors and bring change to the environment and also relate well with others.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to show ways in which PROCMURA has participated in empowering the youth from the two different traditions to be ambassadors of peace in the community. PROCMURA does this by offering information and creating space for young people to share and learn from each other. In sharing among themselves, the youth are able to raise issues of common concern and their fears about each other. At the same time, they are able to work towards solutions for some of the challenges they face. Bringing together the youth during the International Day of Peace is an eye opener that youth empowerment and national programmes should aim at first increasing knowledge and skills among the youth, and second, at addressing their challenges by joining them in looking for tangible solutions. Thirdly, enabling the youth to be actors and agents of peace in the society and their environment. This can also be seen in the PROCMURA university chapter where first and foremost student leaders from different institutions of learning were empowered with information which led to the birth of Garissa university Chapter.

Organizations need to emphasize building partnerships with institutions of learning and other sectors focusing on empowerment of the youth in all ages. This emphasize will go a great mile to enable them in decision making and bring change to the society and their environment. There is evidence that programmes of youth empowerment create positive learning environment and they allow for social and academic development, thus enhanced self-esteem and reliance, increased responsibility and values.

Empowering the youth begins with the youth themselves as they have agency. The practical activities provided like plenary discussion, peace walks increase the youth agency as full members and participants in the society. Thus, creating a safe space for the youth to nurture themselves and through the organizations that chose to intentionally work with them

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