

Violent Lifeworlds

Vicious Circles and Exit Options for Youths



Sabine Kurtenbach (GIGA) bei der Auftaktveranstaltung

Quantitatively speaking, youths, who make up a total of 1.5 billion people globally, are an important group within the world's population; 1.2 billion of these young people live in the countries of the global South and will influence the future development of the societies they live in. Although the concept of youth is significantly shaped by history and culture, it generally refers to the phase in a person's life between primary education and the time they enter the workforce, which is shaped by various changes in status. There is no uniform definition of youth, and even international organisations differ with regard to the age cohorts they include: the World Youth Report of the United Nation's Department of Social Affairs includes young people between age 15 and 24; the World Health Organization, those between age 15 and 29; and the World Bank's World Development Report 2007, youth between 12 and 24.

Although growing up and the accompanying changes in status are unspectacular for most youths, in many public and scientific debates young males are repeatedly identified as important actors in violence and violent conflict.

This is independent of whether they participate as so-called "child soldiers" in violent conflict or whether they act violently as part of gangs in large cities. International data (WHO 2002) show that homicide rates (that is, the number of violent deaths in relation to 100,000 inhabitants) are much higher for young males than for the overall population. Only Asia is an exception in this respect.



The debates about youth participation in violence and the impacts of violence on youths is predominantly shaped by very selective perspectives as well as the sensationalisation and stigmatisation of youth as a “security threat” or as “trouble-makers”. Given the high number of risk factors in most developing societies, the percentage of violent youth is extremely small.

Hence, the central question is which factors enable the recruitment of youths into violence, which factors help to prevent it and make youth resilient, and which options exist for escaping violent lifeworlds.

In order to address these questions, the GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies and the German Society for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) organised a jointly funded workshop entitled “Violent Lifeworlds – Vicious Circles and Exit



Options for Youths” in Hamburg from October 28t to 30, 2009. Workshop participants discussed the experiences, problems, contexts and exit options which exist for youths in various violent contexts and lifeworlds. Young people were seen according to their roles as victims as well as perpetrators of violence.

At the centre of the discussion were the following questions:

- What role do the individual and collective experiences of youths play, and to what extent are these reflected in the practice of development politics?
- What is the relationship between violent and non-violent youths like?
- What is the relevance of gender-specific role models and life paths?
- What are the differences and similarities between lifeworlds in urban and rural contexts?

Participants agreed that it is necessary to expand the perspective beyond the violent behaviour of youth. Even when many risk factors exist (such as marginalisation, exclusion, and personal experiences with violence) violence is just one option. In addition to the identification of risk factors, it is also necessary to examine the function of violence in the achievement of specific changes in status (for example, economic independence), the construction of identity, and the relevance of peer groups and other intermediating actors and institutions (for example, the educational system).

National and international participants from different disciplines (political science, anthropology, education, psychology, history) and with a broad spectrum of practical experience with youth took up this perspective in their discussion. A closing forum based on the previously introduced problems, options and alternatives presented and discussed the role of and possible options for development cooperation in light of these issues.



The presentations from the workshop will be published in an edited volume of the Foundation for Peace and Development's One World Series by Nomos publishers in May 2010.





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Organizer

Dr. Sabine Kurtenbach
Sebastian Huhn

