



**The First International Symposium on
Youth Participation in Peace Processes**

SIDE EVENT REPORT

Youth Participation in Environmental Collaboration and Peace Processes

7 March 2019, Helsinki, Finland



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**The First International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes****SIDE EVENT REPORT:****Youth Participation in Environmental Collaboration and Peace Processes****7 March 2019, Helsinki, Finland****Event Coordinator**

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Executive Summary

The public event on Youth Participation in Environmental Collaboration and Peace Processes took place 7 March 2019 in Helsinki, Finland. The youth participants were from Columbia, Finland, Indonesia, Kenya, Liberia, Mexico, Myanmar, Philippines, Russia, Slovakia, South Sudan and Sri Lanka. The event was organized by MAKUTANO, ALL-YOUTH and CORE research projects, which are funded by the Academy of Finland and the Strategic Research Council (SRC) as well as by ALLIANSSI, the Finnish Youth Co-Operation. The participation of international young peacebuilders was facilitated by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the United Nations Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth (OSGEY), Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY).

This open-space discussion event was one of the side events to the First International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes, organized in Helsinki 5–6 March 2019 by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the United Nations (UN) together with civil society representatives, and co-hosted by the State of Qatar and the Government of Colombia. The International Symposium, advancing UN Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018) on Youth, Peace and Security, explored the roles young people can play, and are currently playing in peace processes. Resolutions 2250 and 2419 underline the positive and active role of young people in their societies and urge member states to consider the ways to increase the youth inclusion.

During the side event the youth attendees presented their experiences, realities, inspirations and lessons learned on the world on issues related to environmental collaboration and peace processes. The presentations included climate change action and realities in Finland and Sri Lanka; innovative peaceful solutions in Columbia and South Sudan; gender and minority aspects of peacekeeping in Lebanon and Kosovo; Sámi people and the conflicting land use interests in northern Finland as well as lessons learnt from Nordic courses on environmental collaboration and conflict resolution.

The event included group dialogues on three specific questions related to environmental collaboration and peace processes. The findings were debated at the plenary discussion. It was concluded that the importance of active listening cannot be overemphasized. Environmental issues and crises might be causes of national or international political conflicts, and therefore environmental concerns would need a higher focus in many peace processes.

This report presents a summary of the agenda, presentations and key discussion points. For further information or queries, please contact [antti.erkkila\(at\)uef.fi](mailto:antti.erkkila@uef.fi) and [irmeli.mustalahti\(at\)uef.fi](mailto:irmeli.mustalahti@uef.fi).

1. Introduction

The public event on Youth Participation in Environmental Collaboration and Peace Processes was organized on 7 March 2019 at the Think Corner of the University of Helsinki, Finland.

The event was organized by MAKUTANO, ALL-YOUTH and CORE research projects funded by the Academy of Finland and the Strategic Research Council (SRC) as well as by ALLIANSSI, the Finnish Youth Co-Operation.

This open-space discussion event was one of the side events to the First International Symposium on Youth Participation in Peace Processes, organized at the House of the Estates in Helsinki 5–6 March 2019 by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the United Nations (UN) together with civil society representatives ([link to the report](#)). The Symposium was co-hosted by the State of Qatar and the Government of Colombia. The International Symposium, advancing UN Security Council resolutions 2250 (2015) and 2419 (2018) on Youth, Peace and Security, explored the roles young people can play, and are playing in peace processes.

Resolutions 2250 and 2419 underline the positive and active role of young people in their societies and urge member states to consider the ways to increase the youth inclusion ([link to the Global Policy Paper on youth-inclusive peace processes](#)).

The organizers of the side event on Youth Participation in Environmental Collaboration and Peace Processes believe that inclusive youth representation should be recognized in dispute resolution of environmental conflicts. Skills in environmental collaboration and environmental conflict resolution should be regarded as civic education.

In organizing the side event to the international symposium, we wanted to highlight that environmental issues and crises might cause national or international political conflicts. Therefore environmental concerns need a higher focus in many peace processes. In addition, we were keen to organize a side event in which international young peacebuilders would have

an opportunity to further interact with local youth, and share their know-how and experience.

The side event on Youth Participation in Environmental Collaboration and Peace Processes was opened by **Reetta Toivanen**, Leader of the ALL-YOUTH Research Consortium (STN) and Professor of Sustainability Science at the University of Helsinki. ALL-YOUTH is a multidisciplinary research project which explores the capacities of young people and the obstacles that hamper their engagement with society. The ALL-YOUTH Research Consortium (STN) involves the University of Helsinki, Tampere University and the University of Eastern Finland.

After the opening words by Reetta, the international and local youth provided short presentations on peace building and environmental collaboration based on their own experiences. The presentations and follow-up public debate were facilitated by **Heta Heiskanen** from the ALL-YOUTH Research Consortium (STN). After a short break, further and more specific World Café Small Group Dialogues were carried out around three themes. Group dialogues and follow-up plenary discussion were led by **Irmeli Mustalahti**, Interaction Coordinator of the ALL-YOUTH Research Consortium (STN) and Professor of Natural Resources Governance at the University of Eastern Finland.

The youth participants of the side event were from Columbia, Finland, Indonesia, Kenya, Liberia, Mexico, Myanmar, Philippines, Russia, Slovakia, South Sudan and Sri Lanka. The participation of international young peacebuilders was facilitated by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, the United Nations Office of the Secretary General's Envoy on Youth (OSGEY), Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY).

The side event was coordinated by **Antti Erkkilä** from MAKUTANO research project, a project emerging from Tanzanian needs for environmental collaboration and conflict resolution. MAKUTANO is funded by the Develop Academy Programme, which is a programme jointly prepared by the Academy of Finland and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.



2. Presentations and discussion

Following the opening words, the youth attendees took the stage and presented their experiences, realities, inspirations and lessons learned on issues related to environmental collaboration and peace processes.

Finnish youth in action on climate change

The presentation session began with **Joel Linnainmäki**, specialist on international advocacy at ALLIANSSI, the Finnish Youth Co-Operation.

Joel described what Finnish youth are doing to fight climate change. There are youth representatives working “inside the room”; for example, in the Finnish Agenda 2030 Youth Group set up in spring 2017 under the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSO) led by the Prime Minister. The Finnish Youth Delegate attends the UN climate change conferences. The youth are also active “outside the room”, organizing events that give them a voice on climate issues and influencing the political parties. In conclusion, the youth are very active in climate work, and they have been leading the discussion in Finland in many ways.

While that is all positive, Joel nevertheless posed an important question about the fairness of it all: can we really leave activism to young people only, by letting them to bear the responsibility and burden of the advocacy work towards policy makers and civil servants? His own response was much in line with the audience:

“I think that is unfair towards the young people because it is not only their responsibility, but the responsibility of everyone in the society.”

Another issue Joel brought up was that climate change is going to be a generational experience for young people. In the same way that other large events defined the youth experience in the 1980s or 1990s. It is very likely that the youth will remember taking a part in this social movement – pushing people to do more – in 20 or 30 years’ time.

Finally, Joel reminded us that while activism is important, we need the official processes as well. When young people vote, it means the political parties need to take them into account. Thus, young people can affect the important debates rather than letting other people to define their interests for them.

Climate change realities in Sri Lanka

From the Finnish youth we moved to the stark climate change realities in Sri Lanka, presented by **Suchith Abeyewickreme**, an international trainer on peacebuilding, ethics education and inter-religious dialogue. Often, when climate strikes and activism are in the news, there is a heavy focus on the actions of the global North. However, Suchith noted that it is the South that is the most vulnerable and suffers the most from the impacts. His home country, Sri Lanka, is ranked, in some indexes, as the world's second most vulnerable country in the world in terms of climate change, and the intensifying floods and droughts are having a major impact on the country's economy, which relies heavily on crop cycles. The farmers' life is becoming more and more difficult and unpredictable. At its worst, the uncertainty is even causing suicides due to damaged crop cycles and debts incurred. Also in the cities, it is also the most vulnerable people who are affected the most. For instance, the poorest people who live in the slums close to the riversides are facing the highest risks from flooding.

The second major point Suchith emphasized was the link of climate change to conflicts, peace building and partnerships. If you look at many areas of conflict, such as Syria and Yemen, these are not only about political issues. The conflicts are very much related to resources and environment even if they are framed as something different. It is no coincidence that climate change affects significantly these areas.

It is important that we build partnerships between the Global North and the Global South in climate activism, so that the southern and the most vulnerable voices are not lost in this process. While in the Global North the climate change movement may hold that banner up, in certain Global South contexts their struggle may be formed as 'Peace', 'Human Rights', 'Poverty' and they may not be holding up the 'Climate Change' banner in the same way. This means that the Global Climate Change Movement needs to be in solidarity with other movements and not become a isolated movement representing voices of an elite group and excluding the most vulnerable. Also at times, the high end climate science sometimes tends to further isolate the

most vulnerable from the conversations. Suchith concluded:

"We need to make sure we bring both the northern and southern manifestations of climate issues together and we lead a cohesive movement across the different sectors that we work on."

Gender and minority aspects of peacekeeping in Lebanon and Kosovo

Kethlin Piirma's presentation drew on her experiences from Lebanon, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, where she has worked for organizations, such as the UN, NATO and OSCE.

She began by stating that all parties to the conflict need to be part of the solution. This is why a dialogue is such an elementary aspect of conflict resolution. In comprehensive crisis management, military, police and civilians are all involved and committed to protect the civilians and also to promote the mandate of the mission. Working together is seen as the most effective way towards conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

Men and women as well as different ethnic groups, age groups or minorities are often put in different positions in conflict situations. Kethlin highlighted that different groups have different needs, views and concerns by also using concrete examples. This fact makes peace building multidimensional. Solutions are not the same for all, and once again, that is why dialogue is the key for success.

In Kethlin's experience, the youth, whether they are different ethnicities like Serbs or Albanians in Kosovo, or different religions like Christians or Muslims in Lebanon, are all eager to commit to peace and make the most out of the situation together. She concluded her presentation by emphasizing that:

"If women, minorities and youth are not actively involved as peacemakers, we do not get a lasting peace."

Nadafa Le Beledna campaign in South Sudan

Wani Michael, Executive Director of Okay Africa Foundation (OAF) and founder of the Nadafa Le Beledna campaign, showed us a short film ([link to the video](#)) about a campaign in South Sudan, where a growing number of young people are engaging in collaborative effort to clean the city and the streets from garbage.

In the video we could see that the campaign was not only about making the environment cleaner but also about bringing young people in South Sudan together to feel they have a chance to make a difference.

The video shows a group of young people going around the streets with garbage bags, brushes and trucks collecting waste and garbage from the ground. Even though one can see that the work is hard, and the hot weather is challenging, what also comes across is the joyful atmosphere and fun that the young people are having. There is music and dancing and people are having a great time.

While Wani Michael presented the video, he stressed that the idea behind the campaign is to give the young people a chance to be useful for their society. In countries and societies where power is divided in an uneven way and the government might be corrupted, it is important to find safe and low-threshold ways for activism to take place. Cleaning the streets is one way of making a difference and participating in public discussion about the environment.

Sámi people and the conflicting land use interests in northern Finland

The next presentation was given by **Petra Laiti**, who is the chair of the Finnish Sámi Youth Organization.

She discussed the history and role of Sámi people in Finland and brought up important questions about how to resolve conflicting interests and build trust between indigenous peoples and the state.

Since Sámi people may not be familiar to all of us, Petra started off by explaining about the situation and background of the conflict in the Sámi areas.

The Sámi are indigenous people who live across the northern areas of Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. The total population of the Sámi is about 100 000 people and the Sámi nation covers close to 400 000 square kilometers of land. The main traditional livelihoods are reindeer herding and fishing. Reindeer herding in particular requires vast areas of land where the reindeer can roam. As Petra explained, from the 46 rights listed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, nine are exclusively about land rights. Article 26 states that:

“Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.”

In terms of land use the main question lies in defining the roles of indigenous people and the state. As Petra elaborated, 90% of the land used for Sámi reindeer herding is managed by the state-run enterprise Metsähallitus. This means that both the Sámi and the state claim to have the right to control the lands, which leads to clashes of interest.

Furthermore, regarding climate change, Petra explained that the numbers of actors interested in the Arctic are continuously increasing. This means that more and more negotiations are going on about different land use plans between different actors and the state. According to Finnish law it is mandatory to include Sámi people in these negotiations.

The question of these negotiations brought us to Petra’s conclusions. Since historically a lack of trust has developed between the state and the Sámi, there is a concern that Sámi people are not being involved in these negotiations in a fair way. The lack of trust has made Sámi very defensive about their land and, as Petra said:

“They will never stop fighting for it.”

Due to the increasing number of different interests in the Arctic area, this situation needs to be changed in order to protect the Sámi livelihood. Petra ended her presentation with an interesting question:

“How to engage parties in a dialogue they have no willingness to participate in?”

The arts as a catalyzer for peaceful solutions in Colombia

The next presentation was made by **Leonardo Párraga** from Colombia. He is Executive Director of the BogotArt Foundation and co-founder of the Letters for Reconciliation campaign.

The BogotArt Foundation specializes in using art for social inclusion and peace building. Leonardo told the audience about a project which aim was to build trust and communication between historically divided groups in the country.

Leonardo explained that the whole project started from the desire of the organization to try and bring divided groups together through art. They began at the community level by using murals. Offering the local groups the opportunity to paint murals in the city space proved to be a good way for these groups to express their identity and communicate this to others. Building on this encouraging experience in Bogotá, Leonardo and his colleagues started to think how they could apply the idea to the whole country.

Leonardo explained that when the peace agreement was signed in Colombia, it caused a conflict and divided the country into "us" and "them". There were a lot of people in favor of having a peace agreement but also many who were against it. One of the main actor groups was the ex-combatants, who had traditionally seen the government as their opponent and as untrustworthy. There had been only little if any

dialogue between the groups, which had led to a polarization in the country.

Next, an idea of writing letters came up as they thought of ways of communicating. Even though letters had become more of a lost art, they still had power in them and had proven to be very effective tools to start conversations in the past. Leonardo and his team saw the letters as an opportunity to direct the conversation towards a more constructive direction. They created a space for people to exchange letters, where participants could explain in their own words who they were, how they were affected by the conflict and what were their visions for building peace. The experiment was a hit and over 3000 people participated, making it a national campaign.

Leonardo shared two stories of people who had participated in the campaign. The first of them was an ex-combatant and for him, receiving a letter had been a life changing experience. By receiving a letter, the ex-combatant had finally felt that he had been heard and offered support. For the first time in his life he felt that he was actually part of the society and was appreciated as a person. In his reply, the ex-combatant had written that until this moment, he had seen weapons and violence as the only option, but now he was finally ready to learn new skills and to be part of the civil society.

The second story Leonardo told us was about a person whose family had been assassinated



by the rebel group FARC. For her whole life she had wanted revenge and thought violence was the way of having it. However, by having an encounter with an ex-combatant via letters, she had realized that she had to let go of her hatred and find a way to forgive in order to build a better society.

After these touching stories, Leonardo explained how the history and conflict described were linked to the protection of the environment. Areas that used to be controlled by FARC were also areas that had many nature reserves. Under FARC these areas had been in some sense protected since they had only been used a little. After the peace agreement, companies and other actors were now moving to these areas and there was a fear that these lands would be left unprotected. Leonardo concluded that while these lands had great potential for creating sustainability for the communities in Colombia, there was an increasing need to find a working way to manage the lands to prevent a new conflict.

Lessons learnt from Nordic courses on Environmental Collaboration and Conflict Resolution

The last presentation of the morning session was given by **Emma Luoma** and **Juha Kotilainen**, PhD students at the University of Eastern Finland.

Emma and Juha brought us few key lessons they had learned in a Nordic summer school course about environmental collaboration and conflict resolution ([read more about the course and its lessons](#)).

Juha began by discussing how there are socially related challenges that need to be addressed behind most environmental problems. The conflict is rarely just about the natural resource itself. There can be issues related to values, power and social structures, which may be very difficult to solve. Environmental conflicts can include factors from all those categories, which can make them incredibly complex.



Antti Erkkilä, 2018

Furthermore, conflicts are not always entirely a bad thing. They can bring light to injustice and they can provide an opportunity for reform, which can eventually lead to a better situation. Conflicts have a role to play, but the prevention of violence should always be the priority.

Emma continued by discussing an interest-based negotiation approach called the Mutual Gains Approach (MGA) which they had been learning about with Juha during the course. The approach is built on the idea that it is possible to find solutions that benefit all parties and can therefore be more acceptable through collaboration and negotiation that focuses on fulfilling each of the parties' interests. In this kind of collaboration there are no winners and losers, but winning is accomplished together through collaborative effort.

As a key learning point, Emma raised the importance of listening. In order for the collaborative groups to find solutions that benefit all the parties, the parties have to know both their own interests and also the interests of the other parties involved. This can only be learned by active listening. As an example, Emma described a situation where a person is feeling emotional and therefore cannot engage in a constructive conversation. In order to help that person to listen again, first that person needs to be listened to.

Another lesson from the course that Juha highlighted was the need for a realistic attitude towards conflicts. In very difficult situations, the aim of the mediation process does not have to be a perfect agreement. Sometimes it may be more realistic and enough to make progress in just one of the following aspects: substance, procedure or relations. This can already represent a big win.

Finally, Juha stated that it seems to be clear that the attractiveness of collaborative methods is going to keep on growing in the future. Increasingly complex, more challenging and global environmental problems combined with the changing role of the state and civil society will only increase the pressure for more holistic and collaborative approaches. Juha and Emma finished by emphasizing that we need young people interested in this type of work now – more than ever.

Discussion

After the presentations the floor was free for comments and questions. There were specific questions about the presented cases but also wider reflections and feelings that were shared with the attendees. The role of activism and the climate movement was discussed from various perspectives, and the differences between the countries represented were also taken into consideration.

The first common theme that seemed to emerge from the discussion was the complexity and multidimensional form many conflicts can take. There are many different types of societal challenges, as we heard in the presentations of the morning session. Demonstrating in a country where you are welcomed by real bullets is not an option so you need to become creative and show a way, for example by collecting trash. Corruption and deliberate politicization of conflicts as well as mental divisions are issues that have to be addressed.

Climate change is of course an exemplary case where you have to solve several problems at the same time to find a sustainable solution. Due to climate change, countries are facing different kinds of threats of conflict, which depend not only on their current economical, ecological and social situation but also on their history. All this needs to be taken into account when talking about conflict resolution.

The second, and in a sense hopeful theme that came up multiple times was the feeling that we are not alone with our problems. There are a lot of people around the world fighting and trying to solve these issues. We are more interconnected than we think. People could sense that there is this enormous potential in the links and collective capacity that is being built around the globe.

Very much related to the second point, the third theme was a call for mobilization. How can we move from these isolated collaborations to more global movements that can transcend identity divisions? A revolution that is based on solidarity rather than violence was called for.

It was also noted that it is important to try and prevent the climate movement from becoming a movement of the elite. As was pointed out in the

presentations, it can already be seen that climate movements are growing fastest in countries that are least affected by climate change, whereas it is more dangerous to be part of a political movement in countries already suffering from severe impacts of global warming and where conflicts are on-going. While the youth are coming together and can play a major part in the solutions, the responsibility cannot only be put on them; the adults, decision makers and the elite have to do their part as well while taking into consideration the resources available.

3. World Café Small Group Dialogues

The afternoon session began with World Café group dialogues on three different questions related to environmental collaboration and peace processes. The method generally included several rounds during which the participants changed tables and topics, and built on the discussion that took place in the previous round(s) at that specific table. We had three groups and table topics or guiding questions. Three 20 minute rounds provided plenty of discussion on and around the topics. The following summaries are based on the observations by the table hosts **Daniela Tináková, Violeta Gutiérrez** and **Denis Dobrynin**.

What type of environmental conflicts or disputes do you or youth in general face in your home country?

The participants gave many different examples of conflicts, from family level to national and even global conflicts, where youth play a role. These were for example related to water issues, deforestation, agriculture, overfishing, pollution, energy production, infrastructure, waste management and human-animal conflicts. The youth were involved actively through NGOs and indigenous peoples' domains for example.

It was noted that there are generational differences. Younger generations may have different values concerning for example forests. The values are not necessarily money related and they can clash with others. It was suggested that young people may have stronger environmental values and different goals in life than the older generation. Climate change can also be seen as a conflict between generations. However, it is important to include stakeholder groups of various ages for any collaborative processes because they bring wide range of diverse values.

Every group also touched upon the issue of information and the risks related to for example conflicting information and fake news. It was seen as important that people are taught in school to think critically in order to be able to process



the different kinds of information from multiple sources which may have different agendas. It is vital to be able to popularize science but not to simplify it too much. The young people also communicate in different ways than elders, for example by using social media.

What type of environmental collaboration and mediation mechanisms or practices are youth using or could be using?

A key topic on the table was the important role that facilitation and mediation skills have in building environmental collaboration, helping to build trust and giving voice to the different stakeholders involved in conflicts and decision-making. For young researchers, it is useful to learn these skills which provide tools for addressing issues in their work and even in their everyday lives. Furthermore, these are skills that could be taught early on, as early as in school, so children can learn to solve conflicts and create peace.

Social media can play a critical role for young people in finding like-minded people, bringing together these people, in being active and in

expressing their ideas. Social media can give young people more tools for influence. It was noted that while social media can be a tool for having a discussion, they cannot be the only one. There are also issues with inclusivity.

Social media were also considered as a powerful tool for publicity. One participant highlighted that they may also create challenges for local conflict resolution because they bring the conflict into a “public debate” and there is less time for local people to work on the conflict by themselves. The neutrality of social media was also questioned and their role in polarization of public opinion.

The importance of networks was also brought up. One participant noted that:

“It is not necessarily a direct mediation, but a network of like-minded people. It brings a shift in the dynamics of conflict, and people see other possibilities, because when you are stuck in your context, you do not see the exit.”

According to the participant, in the process of peacebuilding, imagination and possibility for different solutions are important, and networks and movements play a vital role in them.



The participants brought up several practical skills and conditions that can be used for developing environmental collaboration and addressing the structures behind any process:

- Active listening
- Trust building
- Transparency and openness
- Joint monitoring of implementation
- Knowledge of the context
- Guarantees of safety for the people who are involved
- Time and money

What are the risks of involving youth in environmental collaboration and conflict resolution?

The risks were roughly divided into two categories in the discussion. First, the risks to the young people themselves. Participation in environmental actions can affect negatively young people's health, since it can be emotionally distressing and cause for instance sleeping problems. In situations where no fast changes and meaningful results can be achieved, it can cause frustration and which can lead, in some cases, people not to participate ever again. Participation can also cause burnout if youth are really committed to the cause and it takes top priority in their life. Environmental activism can be time-consuming, and trying to carry out regular life (school, work etc.) and sustain family relationships can be difficult.

Another issue that was brought up was the risk of stigmatization of young activists. On one hand it can be a negative issue and a big burden. On the other hand, the experience from this activism can be seen as valuable.

An interesting viewpoint was that we might be putting too much pressure on young people, and there can be negative consequences if you are not active politically. Young people should not be forced into activism and they should be able to decide what to do based on capacities and interests.

The more extreme identified risks for young people in environmental collaboration and conflict resolution were the direct harm and insecurity that can occur in some contexts. This can vary significantly between different areas

around the globe. In some countries and cultural settings involvement in activism may lead to exclusion from society, community and family, as one must for example honor family opinions.

The second category of risks was related to youth in collaboration and peace building processes. The before mentioned frustration and lack of fast results may cause radicalism and violence. Even if positive changes are happening, the pace can be perceived to be too slow.

The role of activism in conflict processes was also discussed. One participant noted that the method of activism should be questioned and that sometimes advocacy activism can make the situation worse and increase the conflict. This type of activism does not seek to find a solution or to collaborate and perhaps is not that useful. Another participant disagreed and saw that sometimes you need this kind of activism to carve out the space for the more collaborative service-oriented activism.

4. Plenary discussion

The plenary discussion, led by **Irmeli Mustalahti**, included the summaries from the table hosts and questions designed to open up the theme to other issues too.

In the early part of the session there was discussion that touched upon the nature of conflicts. The notion of environmental conflicts was questioned because there are usually several factors that simultaneously affect the formation of the conflict. It was suggested that it is more accurate to say most conflicts have an environmental angle to them. Conflicts are part of life and they can be agents of change. Another participant joined this line of thinking and also saw conflicts or crises as an invitation to change. It means something has not been worked out. Thus we now can think: what can we do, and how can we act in a way that changes the situation into better?

This question led to the discussion on how the way people approach peace building has evolved over time. Initially, it was about **conflict resolution**: how to resolve the conflict? This was followed by **conflict management**: how do we manage beyond resolution? Now we talk about

conflict transformation: conflicts are seen as an opportunity to imagine a different possibility, as an opportunity to transform. It is no longer about mediation in a closed room; transformation is now seen as flowing across issues, across communities and across generations.

Another theme in the discussion was the risks of youth activism. One of the attendees pointed out that in some countries, being an activist could influence one's career possibilities if activism was not seen as acceptable. It was also noted that activism can be hard work and sometimes very time consuming. However, it was also seen as an important way of being an active member of the society and working for the causes young people believe in.

In this context, a point was made regarding the question about the risks to young people in collaboration and conflict situations (see World Café dialogue above). Perhaps it would have been better to focus on the challenges of involving the young people and how to solve these issues instead of listing the things which are problematic or which might stop young people from participating. You can imagine how seeing this kind of list may only discourage someone from activism and fighting for an important cause that may be worth the sacrifices you have to make. It was suggested that for these young people, trying to find some kind of supportive network around you can be very helpful, even if you do not get support from your family.

Moving back to reasons of conflicts, it was noted that conflicts are also usually about lack of communication and lack of understanding. If we can open new communication channels, we can enhance understanding and move one step forward. One of the basics in peace mediation is that you have to know the interests of people to be able to find common ground. In a way, conflicts might help communities open up a dialogue about the causes of the conflict and in this way help building trust between opposite parties.

Similar points were made when the importance of preparative work of mediation or environmental collaboration was emphasized. There are lots of different interest groups and institutions that are really connected to the problems that are hardly seen or where the connection is not visible.

It is important to get all of these involved. For example, in a conflict related to forests, you can say that the land owners and the government are the clearly visible and important part in the conflict. However, so are the activists, the local daycare kids who use the forests – they may also have an important part in the solution. Thus, you need to do your homework really well and figure out who should be sitting at the table when these questions are asked. It is difficult and takes time but that is what you need to do and have.

A participant in the plenary discussion noted that it is really a great change that young people unlike in the 1980s and 1990s are no longer afraid of the stigmatization of activism. However, in some countries the stigma does not just last a few years but may actually threaten your life. From there she continued with a self-reflecting question: are we throwing the young people into the middle of the soup that is the conflict, without the needed support? We have to be careful that we do not throw them in there without understanding how to protect them and the price they have to pay. That is why we are also here today: to understand what type of soup are we throwing these young people into.

This point was pushed by another participant who questioned the mindset that young people are seen as potential victims that are thrown in somewhere or as passive elements that are used to the context that already exists. The young people are already in the soup and they are very much aware of what makes the soup taste the way it does. So perhaps rather than thinking about whether the soup is too hot or how to get the young people out of it, it may be more productive, more aligned with the UN processes as well, to think about why: why are the young already in there and what does the soup consist of?

5. Conclusions

Major environmental conflicts all over the world are often related to the use of regional and local natural resources, such as oil resources in Nigeria, mining in Latin America or access to clean water worldwide. Although challenges may be regional and conflicts local, deliberative and participatory methods to analyze the context and dynamics of conflict may apply in various conflict situations.

Active listening to each actor's interests, needs and perspectives, without judging, is highly important: a core skill in conflict analysis and resolution methods.

In this side event emphasis was more on tensions and conflicts that could be solved through soft security measures in local contexts. The factors underlying political conflicts might include issues such as disputes on land use and conflicts over natural resources utilization. Conflicts related to natural resources (water, forest, conservation, land use, mining etc.) could also be an entry point leading to national peace building processes. And youth could be key agents to spread basic skills in environmental collaboration and environmental conflict resolution. Teaching those skills should be seen as civic education, in the same way as first aid skills.

There are three priority issues in which youth could be involved and further trained through practice-oriented skills:

Creation of soft security measures and tools via collaborative and multi-actor practices.

Assisting and developing skills to create participatory actions.

Learning practical active listening tools/skills in assessment and mediation in conflict situations.

Soft security measures and tools support the rebuilding of communities and empower the collaboration between various actors, including contributions of young people. Facilitation of dialogue with the sectors having demand for employment, could provide soft security measures in which young people could participate via collaborative and multi-actor practices. Cross-generation work skills mentoring, could be one of these types of soft security tools to support the rebuilding of communities.

The importance of active listening cannot be emphasized too much. Conflict situations are frustrating and the feeling of not being heard is often behind the mistrust that can even lead to the violence. In the case of environmental conflict, people are often unable to listen to anything, rational or not, when they are emotionally frustrated and angry. This state blocks your ability to process any new information, especially

if you are young and you do not have previous experience to help you to reflect and solve the conflicts.

We should be careful that youth are not "responsibilized" into rebuilding trust in the post-conflict or post-war era when the logic of responsabilization encoded in contemporary governance interventions fails and conflicts attend its incomplete realization. The diversity of post-war governance arrangements or post-conflict situations is linked by a common reliance on making individuals responsible for their own wellbeing (also for outcomes related to resource conditions).

The strategies of making individuals responsible for their wellbeing is a feature consistent with the ongoing governance revolution in other social domains, such as illness and health, education, crime and legality, and corporate cost management. In sum, youth participation and inclusion for the prevention and resolution of conflict also require long-term state efforts to ensure social protection of the youth constituencies.

Youth-led mediation efforts require the integration of conflict sensitive and "do-no-harm" principles. The mediation efforts as well as collaborative processes are long-term transformation processes that require time, the recognition of the conflict roots, and dialogue to respectfully restructure the "events" and "facts" that initiated and increased the dispute. The youth who are involved in these types of long processes need the protection of their rights, including the right to withdraw from the process once their civic spaces or private life and families are at risk.

Acknowledgements

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Organizers

MAKUTANO Translocal forest owners and environmental collaboration: an action learning process of forest governance transformation in Tanzania is a research project funded by the Develop Academy Programme (2019-2022), which is a programme jointly prepared by the Academy of Finland and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. The main objective of the project is to study skills of environmental collaboration and conflict resolution methods among a group of forest owners and local community members in the Southern Highlands, Tanzania, and to trace how these skills are transformed and used in the future actions of these forest owners and the surrounding communities. The research collaboration involves international partners from Tanzania, Kenya, Mexico and Denmark.

ALL-YOUTH Want To Rule Their World is a multidisciplinary research project (2018-2023) which explores the capacities of young people (aged between 16 and 25) and the obstacles that hamper their engagement with society. The main goal of the project is to create possibilities and to enable young people to participate in making their own communities and the society. The research focus is on responsive governance and rule of law, digital innovation and sustainable development interventions, such as the forest-based bioeconomy. ALL-YOUTH is funded by the Strategic Research Council (SRC) coordinated by the Academy of Finland.

CORE Collaborative remedies for fragmented societies is a research project (2017-2021) that builds on the notions of interdependence and collaborative governance as responses to complex societal problems. The project seeks practices for creating fair, efficient and knowledge-based solutions to complex problems concerning the environment and use of natural resources. The focus is on creating models for joint problem-solving in the Finnish context and on supporting the capacities of different actors to use them. CORE is funded by the Strategic Research Council (SRC) at the Academy of Finland.

ALLIANSSI, The Finnish Youth Co-operation, is a national service and interest organisation within the field of youth work. It is a politically and religiously independent trustee that hosts 125 national youth work and educational organisations as its members. Its purpose is to promote the development of youth as responsible members of the society and to encourage youth participation in decision-making as well as international activities.



"No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline." - Kofi Annan, 1998

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL COLLABORATION AND PEACE PROCESSES

7 March 2019

Venue: Think Corner - Tiedekulma, University of Helsinki, Yliopistonkatu 4, Helsinki, Finland

PROGRAMME

- 11:00** Opening words, **Reetta Toivanen**, Leader of ALL-YOUTH Research Consortium (STN), Professor of Sustainability Science
- Facilitators: **Heta Heiskanen** and **Antti Erkkilä**
- Realities and lessons learnt around the world and inspirations from the Finnish youth on issues related to environmental collaboration and peace processes
- Finnish youth in action on climate change: **Joel Linnainmäki**
- Climate change realities in Sri Lanka: **Suchith Abeyewickreme**
- Gender and minority aspects of peacekeeping in Lebanon and Kosovo: **Kethlin Piirma**
- Nadafa Le Beledna campaign in South Sudan: **Wani Michael**
- Sámi people and the conflicting land use interests in northern Finland: **Petra Laiti**
- The arts as a catalyzer for peaceful solutions in Colombia: **Leonardo Párraga**
- Lessons learnt from [Nordic courses on Environmental Collaboration and Conflict Resolution](#), **Juha M. Kotilainen** and **Emma Luoma**, University of Eastern Finland
- Discussion
- 13:00** Vegan snack
- 13:30** World Café Small Group Dialogues on environmental collaboration and peace processes
- 15:00** Plenary discussion lead by **Irmeli Mustalahti**, Interaction Coordinator of the ALL-YOUTH Research Consortium (STN), Professor of Natural Resources Governance
- 16:00** Short film

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