Regional Policy Recommendations

Violent Extremism (VE) threatens the security and fundamental rights of peaceful living. Youth are essential actors in contributing to Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and peacebuilding work. Youth are not only highly affected by VE, but they also play an important role as positive change agents. The way youth resilience manifests is very much dependent on social, political, and economic factors. ALLY intends to amplify young people's constructive voices and agency in addressing diverse factors of violent extremist narratives in South Asia. The recommendations herein were produced by the ALLY youth researchers through an eight months long participatory research with multiple stakeholders, and with further contributions from ALLY staff and fellows.

The following recommendations for the governments of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, would, if implemented, facilitate the increased engagement and impact of youth in peacebuilding and the prevention of violent extremism across South Asia:

Establish Regional Action Plan for PVE

Formulate a comprehensive regional roadmap towards preventing violent extremism that includes youth – based on the 2015 plan of action to PVE of the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN 2016).

Establish Bodies for Preventing Violent Extremism and Youth

In order to fulfill the requirements of UNSCR 2250, all the countries in South Asia should create a coordinating body for preventing violent extremism. These bodies will need to have a significant youth representation with grassroots outreach through district-level arms. These bodies should be responsible for launching coordinated, funded projects for PVE across the region. Further, they should organize awareness campaigns on VE for the general public, as well as targeted campaigns for rural and suburban communities. The established bodies should also ensure the systemic coordination of peacebuilding and PVE programs in rural and other underserved areas.

Promote Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Processes

The countries in South Asia have a long, complicated history of conflict. As noted in this policy brief, these past conflicts fuel grievances that drive VE, particularly in these current times. While grassroots PVE work is essential, nation states themselves must take formal actions to address past grievances and embody efforts to create reconciliation at the national level. South Asia could also be path-breaking in engaging in transitional dialogue on conflicts at the state level, adopting statements of acknowledgement and reconciliation which aim to take the region beyond historical divisions, thus potentially diminishing public animosities that incite VE. This work could be supported at the grassroots level by YPBs, especially in regard to making visible and acceptable the personal and community-level trauma that lingers from these regional conflicts, impacting mental health and further these conflicts at the local level.

Encourage Flexible Policies and Regulations for Preventing Violent Extremism and Peacebuilding Organizations

All countries in South Asia have very strict rules and regulations for registering, managing, and funding (national or international) NGOs for PVE. These bureaucratic barriers can overwhelm YPBs. Without formal registration, YPBs have no ability to solicit funds and grants to support their work. To support the fulfillment of the YPS agenda, differentiated policies should be established which make registration less complex and costly for youth-led organizations with small budgets. Further, the registration processes need to be transparent and consistent. Alternatively, funds for YPS could be routed through a central registered body and channelized to YPBs for particular projects.

Include PVE in Educational Curricula

Integration of peace, tolerance, interfaith understanding, inclusion, diversity, and global citizenship in existing national education curricula would boost peace and reduce extremism. Applying an approach of behavioral change to nurture mutual understanding, empathy, compassion, and regional/global citizenship as part of every student's would make a huge difference. YPBs are innovators in this regard as they have been imparting training and workshops on peacebuilding to teenagers across the region. Their collaboration and input should be sought to create the academic curriculum to expedite a regional peacebuilding effort.

Institutionalize Youth Participation

Youth-led peacebuilding and PVE efforts cannot be considered in isolation from other ways in which youth engage with the government. Ensure youth inclusion in political decision-making processes (e.g. through youth councils/parliaments, etc.), at local, national, and regional levels in order to establish a collaborative environment between youth and government.

Enablers of Youth-Led Peacebuilding in Asia

In this analysis, enablers for youth-led peacebuilding are divided into primary and secondary categories:

Primary Enablers

- **Passion:** Youth feel the urge to do something good that reduces social injustice. Their personal experiences to violence and traumas serve as motivation to work towards building an inclusive and peaceful society for their fellow human beings and citizens.
- **Support:** Initial support to fuel this work comes from family members, close friends, peacebuilding peers, and other supporters in their close network. Continuous support from networks helps YPBs move forward.
- **Motivation:** YPBs also feel motivated when their ideas are backed by the educators, university faculty, and other leaders. They feel valued having support from their mentors.

Secondary Enablers

- **Networks:** As they start working, YPBs take part in different online and offline trainings run by different local and international NGOs. They also begin to recognize the scope and scale of the peacebuilding sector as they develop their personal networks. Eventually YPBs start working in larger groups with other like-minded youths serving on a voluntarily basis. As their work gains visibility, YPBs find opportunities to connect or collaborate with other youth groups and networks.
- **Funding:** YPBs may receive funds from local sources, individuals, or through crowdfunding. Local and international NGOs may also show interest to work with and support these YPBs.
- **Social Media:** YPBs use social media to increase their visibility. It becomes easier to reach larger audience without needing to have larger financial resources.
- **Exposure and Exchange Programs:** In-country networking and collaborations lead YPBs to international exposure where they start leading sessions, seminars, and workshops. National-, regional- and international-level cultural exchange programs and scholarships may help young people interact with and better understand different societies while developing leadership skills for civic engagement.
- **Recognition:** Gaining recognition from different government organizations, senior officials, media outlets, celebrities and/or other social influencers gives YPBs a moral boost for their work.
- **Relationships:** Maintaining good relations with various political parties is important. To arrange larger events and campaigns, YPBs need support and acknowledgment from the local representatives. Staying in favor with the current administrations helps them address issues that may arise.
- **Government Departments:** India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka have ministries or departments established for campaigning, peacebuilding, youth engagement, cultural development of all existing communities, Information Communication Technology monitoring, and the preservation of historical sites and figures. These departments might be titled differently in different countries, but they serve similar purposes. YPBs partner with these government organizations. In this way, these departments function as significant enablers because they ensure multilevel support to YPBs, from advocacy, training, and funding.
- **Documentation:** Proper documentation of programs in their early stage increases credibility of YPBs and their programs.
- **Organizational Support:** Ongoing support from local and international NGOs can make a smoother pathway to create sustainable impacts in the society.