



# **African Buddhist Perspectives on Challenges and Opportunities in Youth Participation in Good Governance and Peace Building**

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## **Abstract**

An estimated 16 million people die every day because of violence. Globalization impacted global environment change, financial and economic crises -resulting into growing inequalities, extreme poverty, exclusion, and denial of basic human rights. Good governance and sustained development; through promotion of equity, participation, pluralism, transparency, accountability, and the rule of law in the manner that was effective and enduring. This paper explores the challenges and opportunities of African youth participation in governance and peace-building.

*Keywords:* Peace Building, Good Governance, African Buddhism

*Buddhism is not a religion; it is a way of life. Religion was binding with God: Buddhism does not have God. It should not be that you should do [something] because God will punish you. There should not be any fear because you should not do what you do not what to be done to you. Everyone can remain in his religion and be made a good person in it or a good person for his country. For example, if children are taught about the Buddha, they would protect animals instead of shooting stones at them. The precepts deter killings. Reckless killings basing on God would not arise.<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

Africa is the second largest continent - originally a mass of black people, who with time, dispersed around the world, for various reasons – and now, the term ‘African’ has been changed to ‘Blacks living abroad’, and people within the so called Black Diaspora.<sup>2</sup> The term youth describes both men and women below 35 years, and at most 45 years. At this stage, they are full of ideas and energy to explore their environments and gain favors from them. Incidentally, the Buddha achieved full status as Buddha at thirty five years of age.<sup>3</sup> With globalization effects, it was possible to integrate youths from anywhere and influence governance.<sup>4</sup> Along the way, they participate in governance and transform their societies from unfavorable states to better ones. Unfortunately, deliberately or not, they fail to contribute their abundant ideas and energy towards good governance, social change and development. Better governance was highly associated with development<sup>5</sup>, of which the youth were majority stakeholder. Yet, it was through their natural efforts that they overcome poverty, hunger, environment degradation, unemployment, human diseases, and

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<sup>1</sup>Nandasiri Manimendra, Incumbent Chairperson, Buddhist Association of Tanzania, 12 January 2015.

<sup>2</sup>Michel Clasquin. Transplanting Buddhism: An Investigation Towards the Spread of Buddhism, with Reference to Buddhism in South Africa. University of South Africa November 1999:3.

<sup>3</sup>Chattha Sangiti Pitakam - Suttantapitaka Dighanikaya - Maha Vagga Eds. The Editorial Committee, Department of the Promotion and propagation of the Sasana. [Introduction], 2007.

<sup>4</sup>Voxi Amavilah, Simplice A. Asongu & Antonio R. Andrés, “Globalization, Peace & Stability, Governance, and Knowledge Economy,” A G D I Working Paper WP/14/012, August 2014:9.

<sup>5</sup>ODI Briefing paper, ““Governance, Development and Aid Effectiveness: A Quick Guide to Complex Relationships,” March 2006:1.

achieve faster more sustained pro-poor economic growth.<sup>6</sup> This paper explores reasons for youth's failure to participate in those efforts and the opportunities greatly missed, too.

## Background

An estimated 16 million people die every day because of violence.<sup>7</sup> Globalization impacted global environment change, financial and economic crises - resulting into growing inequalities, extreme poverty, exclusion, and denial of basic human rights. Of the millennium development goals (MDGs), lack of focus on transparency, accountability, and participation were greatest setbacks.<sup>8</sup> Young men and women had wealth of ideas which were not tapped, and therefore for social good and development.<sup>9</sup> Poverty was prominent at causing exclusion from participation and marginalization of human beings.<sup>10</sup> It was not only about social crises but mental crises –showing greater risk states because of unemployment, low standard of living, financial difficulties, radical discrimination and social isolation.<sup>11</sup> As a consequence, social crises were triggered and development stalled. Social crises were remained rife, when governance structures and development plans failed to capture aspects of human dignity, freedom and equality. Young men and women had wealth of ideas there were not tapped, and therefore they were not active in powering their innovations for social good and development.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>IFPRI: "Development Strategy and Governance" <http://www.ifpri.org/book-33/ourwork/division/development-strategy-and-governance> retrieved 20.08.14.

<sup>7</sup>Thich Nhat Tu. Engaged Buddhism, Social Change and World Peace. Vietnam Buddhist University Series 21, Religious press 2014:62.

<sup>8</sup>Guardian News and Media Limited: "Development depends on good governance" <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/02/development-depends-good-governance> retrieved 21.08.14.

<sup>9</sup>8th UNESCO Youth Forum / Cyril Bailleul in UNESCO: "By Youth, For Youth" <http://en.unesco.org/themes/democracy-and-global-citizenship> retrieved 18.08.14.

<sup>10</sup>Maritza Formisano Prada: Empowering the Poor Through Human rights Litigation. UNESCO, 2011:7.

<sup>11</sup>Jeewanthi Rathnayaka. Buddhist Contribution to Health Living. Vietnam Buddhist University Series 23. Eds. Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu & Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Thien. Vietnam 2014:80.

<sup>12</sup>8th UNESCO Youth Forum / Cyril Bailleul in UNESCO: "By Youth, For Youth" <http://en.unesco.org/themes/democracy-and-global-citizenship> retrieved 18.08.14.

Poverty was prominent at causing exclusion from participation and marginalization of human beings.<sup>13</sup> It was not only about social crises but mental crises: showing greater risk states because of unemployment, low standard of living, financial difficulties, and radical discrimination and social isolation.<sup>14</sup> Discontent was synonymous with social conflicts and parallel to development. At a peak of social crisis a rethink and turnaround was most comfortable position to turn to, with a view of forging peace. Decentralization was pivotal step towards democratic governance; but that did not succeed without rage.<sup>15</sup>

While Buddhism was independent of said social crises, community was dependent on the degree of coherence. Buddhist governance system was top-down and was structured into three major segments: Sangha, Dharma, and Lay Community. Such specialization of forces built effectiveness, and systems of accountability and responsive.<sup>16</sup> This helped create years of orderliness that bored some characters favor of instability by crossing lines of duty, leading to political and socio-economic collapse, while at the extremes, causing dilution of Buddhist values.

In recent years, social media was the commonest and effective media of influencing governance. It provoked social crises through which regime changes were achieved.<sup>17</sup> The successful Tunisian and Egyptian protests demonstrated how effective social media tools were at influencing governance,<sup>18</sup> moreover with the youth at the forefront of that change. In this paper, emphasis was put on ‘peaceful means of attaining peace’.

The peace construction processes consisted of commitment to peace-building, mediation, conflict prevention and resolution, peace education, education for non-violence,

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<sup>13</sup> Maritza Formisano Prada: Empowering the Poor Through Human Rights Litigation. UNESCO, 2011:7.

<sup>14</sup> Jeewanthi Rathnayaka. Buddhist Contribution to Health Living. Vietnam Buddhist University Series 23. Eds. Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu & Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Thien. Vietnam 2014:80.

<sup>15</sup> Pranab Bardhan, “Decentralization of Governance and Development,” The Journal of Economic Perspectives Vol. 16, No. 4 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 185-205.

<sup>16</sup> RTI, “Governance and Economic Development” [http://www.rti.org/page.cfm/Governance\\_and\\_Economic\\_Development](http://www.rti.org/page.cfm/Governance_and_Economic_Development) retrieved 20.08.14.

<sup>17</sup> Clay Shirkey, “Political Power of Social Media - Technology, the Public Sphere Sphere, and Political Change.” 90 Foreign Aff. 28, 2011:28.

<sup>18</sup> Sarah Joseph: “Social Media, Political Change, and Human Rights.” 35 B. C. Int'l & Comp. L. Rev. 2012:145

tolerance, acceptance, mutual respect, intercultural and interfaith dialogue and reconciliation.<sup>19</sup> Resolving the acute economic, social and environmental problems was a lot possible with scientific innovations, which assured youths of sustainable development.<sup>20</sup> The use of information technological was significant at impacting communities.<sup>21</sup> The utilization of such information was reinforced by United Nations backed mandate to promote freedom of expression.<sup>22</sup> It was a crucial tool for youth engagement in governance and peace-building. Education was important component of transformation as it aimed at meeting development agendas.<sup>23</sup> Good governance sustained development, through promotion of equity, participation, pluralism, transparency, accountability, and the rule of law in the manner that was effective and enduring.<sup>24</sup> In this paper the challenges and opportunities in youth participation in governance and peace-building were explored.

## Challenges and opportunities of youth participation in governance

Participation was part and parcel of human development. It essence in Buddhism was doing well, since the origin of happiness was in good actions.<sup>25</sup> Participation was to be guided by good speech. As high speaking tone brought so much suffering: directly or indirectly, the blame game only caused pain to others.<sup>26</sup> Clinging on false impressions: stubbornly was responsible for the unfortunate destructions.<sup>27</sup> The teaching of karma helped

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<sup>19</sup> UNESCO, “Culture of Peace and Non-Violence.” <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/bureau-of-strategic-planning/themes/culture-of-peace-and-non-violence/> retrieved 18.08.14.

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO, “Science for a Sustainable Future.” <http://en.unesco.org/themes/science-sustainable-future> retrieved 18.08.14.

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO, “Building Knowledge Societies.” <http://en.unesco.org/themes/building-knowledge-societies> retrieved 18.08.14.

<sup>22</sup> UNESCO, “Fostering Freedom of Expression.” <http://en.unesco.org/themes/fostering-freedom-expression> retrieved 18.08.14.

<sup>23</sup> UNESCO, “Education for the 21st Century.” <http://en.unesco.org/themes/education-21st-century> retrieved 18.08.14.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations, “Governance.” <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/governance/> retrieved 18.08.14.

<sup>25</sup> Thich Nhat Tu. Inner Freedom. Vietnam Buddhist University Series 8. 2014:116.

<sup>26</sup> Thich Nhat Tu. Inner Freedom. 2014:8, 9, &11.

<sup>27</sup> Thich Nhat Tu. Inner Freedom. 2014:12.

shape methods of participation so that outcomes were beneficial rather than harmful.<sup>28</sup> It all started with the initiative of mind development, which was a means of investigating nature of conditioned phenomena.<sup>29</sup> There were mixed feelings for Buddhist youth participation like it was the case in other societies. There were always the pro-reforms or change and statuesque section. Radical Buddhism was encouraged which undermined goodwill of Buddhism.<sup>30</sup> It was not long enough when violent confrontation began among Buddhist population, until one group overturned the intentions and actions of another as increasingly the overpowering force turned out to be a representation of social justice. Buddhism was all embracing.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, Buddhism had psychological and philosophical features<sup>32</sup> that explained strange human and actions, and provides remedy path to them. Youth engagement required wisdom in order to win their place in the world of the wise. Buddhism provided realistic means to attain mental power and effort to attain life goals, including knowledge and wisdom.<sup>33</sup> Youth participation also involved engaging and exhibiting good virtue, including generosity. Generosity nourished material progress of individual and society, such as kind speech, helpful actions and equal participation.<sup>34</sup> The economic relationship between the rich and poor was that of dependence, which created room for oppression. Dependence on others was suffering.<sup>35</sup>

While there was willingness to forego selfish interest, materialism reigned.<sup>36</sup> Political wellbeing was one of the measurements for wellness, characterized by quality of

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<sup>28</sup> Phra Raysuddhinanamongkol. The Law of Karma – Darama Practice. First Edition. Wat Amb-havana. Bangkok, Thailand. 2003:84,90.

<sup>29</sup> Milindapanha. 2006:420.

<sup>30</sup> Bangkok Post. <http://www.bangkokpost.com/most-recent/434995/radical-buddhist-groups-join-forces> [retrieved 3rd-10.14]

<sup>31</sup> Extra Canonical Works in Bimala Churn Law. A History of Pāli Literature. Vol.: II. Ideological Book House; Dehli 1983:361

<sup>32</sup> Bimala Churn Law. 1983:385.

<sup>33</sup> Mirandapanha. The Questions of King Miranda. Sitagu International Buddhist Academy, Myanmar, 2006:77.

<sup>34</sup> Thich Nhat Tu. 2014:42.

<sup>35</sup> Kazal Barua. Communal Harmony and Buddhist Perspectives – Bangladesh. In Buddhist Contribution to Global Peace Building Eds. Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu & Most Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Thien. Vietnam Buddhist University Series 24—2014:183.

<sup>36</sup> Bhante Suvano Casette Recordings. The 16 Dreams of King Pasenadi in the New Dhara Series. In WardPath, Malaysia. No.4. 2003:30.

local democracy, and individual freedoms.<sup>37</sup> The ability of leadership to transform society was made possible through civic responsibility.<sup>38</sup> The ways of Buddhist leadership were charity, morality, gentleness, restraint, non-hatred, non-violence, patience, friendliness and equity.<sup>39</sup> Buddhism aimed at developing the mind to respond well to expected moral and ethical practices in everyday endeavors to achieve success and happiness –which too was a universal goal. From it desired virtues were developed.<sup>40</sup> That way, it was predevelopment and pro-peace when everyone did the same. Certain morals and ethics were only local ideas that new Buddhists pick on to consider Buddhist, and soon it becomes new Buddhist tradition, just because Buddhism recognized diversities in choices and deeds. Corporate governance overshadowed environment governance, which caused bad karma to man; but with global environment problems, man will learn good lessons for better environment governance.<sup>41</sup>

Decentralization of Buddhist functions helped service providers to reach diverse geographical regions and facilitated participation, through which it systematically resolved crises.<sup>42</sup> What if the emerging new traditions persistently demonstrated outrage and apathy? Or is it a propagation strategy to appease and appeal to everyone in order for Buddhism to be popular worldwide? The strategy though was successful for now but future Buddhism will be at stake as it progressively gets diluted to no sense. It was thus important to continue to discuss the sense and no sense of creating new traditions consistent with the ever curious and experiment, so that Buddhist ethics are preserved and consistently transferrable to future generations.

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<sup>37</sup> Ching Y. Lo. Quantification of Happiness Using Using the Science of Metabolomic Profiling – in: Buddhist Contribution to Health Living. Vietnam Buddhist University Series 23. Eds. Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nat Tu & Most Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Thien. Vietnam Buddhist University Series 23. Vietnam 2014:210.

<sup>38</sup> Thiri Nyunt. Towards Non-Violence Through Healthy Mind, in: Buddhist Contribution to health living. Vietnam Buddhist University Series 23. Eds. Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu & Most Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Thien. Vietnam Buddhist University Series 23. Vietnam 2014:185.

<sup>39</sup> Maha Vagga. 2007: 147.

<sup>40</sup> Milindapanha. 2006. 422.

<sup>41</sup> Most Ven. Thick Hue Thong. Buddhist with Sustainable Development Objectives of Environment Protection – in Buddhist Response to Environmental Protection. Eds. Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu & Most Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Thien. Vietnam Buddhist University Series 2014:306.

<sup>42</sup> ISDR, “Disaster Risk Reduction, Reduction, Governance and Development” UN/ISDR Africa Educational Series, Volume 2, Issue 4, December 2004:6.

## Challenges and opportunities of youth participation in peace-building

Radical Buddhism was a soft-spoken threat to regional and global peace.<sup>43</sup> Attainment of peace was possible and it was down to individual effort and the realization of the situation they found themselves in, and development of insight as a means to resolve distractions of life, including disease, ignorance and poverty. Subsequent resolutions of inner, social, environmental and spiritual conflicts led to peace and celebratory states. Letting go of painful experiences and practicing lessons for better future was the sincere way to peace. The act of letting go was painful and what was to be released were worries that threatened our existence.<sup>44</sup> Allowing pain to rise on its own, without trying to change its nature was a case of generating peace peacefully.<sup>45</sup> Pain and suffering could only be stopped rather than encouraged through acts of revenge. The past gave us a chance to live differently, to improve and to improve life from lessons learned.<sup>46</sup> The individual had the greatest responsibility to do so - not others, because it is the individual that suffered<sup>47</sup> - not others on his behalf. Application of mindfulness ensured such individual and group power to develop the mind, attain clear insight and knowledge.<sup>48</sup> The practice of meditation and assimilation of the Dharma message cultivated peace,<sup>49</sup> by nurturing virtues of self-restraint, right living, vigilance, steadiness, diligence, discipline, self-mastery, and supremacy over sensory pleasures. Materialism and focus on self-importance - selfishness caused fear, tension and anxiety and such people have not learned to be contented with what they have.<sup>50</sup> People had greater sense for pleasure and religion was not playing its role to guide them morally and spiritually.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Bangkok Post. <http://www.bangkokpost.com/most-recent/434995/radical-buddhist-groups-join-forces> retrieved 3rd-10.14.

<sup>44</sup> Ajahn Sumedo. Cittaviveko –Teaching from the Silent Mind. Amaravati Publications. 1992:44-45.

<sup>45</sup> Carina Pichler. Buddhist Contribution to Global Peace Building ---Peace Through Peaceful Means: A Buddhist Perspective of Restorative Justice. Eds. Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu & Most Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Thien. Vietnam Buddhist University Series 24—2014:84.

<sup>46</sup> Thich Nhat Tu. Inner Freedom. 2014:11, 12 & 48.

<sup>47</sup> Ajahn Sumedo. 1992:47.

<sup>48</sup> Mirandapanha. 2006:77.

<sup>49</sup> Walipola Rahula. What the Buddha Taught. Paris. 1958:125-126.

<sup>50</sup> Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda. You and Your Problems Buddhist Missionary Society. Kuala Lumpur-Malaysia 2004:7.

<sup>51</sup> Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda.2004:15.

It was important to take responsibility over ones' actions with due consideration of consequence. It was illogical to blame religion for one's wrong actions.<sup>52</sup> Exercising compassion was a sure way to foster collective peace and harmony,<sup>53</sup> since discrimination and fanaticism only nurture misery.<sup>54</sup> Also traditions were quickly being destroyed or distorted by modern thought and culture<sup>55</sup>, which broke the identity of the community and diminished their moral fiber, resulting in actions that were violent and against prospects of peace into the future and for generations to come. The way towards peace could be walked by actions practiced rightfully.<sup>56</sup> Kind speech, helpful actions and equal participation were important qualities in promoting unity and harmony.<sup>57</sup> Despite diversity of ideas, cultures and expectation, people always agreed to live differently and attain the goal of peaceful co-existence.<sup>58</sup> The Buddhist practice of meditation offers the understanding of the interdependence of all beings, and teaches that violence is an insatiable means of resolving conflict.<sup>59</sup> Buddhism advocated midway between two extremes –for inner and outer peace.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion and recommendations

The biggest challenge to participation, transformative leadership and peace-building was ignorance that shaped the poor level of confident, quality of discussion and output. It was a big phenomena that will take time and patience – the servicing of our challenges, learning from them and acting right by taking responsibility and managing ourselves and the

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<sup>52</sup> Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda.2004:16.

<sup>53</sup> Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda. 2004:21.

<sup>54</sup> Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda. 2004:26.

<sup>55</sup> Ven. Dr. K. Sri. Dhammananda. 2004:43.

<sup>56</sup> Ajaan Lee Dhammanandaro. Food of Thought – Eighteen Talks on Training the Heart. Wisdom Audio Visual Exchange. 2012:18.

<sup>57</sup> Thich Nhat Tu. 2014:42.

<sup>58</sup> Dr. Sushma Trivedi. Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Multicultural Societies Response and a Recommendation of Buddhist model of Global Citizenship: Buddhist, in: Buddhist Contribution to Global Peace Building. Eds. Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu & Most Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Thien. Vietnam Buddhist University Series 24—2014:184.

<sup>59</sup> Siddarth Singh. Holistic peace as an Integral Part of Peace Building Process and Post Conflict Recovery – in: Buddhist Contribution to Global Peace Building. Eds. Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu & Most Ven. Dr. Thich Duc Thien. Vietnam Buddhist University Series 24—2014:34.

<sup>60</sup> Siddarth Singh. 2014:34.

environment better so that the future can be celebrated as one where young people are much involved, active, responsible, able to influence and take over leadership for the better, and contribute to efforts towards peace. Governance was a development process from a certain level of satisfaction to another. As part of post-conflict recovery, caution was necessary not to throw the country back into chaos. Much of the measures involved restricting seven principles of governance: participation, rule of law, respect for human rights, consensus, and the levels of youth participation varied from far up to far bottom. These levels were freely available for them to participate in depending on the identifiable source of the youth challenges meant to address it at any given level. There was need to have continuous debates until a given challenge was addressed, and at any level depending on the source of the challenges - including those posed at global levels. There was a need to subject any issue to debate - regardless of the complexity and sacredness associated with it, in order to encourage more rational decision making, engagement and success. There was need to localize participatory and decision making processes so that actions made were appropriate to the local situation and only engage other levels when really seen as appropriate, through other processes of local debate, negotiation, consensus building, confidence building, respect, situation of learning from each other, and possibility of agreeing to be different with respect to diverse cultural expectations.