

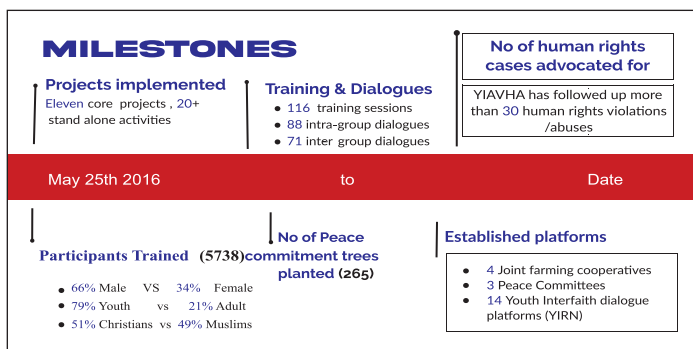


YOUTH INITIATIVE AGAINST VIOLENCE & HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE (YIAVHA)

ROOTS OF RESILIENCE: LOCALLY -LED YOUTH-CENTRIC APPROACHES TO ADDRESSING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

ABOUT YIAVHA

The Youth Initiative Against Violence and Human Rights Abuse (YIAVHA) works to unite and engage youth from various religious backgrounds in peacebuilding, governance, and human rights efforts to foster reconciliation, peace, and development. Established in 2014 but formally registered in 2016, YIAVHA has worked across the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria with youth on different projects. YIAVHA has conducted over 116 training sessions on human rights advocacy, peacebuilding, dialogue, and non-violent conflict resolution, training more than 5,000 young people across the region. Learn more about YIAVHA's work at www.yiavha.org.



herding groups. In the past, strained relationships led to the destruction of farms, attacks on cattle and people, burning of farm residue to prevent grazing, and intensifying hostilities. Through our initiatives, however, communities that once viewed each other as adversaries now work together on shared farms, from planting to harvest.

This shift has fostered economically beneficial relationships between groups. Farmers and herders now exchange resources—such as cow dung for fertile grazing fields—creating mutual benefits and minimising previous sources of conflict. By advancing this cooperative model, communities are seeing a rise in personal relationships that support sustainable peace and align with identified Key Driving Factors (KDFs). As a result, communities have experienced increased economic prosperity.

3. Enhanced youth leadership in Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) in local communities.

There is a general belief that peace & security issues are “high level” discussions above the status of young people across communities despite the existence of youth peace and security frameworks. This has made it difficult for young people to participate and contribute to P/CVE.

We are addressing the capacity gap of young people, changing the perceptions about youth capacity and opportunities in P/CVE through trainings and intergenerational dialogues, formation of local youth networks, amplifying youth voices & relevance,

4. Improved trust in local governance systems for reduced community vulnerabilities.

In the past, conflicts could quickly escalate due to delayed responses from security forces at scenes of farm destruction. These delays were exacerbated by economic challenges and inadequate support for security systems. However, the establishment of local peace committees has allowed for faster, collective resolutions of emerging issues by local power holders, reducing communities' vulnerability to conflict escalation.

YIAVHA's Peace Committees have established protocols for reporting and addressing conflicts, which has improved response times to incidents of farm destruction and cattle rustling. Previously, neighbouring communities often reacted adversarially upon hearing of conflicts nearby which could lead to deaths. Now, the committees' organised approach fosters stability, helping prevent broader conflict.

1. Reduction in violent incidents and other farm and grazing related conflicts:

Due to the significance of dialogue platforms among local power holders across rival communities, the forums established by YIAVHA have been used to address the drivers of violent conflicts, build trust and verify rumours. As a result, there has been a reduction in acts of reprisals, and deliberate destruction of farms and cattle. Even when farm destruction occurs, there is now a trusted, unarmed local platform for resolution of grievances. Prior to most of our projects, herders and farmers often sought reprisal without investigating who was responsible for cattle rustling or farm destruction, or they reported incidents to armed security forces instead of engaging in dialogue, thereby perpetuating a cycle of violence.

A beneficiary of Community exchange visit narrated

“for me I thought my next visit to this community will be for revenge but I feel deep relief that I am visiting this community on a peace note. I am happy for the new me and the opportunity to heal rather than to revenge”

2. Integrating Socio-economic livelihood resilience support activities in promoting peace. The joint farming cooperatives have introduced a transformative approach in conflict-prone communities, especially between farming and

FOOT PRINTS

A narrative of Local Policy transformation

In Kwi community, local leaders enacted a law restricting access to illicit drugs, recognizing that drug abuse is a Key Driving Factor (KDF) in Riyom's 2024 conflict systems map. Previously, the local chief was unable to pass this law due to a lack of community support and trust in governance. With YIAVHA's advocacy and the system's map's clear insights, local leaders collaborated to pass the law, addressing a critical root cause of conflict.

5. Increasing access to land for farming and grazing in communities experiencing shrinking spaces due to conflicts

Under the Building Bridges for Peace (BB4P) project, we worked in communities where an adversarial mindset toward neighbours had heightened tensions and restricted access to farmland for all parties involved. In these areas, fear of attacks, cattle rustling, and farm destruction had left some lands abandoned for 5 to 10 years.

Through locally driven social cohesion activities and dialogue platforms, the BB4P project enabled more community members to cultivate their farms during the last farming season. Incidents of farm destruction were limited, and meaningful progress was made in settling disputes. With continued dialogue and advocacy, even more land can be cultivated in the coming seasons, contributing to food security.

An 18-year-old Christian woman shared her experience:

"Before the project, there was no room for communication. They told us not to cross to the Muslim side because they would catch us and kill us. I got to understand that it was just rumours and a misconception from our community."

This story underscores how breaking down barriers of misinformation and fostering open communication have helped reshape relationships and improve safety for all.

6. Intersecting climate action for conflict transformation in peacebuilding initiatives across local communities

Our initiatives foster climate action intertwined with peacebuilding by bringing together young people from rival communities to collaborate on environmental efforts. Through these collaborations, participants establish mutual commitments to each other's peace and have so far exchanged 265 fruit trees as enduring symbols of this pledge. These trees serve not only as representations of their commitment but also as tangible footprints of their remedial efforts for peace.

Also, they are used as platforms for climate action education where training sessions mobilise communities by increasing awareness of maladaptive climate practices.

Participants learn practical strategies to mitigate environmental degradation while fostering sustainable and peaceful coexistence. Community-Led Action: Local communities actively nurture trees, discourage bush burning, and take collective steps to protect and restore the environment, demonstrating the power of grassroots collaboration.

A narrative of Community Gate Keeper on tree planting

"I planted a tree in my home, which was burnt during the Crisis of 2010. When this tree grows, it will symbolise my commitment to peace—a promise made by my Christian brothers. This tree represents our shared efforts to foster harmony in our community." This approach showcases how addressing climate challenges can be seamlessly integrated with conflict resolution, creating a dual impact that restores both the environment and fractured relationships.

7. Advancing collective action towards Preventing /Countering Violent Extremism

This initiative leverages inclusive approaches to foster collective action in addressing violent extremism. By employing the systems thinking analysis methodology, the project identifies and understands the Key Driving Factors (KDFs) of conflict. The integration of community focal persons through Community Participatory Action Research (CPAR), along with an established community feedback mechanism and community-led advocacy, has galvanised stakeholders to take urgent and coordinated action against the persistence of violence.

"The milestones achieved include the enactment of community laws regulating illicit drug access to address a critical driver of violence, the deployment of teachers to previously isolated communities, reducing marginalisation and fostering stability, and the widening of security accountability mechanism by connecting communities with security operations oversight actors"

8. Counters violent extremism with positive narratives.

YIAVHA has actively worked to dismantle entrenched "enemy perspectives" between communities through transformative exchange visits, and storytelling methodologies also utilising the social media space. These initiatives have created opportunities for community members once separated by deep-seated mistrust to meet, engage, interact and discover shared values.

By fostering dialogue and mutual understanding, these encounters are gradually replacing perceptions of threat. Communities are beginning to see each other as allies in the pursuit of peace and prosperity, moving beyond historical divisions to collaboratively address pressing challenges and changing the narratives of relationships and how people are to respond to conflicts. This growing unity lays a foundation for sustainable reconciliation and collective progress.