

**NO!** I'M NOT A HERO WHEN I'M A CHILD SOLDIER.



How cartoons combat extremism in Africa?

## **Context**

Over the past two decades, the threat posed by violent extremist groups that espouse fundamentalist religious narratives has grown substantially across Africa. The colonial era and the undemocratic rule that characterized many post-independence governments generated anti-Western and jihadist movements across the Middle East and the wider Islamic world. These movements advocate conservative religious rule as a cure for modern societies' social ills. By the 1990s, these ideologies had begun to spread to Africa, where porous borders, poor security apparatuses, weak governance, corruption, ethnic divisions, and high youth unemployment created conditions under which violent extremist groups thrived. In Nigeria and Somalia, for example, violent extremist organisations began as ethnically homogenous movements with purely domestic concerns the overthrow of their respective governments. Over time they have evolved toward more ambitious political goals and established an active presence in neighbouring states. These groups generally favour border regions due to lower levels of government presence and security, which facilitate illicit networks and vulnerable border communities. Such a situation challenges not only the internal stability of many countries, but also the stability of the broader region. Moreover, links between national and international jihadist groups have increased over the past decade. In 2012, al Shabaab declared allegiance to al Qaeda, but there has been recent infighting over whether to shift this allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In early 2015, the Nigerian group Boko Haram publicly declared allegiance to ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. These international networks not only help these groups with material and operational support, but also build their credibility within the broader jihadist movement, thereby facilitating international recruitment. Security-led approaches have largely failed to contain the geographic footprint of violent extremists in sub-Saharan Africa. This has prompted the emergence of more development-oriented approaches, such as countering violent extremism (CVE) and preventing violent extremism (PVE) initiatives, which seek to address root political and socioeconomic causes of extremism. In the past two years, both the United States and the European Union have officially outlined their approaches to CVE. Several initiatives have also emerged on the African continent, including Nigeria's Soft Approach to Countering Terrorism (NACTEST) and Children for Peace Countering Violent Extremism through cartoons. These development-oriented approaches place emphasis on the environments in which violent extremism thrives.

This presentation seeks to explain the violent extremism in Africa, (I) and to present the cartoon-oriented approach of Children for peace to mitigate the effects of violent extremism in Africa (II)

### **I- Understand the violent extremism in Africa**

#### **A- Portrait of a youth on the brink of rupture**

The African continent finds itself plunged into a kind of chaos, the most obvious signs of which began to emerge with the decline of its visible economy as early as the 1980s. In 20 years, sub-Saharan Africa's share of world trade has halved, its cereal imports have tripled, and its total debt has increased more than twentyfold. The crisis is also reflected in the failure of many basic public services. The agricultural policies implemented have proved counter-productive and the countryside is being depopulated, aggravating the problems of urbanisation and security in the cities. All countries are potential powder kegs and their social fabric is undermined by poverty, unemployment, rural exodus, emigration, AIDS and other pandemics. Tensions are rising everywhere, threatening the lives of tens of millions of young people.

### **1. Historical and political markers shaping young people's vision of the world**

Each generation sees its relationship to the world shaped by great historical events. The attacks of 11 September 2001 are the founding event of the world in which this young generation is evolving nowadays. Because they created a climate of fear and threat and above all led to the outbreak of the second Iraq war in 2003 on the basis of the existence of heavy armaments, the evidence for which proved to be false. This war was fraught with geopolitical consequences because it took place not only on the ground but on every screen on the planet.

In addition to this, the dominant news of recent years, marked by, the wars in Ivory Coast, Libya, CAR, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict... COVID-19 spread Africa, reinforcing the balkanisation of peoples and communities in Africa, the macabre spectacle offered by displaced African populations, hungry children or African migrants risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean are all apocalyptic events experienced live by young people, brutally reminding us the reality of the barbaric and ruthless world in which we live and confirming this logic of legitimisation of violence, crime and dehumanisation of the human being by the international community. The emotional charge of the images relayed by the media in these different crises, which plays an important role in the process of radicalisation of young people, has a strong impact on their perception.

The facts cited above obviously do not embrace the whole history of the last decades, but are likely to influence the reading of the world that young people in Africa are constructing for themselves. Yet they are indicative of a paradoxical situation. While globalisation and liberalism are supposed to bring comfort and progress through access to consumption, the crises in Africa shed a singularly different light, promoting human vulnerability and inequity.

## **2. Understanding of the African Youth and its challenges**

In order to better understand the African youth, after having briefly described the world in which they evolve, it is necessary to look at their living conditions.

Africa has a fairly high demography, especially the young people who represent nearly 60% of the active population. This situation is not without consequences on employment, with a dizzying rise in the unemployment rate and job insecurity.

Young people perceive poverty as a lack of means, a deprivation of basic social services, a lack of protection for them, in addition to being a factor of stigmatisation, it also leads to difficulties in asserting oneself. Looking at poverty in terms of deprivation, it emerges that in Africa 64% of young people are exposed to at least one severe deprivation. Taken individually, the most severe deprivation among young people is that of housing, followed by food 30%, information 30% and education 20%.

At the same time, due to a strong polarisation and politicisation of the masses, a section of the youth is developing ultra-nationalism as a social affirmation through so-called patriotic movements that rise up against neo-colonialism and stand up against the aggression of Africa. There are several reasons for the formation of these patriotic structures and professional aspirations. Rather than seeing only in the nationalist and anti-colonialist harangues of the young patriots the pursuit of a dream of democracy or the awareness of the national fact, their nationalism and anti-colonialism should also be seen as signs of revolt of a sacrificed generation, dispossessed and devoid of any hope of acceding to the status of the older generations, demanding secure social advancement. This is reflected in the ordinary strategies of political and economic participation deployed by these young patriots. This strategy consists of organising themselves supposedly to defend Africa in conflict situations, but first and foremost it is a matter of acquiring power in order to use it as an instrument of pressure to achieve their demands for social advancement.

### 3. Psychic and moral feverishness

The risk behaviours and mental state of young people in Africa also tell us about their state of mind and their relationship with society. From this point of view, the **reckless** diagnosis of certain behaviours is a clear denial of danger, but also of a growing sense of unease.

The practice of "binge drinking", which consists of drinking large quantities of alcohol as quickly as possible in adolescents, the consumption of alcohol or other psychoactive substances, unprotected sexual relations, dangerous driving, repeated drunkenness, are in some cases the result of a search for pleasure and adrenalin. But these risk behaviours can also be the expression of a feeling of unease and in all cases, they lead to increased risks of social marginalisation.

### 4. A connected generation

Finally, what unquestionably distinguishes this generation from the previous ones is its relationship to new information and communication technologies. The young people we are talking about have grown up in a connected world and have a perfect command of digital tools and social networks. This is why we need to question the influence of digital content in radicalisation processes.

#### **B- Violent extremism**

##### 1. Definition

"Violent extremism" is a phenomenon whereby certain individuals adhere to certain views, opinions and ideas and may be led to commit terrorist acts. This definition corresponds to what could be considered a complete and successful process of radicalisation, which implies that the individual's opinions have been profoundly altered, making him or her adhere to an ideology, be it religious or political "extremist", but above all that the "alteration" has been significant enough to lead him or her to commit an act of terrorism.

##### 2. process of transition to violent youth extremism

#### ***Structural analyses***

One such analysis is that which attributes processes of extremism to structural situations, induced by social contexts. Among these structural causes are those arising from the wider social reality. These include the lack of jobs, but above all the discrimination in employment to which these young people are subjected. Or the identity crisis due to the discrimination, racism, xenophobia, "facial offending" that these young people encounter in society. On another level, some young people attribute structural causes to similar social realities and in particular to factors of social disintegration due to a family crisis. According to the structural approach, it is these factors - broad social structure or close social structure - that must be attributed as the primary cause of this process of bifurcation. This is an argument commonly used by analysts, politicians and intellectuals. That analysis in structural terms as the sole or main factor should be rejected, for several reasons.

**One reason for sociological criticism:** according to our survey, this hypothesis is flatly socio-materialistic. The choice of a radical approach is seen only as a consequence of material and social structures and completely ignores personal dimensions, the role of cognitive aspects, or emotional aspects.

**A logical reason:** using global structural causes does not explain why not all people in this situation of distress become radicalised. Moreover, we can see that among radicalised people there are some who are not marginal, who are discriminated against.

**A moral reason:** this explanation considers that these radical choices, including personal commitment, do not imply personal responsibility. Young people who decide to commit themselves to fight, and possibly to fight in the terrorist organisation make their choices, as adults, of course, when they are of age. And if they commit wrongful acts on a judicial or moral level, they must assume their responsibility. Undermining the responsibility of these young people by attributing causes or making them victims of a social context also means somehow infantilizing or despising them. Infantilisation is often the work of parents or caring people.

### ***Individualistic analyses***

An equally insufficient argument, which is the opposite of the previous one, is the individualistic one, which tries to explain this turning point in personal life solely on the basis of individual characteristics and individual choices. There are certainly individual aspects in these choices, but they are inseparable from other aspects. This explanation is specific to sociologies. There are also all the explanations which emphasise the fact that young people are socialised via the Internet, and that these young people are alone in front of their screens. It is true that the internet plays an important role in the socialisation process, but this does not mean individualisation.

It is therefore in favour of a complex, multidimensional and multidisciplinary interpretative theory that this presentation argues.

### **3. *The transition to violent extremism***

*We are going here to study the process by which young people in Africa end up with a bifurcation of their existence, a true conversion, which leads them to adopt a vision of the world that breaks with the social context. This vision of the world leads them to make extreme choices in their personal biography and to opt for an action that involves physical violence and death, for others and often for themselves. The concept of "radicalism" and the qualifier "extreme" return to the political vocabulary of the nineteenth century, which it is important to clarify.*

#### ***a. Four dimensions of violent extremism***

***Firstly, the dimension of personal commitment:*** *in the name of an ideology, in the name of an ethnic or national belonging, in the name of a religion, young people fully commit their lives to what they consider to be an absolute value and goal and engage in actions that put their lives and the lives of those they consider to be obstacles to their goals at risk. Commitment becomes a moral imperative. The need for a radical break from the surrounding world and from their own past is crucial.*

***Second;*** **violent extremism is pressed by a temporality** that is difficult to accommodate the long timescale of ordinary political action. Violent extremism, which considers the current reality totally unacceptable, has a pressing need to see results in short periods of time. Everything and immediately is its watchword.

***Thirdly, the violent extremism we are talking about here comes to the conclusion that physical violence, armed action in one form or another, is the only possible means of action*** This conclusion is either the result of an experience of failure of other modes of action or is intellectually constructed as the only possible outcome, and it is confirmed, possibly, as the study reveals, by a cultural context and environment that makes it plausible.

***Fourthly, the form given to the worldview*** regardless of ideological content, young people or radical groups tend to see social or political reality in terms of clear-cut alternatives "or us and our ideas or

nothing". They take the view that their own visions, goals and methods are the only ones valid in an absolute sense. We will speak of elected representatives, of purity, of absolute truth.

***b. Types of motivations that justify radical bifurcation of life and radical action by young people***

- **Spiritual and moral motivation** : the main reason here is the search for meaning as a purpose of life and/or a moral norm for oneself.
- **Altruistic motivation** : here it is a question of acting in solidarity, supporting people who are suffering, identifying with their sufferings
- **Nihilist motivation** : in general, the notion of "nihilism" (from nihil, in Latin- nothing) refers to the idea of the absence of meaning, of values in human life, whether individual or collective. This general idea can have two meanings, in a way complementary to each other. On the one hand, a nihilism that could be called vertical : it stems from the idea that humanity as such and in itself has no value, the only value coming from God. From this stems a vision that sees oneself and one's actions only as instruments of God.
- **Heroic motivation**: to go into jihad is to identify with the figure of the hero, honor and fearlessness.
- **Millenarian, apocalyptic motivation**: here we hear all the visions of history present in Islam, as in many other religions, which are based on the announcement of a renewed future (millenarianism), of signs announcing the end of time in earthly and human history (apocalypse) and of a future future that is both collective for humanity and the world and personal. These visions are underpinned by a struggle between good and evil, God and the Devil, as the final battle of the future of the world and of humanity. In short, it is a question of envisaging a turning point in life with a view to realizing a reality outside place: establishing the kingdom of God on earth, re-founding a Muslim Caliphate, winning paradise.
- **Instrumental or ideological-political motivation**: the aim here is to radically combat an enemy perceived as a total evil. Geopolitical argumentation prevails here, which can moreover be inscribed in a millenarian and apocalyptic vision.

***c. The path that leads young people in Africa towards violent extremism***

In the previous point, our presentation has taken a stance against simplifying explanations (the structural explanation and the individualistic explanation) of young people in Africa to be radicalised. It is now a matter of presenting what an explanation that takes into account the complexity of this process would consist of. The path towards radicalism, according to these young people, is constructed through three interconnected axes: the axis of lived experience which is the trigger for the attitude that leads to radicalism; the axis of the social fabric by which the radical attitude is constructed and takes social consistency; the cognitive axis by which the radical position takes intellectual form and becomes plausible.

➤ **The axis of lived experience**

At the starting point of the decision that turns an existence upside down, there is a personal experience that stems from a lack of satisfaction, motivated by various reasons, about one or another aspect of existence and which translates into so much indignation. Thus, the motivations that are stated with a view to the decision to commit oneself totally, and mentioned in the previous point, stem from just as many dissatisfactions-indignations: in relation to oneself and one's life project, in relation to the situation of others in the world, in relation to a general view of society and whether or not it conforms to an ideal vision, in relation to the general organisation of the world and the functioning of power in the future of the world. Equally, the situation of frustration is one of the major triggers of the

radicalisation process among young people in Africa. But other reasons may appear, such as a taste for adventure, or bravado, or even perversion.

➤ **The axis of the social fabric**

*After having taken into account the experience of the situation that young people in Africa are planning to pull themselves out of, let us look at a second aspect, the social one. Radicalisation of the gaze and extreme decision making is never where it is very, very rarely the case that isolated individuals, what criminology calls "lone wolves", are individual predators. It is most often within a collective that this vision and this decision is forged. Radicalism and extremism are social facts, of which four aspects can be taken into account.*

**a. The existence of an offer, a group, a collective**

Choices of ideological-religious change and radicalisation tend not to exist (except in the case of isolated but rather rare acts) if they are not relayed by an offer, an organisation, a group, a network that gives shape to the reaction experienced. Analyses which talk about individualisation ignore this, for example because these young people were not part of a longstanding militant group, socialised on the Internet, did not leave through a network, but individually. In fact, even if these young people in Africa surf the Internet, they form a contextual "Internet user community" which can be that of a concrete group or a virtual group

**b. The existence of a leader**

The existence of a leader with the function of general orientation, operational management and control is indispensable. In general, when we refer to a leader, we limit ourselves to reasoning in terms of the capacity for manipulation and indoctrination. However, things are more complex. The effectiveness of the leader's influence must be based on a legitimacy that he or she acquires on the basis of various factors:

- Credibility in terms of competence (it doesn't matter whether it is real or apparent, what matters is that it appears as such in the eyes of the follower).

-Interpersonal management capacity, listening, understanding people, motivating them, responding to their needs and aspirations,

- in short, being an exemplary figure, the capacity to situate oneself and to move from one's group to the outside world (TV sets, wider public...).

-Credibility also in terms of the trust that the leader inspires because of his integrity In the sense that this leader appears objective, disinterested, without intention to manipulate or deceive, paying with his person. Therefore, bearer of a truth. Attractiveness of the leader as a synthesis of previous traits: here we are in the order of emotional, affective adhesion.

**c. the question of indoctrination**

Reference to the group, and in particular to the leader, is often associated with the idea of indoctrination. This idea comes back to the image of the 'skull stuffing' whereby an individual passively undergoes this influence. In reality, things are not so simple. The work of social psychologists has highlighted the complexity of the processes of influence. First of all, it can be said that the influence of speeches, of preaching is effective if it falls on soil that has already been irrigated and has already been translated into action. In other words, we tend, in all fields, to root ideas not only on ideas already known but also on acts already accomplished . This brings us back to the question that we will develop

in the next point, of the long-term swarming of doctrines such as that of Salafism or the Muslim Brotherhood, which do not preach jihad, but which propose practices and visions that lead people to a progressive commitment, which prepares the ground for future radical commitment. The influence of the leader is often the last act in a process. The second element of analysis provided by psycho-sociologists is that a persuasive effect is all the more effective if it is done under the banner of freedom and not constraint. This is what the authors have called "freely consented submission": "...I tell you this, this truth... but you are free to think...". ». These two elements already point to the need to take into account the complexity of the processes involved in joining a group and a leader who advocates extremist action.

#### **d. Radical choice and community**

The question is to know how this radical choice, these groups that make radical commitments, are situated in relation to society as a whole? How do jihadists relate to the Muslim context? Are they on the margins, at odds with the community context, or are they in tune with the context? Either way, the fate of these groups changes and the status of their radical choice changes. If they are on the margins, their social survival is difficult and they tend to become completely isolated from the group. If, on the other hand, they receive more or less empathy within the group, then their survival and development is assured. In this case, radicalisation will just have to be careful not to inflict too heavy consequences on the immediate context.

##### ➤ ***The cognitive axis***

This dimension is often not taken seriously in the case of analyses of radicalisation processes. Indeed, these analyses are strongly influenced by police investigations or by security specialists. Logically, as a result of their skills, they focus exclusively on channels, networks and practices. The universe of meaning and convictions are ignored, whereas if we adopt a socio-anthropological approach, this aspect appears to be a major one. For the human being is a being of meaning, knowledge and values and these constitute a real driving force for individual and collective action. In order for radicalisation to make sense, it is important that the individual concerned, his group, his leader, should produce a discourse that makes the attitude and action resulting from it plausible, coherent and legitimate.

## **II- Cartoon-oriented approach of Children for peace to mitigate the effects of violent extremism in Africa**

Children for Peace which seeks to amplify the voice of children and youth in the matters linked to peacebuilding in Africa, is a pan-African, nonpartisan research teenager grass root led organisation operating in Cameroon and in some countries in Africa which (i) conducts public attitude surveys and studies on democracy, governance, (ii) realize of documentaries on peacebuilding; (iii) organise of children capacity building workshops, (iv) awareness raising campaigns, (v) create digital tools, (vi) organise psycho social assistance to vulnerable (vii) create, produce and distribute Children Peace Cartoons.

### **A- The power of comics and cartoons in influencing public opinion related to peacebuilding.**

The power of the visual media has been playing a significant role in influencing public opinion. In the same line, comics and related media such as cartoons, graffiti posters have frequently been effective tools to transmit peace building message in playful manner.



The term cartoon “refers first to metaphorical codification and second to a satirical and humorous genre through which a cartoonist subtly informs, criticises and entertains his audience. More specifically peace building cartoons represent a form of media discourse that uses verbal and non-verbal signs to disseminate information and express ideas and opinions on contemporary issues. Though peace building cartoons do not occupy large portions of the media, they can have a huge impact on the audience and/or readership as they effectively humorously convey message succinctly. They function as a communicative devices society and play paramount role in influencing public discourse.

Very often, peacebuilding cartoon have enabled audience to look critically their socioeconomics and political reality. In many instances, peace building cartoons prove to be more effective to disseminating information and demonstrating ideas than verbal text, which usually require more time from both writers and readers. Cartoons communicate messages and critiques camouflaged as humour. This aspect of cartoons allows to attract more attention.

Through cartoons, cartoonist try to current socioeconomics and geopolitical issues in a humorous and satirical manner that can be read and understood quickly and directly. In fact, cartoonist try to translate the current event into culturally and familiar signs and symbols that are locally and sometime globally recognized. In time of crises and popular protest these satirical symbols have direct impact on public opinion.

It is true that animated cartoons have a positive social impact on children. It works as an important socialization and educational tool. It has helped children to broaden their understanding of the world in which they live. It gives them the opportunity to learn This is because successful cartoonists rely on three key tools to make their impact successful. These are personal conviction, humour and societal consciousness. Animated cartoons are influential tools of communication, so their ability to impact values and viewpoint in the minds of mainly children and reader the values of the nation and culture in which they live, Civilization of other countries and children.

Animated cartoons and comic strips target the educated youth including the students, academicians, young professionals...

## **B- Case Study of Children for peace and its cartoons project entitled “I am not a hero when.....”to fight against Violent extremism in North Cameroon and Maiduguri in Nigeria**

### **1. Context of these projects**

Since 1 January 2017, 83 children have been used as ‘human bombs’; 55 were girls, most often under 15 years old; 27 were boys, and one was a baby strapped to a girl. The use of children in this way is an atrocity. Children used as ‘human bombs’ are, above all, victims, not perpetrators.

The armed group commonly known as Boko Haram has sometimes, but not always, claimed responsibility for these attacks, which target the civilian population.

The use of children in such attacks has had a further impact of creating suspicion and fear of children who have been released, rescued or escaped from Boko Haram. As a result, many children who have managed to get away from captivity face rejection when they try to reintegrate in their communities, compounding their suffering.

All of this is taking place in the context of a massive displacement and malnutrition crisis – a combination that is also deadly for children.

In Amchide, hundreds, and perhaps up to 1,000, Boko Haram fighters attacked the village killing at least 30 civilians, including those accused of collaborating with State authorities, and eight members of the security forces. In Bia, 16 civilians including two children were killed, and over 150 houses were burnt, when over 100 Boko Haram fighters attacked the town. In Maroua, three suicide attacks within 3 days in crowded civilian areas – a market, a neighbourhood and a bar - killed at least 33 people and wounded more than 100. Girls as young as 13 were used to carry out these suicide attacks.

Violent extremism and conflicts are inflicting unspeakable horror upon the children. Testimonies from children separated from terrorists we have been encountered and have been working with indicate that girls are the most vulnerable, many are forced into early marriages to terrorist either by Boko Haram members or by their parents to overcome their financial difficulties. Several studies carried out show also that children and girls are still instrumentalized and enrolled in violent extremism because they are not (sufficiently) taught about their rights, and involved as key stakeholders in decision making processes related to matters that concern their life. They are left behind. There are several societal, religious and traditional barriers to girl's participation. In many communities, peacebuilding is the responsibility of men and not children and women. Many use to think that children and girls are incapable to play a leadership role in complex issue like peacebuilding and leading societal transformation. They think, children should stay quiet and adults should act on their behalf. Unlike girls, many communities may accept the involvement of boys and women in peacebuilding. The stereotypes are more pronounced against girls. This diminishes their self-confidence and trivializes their chances to succeeding in leadership and peacebuilding, preventing and countering violent extremism. In order to address the above-mentioned challenges and to increase the number of children and girls in PVE, we have been developing and implementing several activities and projects driven cartoons, among others "I am not a hero when I am a child soldier" ; "I am not a hero when I carry the bombs" and "united for peace"

## **2. Methodology for the implementation of these projects**

The idea of activities and projects driven cartoons is justified by the concern to address language barrier language barriers which are an issue when it comes to spreading a national message of peace in Cameroon, central and west Africa (our main areas of actions) that are home to a diverse mix of cultures, languages and dialects.

Thus, to reach our targets and impact communities, we have created within our association and its representations frameworks where children are initiated to art work. We produce, cartoons, comic strips, drawing and painting boards inspired from stories of children who have experienced/witnessed violence. Cartoons, comic strips, drawing and painting are one of the best materials we use to engage stakeholders.

Children for Peace mobilizes children/teenagers in/from complex cultural and religious background and affected areas by war to define and implement actions plans and local and nation-wide activities/projects-based cartoons. Cartoons are used as a key tool in our inter community peace camp activities. The Inter Community Peace Camp aim to resolve conflict between tribes or community by developing friendships between their children and building on this to resolve interethnic conflict, land conflict, religious conflict and promote social – economic interdependence. We use them also in our advocacies, capacity building, awareness raising activities, in our social media activities, as well as our peacebuilding marches, campaigns and sportive activities for children and girls' rights and against violent extremism, Child soldier's phenomenon, early marriage and gender-based violence in areas affected by conflicts.

Cartoons helps vulnerable children, youth and girls to voice against violent extremism and express their fears and hope. We accompany them to speak up quite literally and believe their voice can be heard. Our cartoons explain the challenges of peacebuilding, the horrors of violent extremism and early/wrought marriage on girls through the stories of boys and girls who have experienced/testified sexual violence and early/wrought marriage. They emphasize on the role of youths, parents, governments and community leaders in our patriarchal system regarding our secular traditions and the rights of the most vulnerable.

### **3. Impact of these projects**

These projects-oriented cartoons and comic strips have:

- contributed to increase the number of children, youths and girls demobilized, disarmed and reintegrated in their communities;
- contributed to democratize public sphere for more political and economic expression of children and girls advocating for inter-generational dialogue and fruitfully engaged for the full internalization of UNSCR 2250 and 1325, the UN Conventions on the rights of the Child and Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- contributed to improve children and community understanding on peacebuilding and PVE challenges;
- contributed to increase community awareness about the phenomenon of child soldiers, girls' early marriage and sexual abuses during conflictual and post conflictual periods;
- permitted us to integrate values of inclusivity and participation while engaging directly with traditional and religious beliefs of those experiencing violent conflict;
- permitted children to be enrolled in the process of reintegration of ex child soldiers, thereby embodying exceptional leadership towards the positive transformation of their community;
- permitted children to consistently lead talks with traditional, religious leaders, women and Children on matters related to children rights, gender-based violence, early marriage and the prevention and countering violent extremism and radicalization;
- Facilitated in several affected areas, collaborative work among children, teenagers Muslim and Christian religious, traditional leaders and local authorities and civil society engaging them against identity-based differences; mobilizing them in community-based conflict trough activities consisting to build relationships between the antagonists to find gender sensitive approaches to dealing both with conflict; pandemics and proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

The outcomes so far are as follows:

- 550 children capacitated on thematic related to peacebuilding, violent extremism and human rights focusing on children rights, disarmament, reintegration and illicit proliferation of weapons;
- 100 children (victims of war that have been capacitated within the Art for Peace Project) voiced for children/girls' rights, peacebuilding, disarmament and reintegration of child soldiers and against early marriage trough painting, cartoons and artwork.

- Production and distribution of 2000 cartoons, drawing and painting using them as meaningful tools to communicate our message in several communities (given that we are working in multicultural and multilingual milieus).
- 40 children-gender-peace clubs engaged talks with traditional, religious leaders, women and Children on matters related to children rights, gender-based violence, early marriage and the prevention and countering violent extremism and radicalization.
- 03 advocacy meetings gathering 50 local traditional and religious authorities; State officials organised on matters related to (1) demobilization reintegration and disarmament of youth/teenagers ex combatants; (2) KidsRights; (3) the implementation of the UN Convention on the Right of the Child and the UNSCR 2250 and 1325 (relating to youth and children participation in peacebuilding) and the fully implication of children in peacebuilding (4)fight against early and rough marriages; (5) the importance to mobilize all stakeholders including private sector and multi-nationals to invest in girls and children education and youth employment.
- 1000 children; 20 local authorities and 100 community members directly involved in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-child/youth combatants as well as in the fight against violent extremism, radicalization, proliferation of weapons
- 05 sensitization meetings mobilizing 300 community members ( 150 women and 150 men) including internally displaced people and refugees organised in 5 communities on (1) Children rights and early marriage; (2) the importance of the living together and peacebuilding, (3) the consequences of early marriage; (3) the importance of disarmament, reintegration of children/Youth ex-combatants (4) the importance to fight against the illicit proliferation of weapons; (5) children and girls education
- 5 multi-stakeholders networks constituted by religious and traditional leaders and children operationalized community sensitization and advocacies in villages, markets, schools, mosques, churches and in local media and on the internet to touch at least 15 000 peoples among which 10 000 children/teenagers.

### **Upcoming cartoon project to mitigate the impact of Violent Extremism in Africa**

The title of the comic strip will be "Guide of a repentant extremist". It will tell the story of Zeynabou ex-extremist. In fact, we will talk about the process of her recruitment, how the missions and living conditions with the extremists were, her encounters and her feelings after each mission she was assigned. Finally, we will talk about the encounter that changed her life and contributed greatly to her repentance, as well as the support she received