

Youth from the Global South and Chemical and Biological Weapons Disarmament

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Summary

This article examines the growing youth population in the Global South and its implications for chemical and biological disarmament. It argues that meaningful youth engagement can strengthen verification and promote equitable cooperation, and emphasizes the need for systematic education, training, and knowledge transfer to empower future leaders.

Global South and its youth

The Global South refers to countries, mostly in the Southern Hemisphere, characterised by weaker economic conditions. The countries found in Asia, Africa, South America, Oceania, and the Caribbean form the bulk of the Global South. During the Cold War, NATO countries and the Soviet Bloc were labelled the West and East, while underdeveloped nations were seen as the South. The Global South also had overlaps with the Non-Aligned Movement¹. Although mostly located in the Southern Hemisphere, the Global South also contains India and, by some definitions, China², both located in the Northern Hemisphere. Australia, located in the Southern Hemisphere, is part of the Global North and is an exception to the hemisphere-wise division. The Global South is economically underdeveloped and industrially primitive for various historical and governance reasons³. Most were former colonies that suffered economic exploitation. Three sets of components of modernity have traditionally been used to distinguish the Global South from the Global North⁴. The majority of the Global South was colonised by the Global North after the Industrial Revolution. The North was industrially advanced and used raw materials extracted from the South⁵. The second distinguishing characteristic of the Global North from the South was that the North first aligned its economy under capitalism. Finally, knowledge creation and circulation were dictated by the Global North. After the Second World War, the three components of modernity are gradually shifting to the Global South⁶. We have already entered the post-colonial world after a wave of decolonisation events. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, capitalism has extended its reach to the Global South in search of cheap labour and resources. Finally, after

the ICT revolution, the Global South has a large potential to improve its standing in knowledge creation and circulation. As a result of the latest changes, the gap between the South and the North is decreasing, and the Global South has become politically more relevant.

In recent times, large economic inequalities within have characterised the Global South. Socially, the people in the region have experienced modernity while still being exposed to traditions. Today, these countries encompass two-thirds of the global population and will boast a major part of the middle class in the latter part of this century.

Youth, aged 15 to 30 years, form a sizable population of the Global South. In fact, they are so disproportionately large in number that they form 85 percent of the global youth population⁷. Such a large youth population is bound to play a significant political, economic, and social role in the world when they come of age. These youth are digitally literate and use social media and the web for political activities⁸. They can contain large populations that are marginalised: they have very poor access to education, healthcare, and the government safety net⁹. In their countries, they have experienced rapid urbanisation; social inequalities pertaining to class, caste, gender, and ethnicity; a desire for a higher standard of education, connectivity, and social mobility; and weaker institutions plagued by corruption, inefficiency, clientelism, and favouritism¹⁰.

Why should youth from the Global South be engaged in global political issues?

Engaging today's youth in socio-political issues like disarmament helps build a safer, more just future. Involving youth in important political activities is a matter of intergenerational justice and moral

imperative. According to several studies, involving youth improves the chance of success for any campaign¹¹. Hence, the involvement of a critical mass of the youth from the South may be pivotal in the success of the disarmament movement. Youth today are tomorrow's adults; including their voices in the present ensures future legitimacy and continuity. Involvement of youth from the South in important issues helps build trust between the world community and the youth population. In issues such as disarmament, youth in general bring passion and novel ideas to the table, which might aid the issue¹². Because of these various reasons, youth have been critical in several revolutions and campaigns throughout world history.

For democracy and justice purposes, it is important to involve the youth from the Global South in disarmament issues, including biological and chemical disarmament. Since a number of these youths are not in diplomatic and power positions in the Northern bureaucracy, other means have to be used to bring forward their view. Considering their view in globally important discourses is a practice of democracy since they form a globally important mass, and some of them are not even in a position to influence their government because they cannot vote.

Youth from the South suffer disproportionate harm from biological and chemical catastrophe, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic. They not just suffer immediate harm, but suffer from long-term consequences such as displacement, trauma, and disruption of education¹³. Excluding them disregards the lived realities and suffering of the most vulnerable. As a matter of distributive justice, peace dividends from re-channeling the arms race money to humanitarian causes would first benefit the Global South's vulnerable

population¹⁴. Procedural justice, which isn't just about the outcome, but also about how decisions are made, would dictate the involvement of the most affected parties in decisions about disarmament and arms control. Recognitional justice, which involves acknowledging different experiences, narratives, and literacies different from the typical Global North experiences and narratives, would involve including the Global South youth to avoid a one-size-fits-all perspective in disarmament¹⁵.

Possible opinion of the youth of the Global South on chemical and biological disarmament issues

Youth from the Global South is a conglomerate of voices from different nationalities, genders, ethnicities, educational backgrounds, and lived life experiences. It will be naive to assume that all of the Global South will have a uniform opinion on different issues of chemical and biological weapons disarmament. However, these youth have certain commonalities and could perhaps form a coherent view on different issues such as disarmament, norms, verification, international cooperation and assistance, export control, and assistance and preparedness.

Broadly, youth from the Global South may strongly support disarmament, shaped by experiences of conflicts, peace aspirations, awareness of power imbalances, and hopes for a just future. Regions of Africa and South America have experienced much more violence than the Global North¹⁶. Living with conflict and violence will possibly make them detest weapons more. The peace dividend from a lack of an arms race will set priorities in education, health, and other essential livelihood parameters of development. Having lived in poverty and marginalisation, youth from the South will be keener than other youth to obtain these basic necessities.

Arms control regimes in the past have disproportionately tied the hands of the Global South¹⁷. The youth from the South are likely to voice an opinion of equitable arms control provisions for the North. Youth, both from the North and the South, will desire a peaceful future, possibly more than adults, because they care for lives in the long run.

Biological and chemical weapons currently have a strong international norm against their use. This norm has mostly developed in the North over the course of history. Poisons were historically considered inferior weapons because of the treachery and perfidy they conjured. Later in the First World War, chemical agents were widely recognised as causing indiscriminate and long-term harm. Over the course of years, BWC and CWC were almost universally signed by nation-states to strengthen norms against their use and production¹⁸. The Global South has acceded to this norm without much lived experience. The youth of the Global South might have less strict obligations towards this norm in the future due to a lack of historical precedence. However, they have not been immune to pandemics and global disasters of chemical release. In fact, infectious diseases still claim more lives in the Global South¹⁹. Because of this reason, the youth of the Global South might stick to the norm of prohibiting biological and chemical weapons in the future.

Verification of arms treaty regimes also has an extensive history in the Global North, especially in Europe, which has been fragmented and warring²⁰. In the late 20th century Chemical Weapons Convention was signed along with a verification regime, which the Global South has been part of for over 25 years. However, a parallel verification regime could not be established for the Biological Weapons Convention for various reasons, including distrust due to the Soviet covert bioweapons program during

the Soviet era and concerns about the high cost and low deterrence capability of the regime. Similarly negative impact on commercial proprietary information and national security information in the biotechnology industry was deemed unacceptable by the US when it walked out of the negotiation in 2001²¹. The Global South and the youth of the Global South would possibly want a strong verification regime in light of all the above reasons. Due to the fledgling chemical and biological industry in the South, the South does not have as strong a concern as the North about commercial proprietary information and national security information. The South was not part of the security competition that led to the covert Soviet biological weapons program. The costs of the verification are mostly borne by the Global North, so the Global South does not have to worry so much about the low cost it has to bear, given the high level of trust robust verification provides. Additionally, to reap maximum security benefits, the Global South would want as robust a verification as agreeable.

The youth from the Global South, as part of the Global South, will seek to maximise international cooperation and assistance from the Global North as part of the BWC and CWC. Some of the assistance that can be provided by the Global North includes access to peaceful technology and capacity building; education, training, and skill development; and support for public health and environmental protection²². Technology transfer in vaccine and medicine manufacture, capacity building for national laboratories, and joint research opportunities are generally sought by the Global South. Since the Global North has a stronger information-generating and disseminating capacity, the Global South will seek education, training, and scholarship opportunities for its manpower. The professionals in the biological and chemical

sciences in the Global South will similarly want to collaborate with the Global North to run various projects. The Global South will seek to fight infectious diseases with the help of developed countries. The Global North might have an incentive to help in this regard since infectious diseases don't follow political borders.

Countries from the Global South ratify the overall package treaty in hopes of getting assistance and cooperation in return²³. The Gulf Countries possibly signed the CWC to get the technology transfer benefit, but the level of assistance the Global North will provide depends on the negotiations. Additionally, under the current intellectual property rights regime, the governments of the Global North might not have infinite capacity to transfer technology.

In regards to strict export control regimes, the voices might differ between countries with more advanced biotechnology industries and less advanced industries in the Global South. Countries with stronger biotechnology industries and authoritarian regimes might prefer strict regulation for supplier country-based export control regimes, such as the Australian Group. They describe denials and control as discriminatory political practices in the name of security. Countries with less developed biotechnology industries might care little about export control regimes and, in fact, might support stricter regimes for security purposes.

Regarding assistance and preparedness under CWC and BWC, youth from the South would prefer to have an organisation for BWC so that the more vulnerable youth could receive systematic assistance when required. Assistance needs to come before attribution of the event, hence assistance needs to be served before investigation of the use or spillage of the potential biological or chemical

agent. For preparedness, countries from the Global North could maximally support the countries in the Global South. A metric for preparedness already exists under the WHO's International Health Regulations. There are numerous subheads, any of which could be strengthened.

Meaningful involvement of youth from the South in the CWC and BWC space

At an individual level, knowledge is often the source of power. The same applies while working in the biological or chemical disarmament space. The knowledge space basically requires two types of scientists: physical and political. Physical scientists can range from microbiologists to physicians, from data scientists to bioinformaticians, from bioprocess scientists to mechanical engineers in the biological space. Similarly, in chemical space, professions range from chemists to data scientists and from engineers to industry experts. Political scientists range from diplomats to philosophers, from security experts to lawyers, from military strategists to historians, and from journalists to politicians.

For the youth from the South to meaningfully engage in BWC or CWC, it is pertinent that they acquire a degree in one of these science or humanities domains and additionally acquire knowledge across disciplines. An empowered individual is someone who has deep knowledge of the treaties (the political, legal, and conceptual ideas behind) and the science; the skills (technical, legal, advocacy, and communication) to engage meaningfully; the networks of pertinent institutions and individuals; and the agency (self-motivation and initiative).

The scientists who specialise in biosafety—microbiologists, virologists, and bacteriologists—are primed to work in the

BWC space. Chemists—especially organic and inorganic—who specialise in the synthesis and mass production of different tier compounds are specialized to work with CWC. For the national implementation of the BWC and CWC, lawyers and politicians are required to ratify the treaty and draft necessary legislation. To revise the treaty or analyse its intricacies, political scientists, philosophers, international relations experts, and lawyers are required. To work with verification, industry experts, bioprocess engineers, bioinformaticians, data scientists, and engineers (to work with UAVs or satellites) may be required. To work with preparedness and response to emergencies, security experts, scientists, and physicians may be required. Although the list described above is not complete, it describes the multidisciplinary approach required for BWC and CWC.

In the BWC or CWC ecosystem, these professions developed and specialised in the Global North. While expertise development and empowerment are possible through degrees and knowledge only from the Global South, empowerment would largely improve through exposure to the Global North's information system. For example, a political science PhD from a Global North university would teach the norms and intricacies of global academia. In this sense, it is possible that the Global North could empower the youth from the Global South by providing education and training in their information centers, which could range from universities to think tanks.

In this sense, a Global South youth with a degree or two and perhaps work experience from the Global North would be largely empowered. This important role the Global North often plays in empowerment is thus full of paradoxes. Even a “handbook on the Global South youth” had to be published by Cambridge University Press, a leading

publication house from the Global North. Several scholars were from the Global North studying youth from the Global South. The majority of the Southern scholars were trained in the Northern system. Finally, the highly priced book will lie in the libraries of the Global North countries²⁴.

Meaningful involvement requires participation in challenging, prestigious, and empowering roles. Such a job could be, negotiation of important treaty provisions that have long-term and pervasive impact. Youth from the Global South should get such work assignments. Token representation of Global South youth does not constitute meaningful participation.

To promote their agenda regarding chemical and biological disarmament, youth from the South can carry out advocacy at local, national, and global forums. They can organise awareness and educational campaigns to make the public aware of the weapons. They can carry out policy advocacy to make governments accountable for national implementation. Coalitions within a country and between South and South can be formed to make voices heard. Community-based advocacy, where local experiences of conflict, chemical exposure, and pandemics are shared, can be carried out. In the international forums such as Review Conferences, youths from the South can meaningfully participate by expressing their opinion, participating and organising side events, and creating petitions and youth declarations.

To empower youth from the Global South in the chemical and biological disarmament space, the Global North can undertake several low-hanging activities. To ensure inclusion in the decision-making, the youth delegate program can be funded, speaking slots and consultation roles can be provided, and representation quotas can be set.

Accessible small funding and grants can be provided for youth participation in various advocacy and other activities. Capacity building and training programs to enhance treaty literacy, advocacy skills, policy writing skills, and diplomacy skills can be carried out. Global South-led research and storytelling can be promoted in Global North media, journals, and conferences. Placement of youth in OPCW, UNODA, and think tanks can also be empowering. High-hanging fruit for Global South empowerment is providing long-term degrees and jobs to large numbers of the Global South youth in the Global North.

Conclusion

Global South youth is an emerging demographic that represents a large and significant population of the world. This population has a certain lived experience of poverty, inequality, poor governance, violence, and activism. The chemical and biological disarmament space, governed by the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological Weapons Convention, mostly arose from the politics of the North. But moving into the future, the youth of the Global South need to be meaningfully included in politics and science. This population of youth representing a certain experience can form a distinctive voice in the disarmament forum. In general, they have a tendency to strongly adhere to disarmament principles and verification to uphold trust. As part of the Global South, they advocate for as strong an international cooperation and assistance mechanism as possible. To meaningfully include this youth population in the globally important issue of disarmament, the youth have to be imparted deep knowledge and expertise in different political and scientific domains of biological and chemical weapons disarmament.

Endnote :

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