

Youth Engagement in Post-Disaster Recovery: Bridging Gaps in Governance and Economic Revitalization

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Abstract. Youth are increasingly recognized as critical actors in post-disaster recovery, contributing to resilience-building, economic revitalization, and sustainable development. However, the extent and effectiveness of their engagement are profoundly shaped by governance structures, institutional support, and social capital. This paper offers a comparative analysis of youth engagement in post-disaster recovery in Libya and Morocco—two North African countries with distinct governance contexts and recent disaster events. Drawing on social capital and institutional theory, the study examines how youth navigate formal and informal systems to participate in recovery efforts, particularly in politically fragile or semi-authoritarian settings. The Moroccan case highlights the enabling role of structured civil society and inclusive policy frameworks, while the Libyan context reveals the challenges of grassroots mobilization amid political fragmentation. Through a qualitative case study approach, the paper explores how youth-led initiatives, from volunteering to entrepreneurship, bridge gaps in governance and catalyse long-term economic and community resilience. The findings underscore the need for policy interventions that integrate youth as partners in recovery, not only to enhance effectiveness but also to foster sustainable, inclusive futures in disaster-prone regions.

Keywords: Youth engagement, post-disaster recovery, social capital, governance, sustainability, institutional support, resilience-building, economic revitalization, Libya, Morocco.

1. Introduction

1.1 Context: Natural Disasters as a Sustainability Challenge

Natural disasters are increasingly recognized not only as immediate humanitarian crises but also as critical challenges to sustainable development. Globally, climate change, urbanization, and environmental degradation have amplified the frequency and severity of floods, earthquakes, and other extreme events [15]. In the MENA region, countries such as Libya and Morocco face recurrent climate-related hazards that threaten lives, infrastructure, and livelihoods [4]. Beyond physical destruction, disasters disrupt local economies, social cohesion, and governance structures, undermining long-term community resilience.

Sustainable recovery therefore requires more than short-term relief; it demands integrated strategies that combine social, economic, and environmental considerations. Such approaches align with the principles of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030),

which emphasize building resilience, reducing vulnerability, and ensuring inclusive, equitable recovery processes.

1.2 Why Youth Engagement Matters

Youth are a vital yet often underutilized resource in post-disaster recovery. Their energy, creativity, and local knowledge enable them to act as first responders, coordinators, and [5]. Evidence suggests that youth participation enhances both social cohesion and economic revitalization, while also fostering leadership skills and civic engagement [12].

In disaster contexts, youth engagement can:

- Support immediate relief through volunteering, information dissemination, and logistical assistance.
- Facilitate long-term reconstruction by leading community initiatives, entrepreneurship, and vocational projects.
- Promote psychosocial resilience by strengthening community bonds and providing a sense of agency.

Despite their potential, youth participation is often constrained by institutional barriers, socio-political fragility, and limited access to resources. This is particularly relevant in North Africa, where governance structures vary widely between semi-authoritarian states like Morocco and politically fragmented contexts such as Libya.

1.3 Research Gap and Significance

While previous research has highlighted the importance of youth in disaster recovery, significant gaps remain:

1. Comparative analyses across different governance contexts in North Africa are limited.
2. The interaction between youth engagement, social capital, and institutional support in post-disaster recovery remains underexplored.
3. Links between youth participation and sustainable development outcomes, including employment and long-term resilience, are insufficiently documented [7] [16]. This study addresses these gaps by examining youth engagement in two contrasting North African contexts—Libya and Morocco—following the 2023 Derna floods and the 2023 Al Haouz earthquake. By focusing on both formal and informal recovery mechanisms, this research provides insights into how youth contribute to sustainable development in disaster-prone regions.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to investigate how youth engagement in post-disaster recovery can foster resilience, social cohesion, and sustainable development. Specifically, the study seeks to:

Objectives:

1. Examine the roles and activities of youth in post-disaster recovery, including volunteerism, advocacy, and economic revitalization.
2. Explore the interaction between governance structures, institutional support, and youth participation in Libya and Morocco.
3. Assess how youth engagement contributes to sustainable development, including employment, social entrepreneurship, and long-term community resilience.

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to generate actionable insights for policymakers, NGOs, and community stakeholders seeking to integrate youth as active partners in disaster recovery and sustainable development strategies

2. Literature Review

2.1 Youth Engagement and Resilience in Post-Disaster Contexts

Youth are increasingly recognized as critical actors in post-disaster recovery, contributing energy, creativity, and local knowledge that complement formal disaster management efforts. Their engagement ranges from immediate relief activities—such as distributing aid and providing first response—to longer-term reconstruction, community mobilization, and [5] [12]. Research demonstrates that youth participation can strengthen community resilience and social cohesion, particularly where institutional response is delayed or insufficient [13]. Recent policy-oriented research further highlights the importance of youth participation in crisis response and resilience-building, particularly in fragile and disaster-prone regions where young people often act as both responders and community mobilizers [10] [14].

In fragile or politically complex environments, youth frequently navigate both formal and informal systems to facilitate recovery. In Libya, for instance, the 2023 Derna floods revealed how youth networks spontaneously organized relief operations despite limited governmental coordination [6]. In Morocco, following the 2023 Al Haouz earthquake, youth participation was more structured, with civil society organizations and local governance mechanisms facilitating coordinated recovery efforts [3]. These contrasting cases illustrate how governance contexts shape the scale and sustainability of youth engagement.

Beyond operational contributions, youth participation also supports psychosocial recovery. Engagement in collective action can foster a sense of agency, strengthen community belonging, and help young people cope with trauma and disruption following disasters [12]. As a result,

youth engagement is increasingly viewed as both a practical and social resource in building resilient communities.

2.2 Social Capital and Disaster Recovery

Social capital—defined as networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity—is widely recognized as a critical component of disaster recovery [2]. Communities with strong social ties are often able to mobilize resources more quickly, coordinate collective action, and provide support for vulnerable groups [8]. Youth engagement frequently draws upon these networks, enabling rapid volunteer mobilization and information sharing during crises.

In Libya, bonding social capital played a central role in the immediate response to the Derna floods. Youth relied on family networks, neighborhood committees, and university groups to organize relief activities and distribute aid. While these networks facilitated rapid mobilization, their localized nature sometimes resulted in fragmented coordination and uneven access to resources [6]. In Morocco, youth engagement benefited from both bonding and bridging forms of social capital, as community associations, NGOs, and municipal structures connected volunteers to wider institutional support. This broader network enabled more coordinated recovery efforts and improved access to funding, training, and organizational resources [3].

Social capital therefore plays a dual role in disaster recovery. It supports immediate community response while also creating networks that can sustain longer-term recovery, strengthen trust, and enhance preparedness for future crises [11]. Recent global assessments also highlight the importance of strengthening social networks and community participation as central components of disaster resilience, particularly through youth engagement in local governance and volunteer networks [15].

2.3 Governance and Institutional Support

Governance and institutional capacity significantly shape the effectiveness and sustainability of youth engagement in disaster recovery. Institutional theory suggests that formal rules, policies, and organizational structures influence who participates in governance processes and how resources are distributed [9]. Inclusive governance systems that recognize youth as stakeholders are therefore more likely to harness their contributions to resilience-building and sustainable development.

Morocco provides an example of how structured governance can facilitate youth engagement. Following the Al Haouz earthquake, youth organizations were incorporated into recovery initiatives through partnerships with NGOs and municipal authorities, which provided logistical support, training, and access to funding channels [24]. While participation was often mediated through established associations, these mechanisms enabled youth to contribute to coordinated recovery efforts.

In Libya, however, institutional fragmentation limited similar opportunities. Youth initiatives following the Derna floods were largely informal and driven by local networks rather than government coordination [19]. Although these grassroots initiatives were innovative and

responsive, the absence of institutional support constrained their ability to scale or integrate into long-term recovery frameworks [6].

These contrasting experiences highlight how governance capacity mediates the transformation of youth engagement from short-term volunteering into sustained contributions to recovery and development.

2.4 Linking Youth Engagement with Sustainability and Livelihoods

Post-disaster recovery provides an opportunity to integrate youth participation with sustainable development and economic revitalization. Active engagement in reconstruction, vocational training, and entrepreneurship not only addresses immediate labor needs but also contributes to the broader objectives of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) [7] [17].

Recent international development reports similarly emphasize the importance of linking youth participation in crisis response with long-term economic opportunities and skills development, particularly in fragile and disaster-affected regions [14] [16].

In Morocco, recovery programs emphasized skill development and social entrepreneurship, creating pathways for youth to contribute to both immediate reconstruction and longer-term community resilience. Examples include vocational training in masonry, renewable energy, and small business development, often linked to NGO or municipal initiatives [23]. In Libya, youth-led economic efforts were primarily informal and survival-oriented, such as home repair services or small cooperative initiatives. While impactful, these efforts faced limitations in scale, funding, and integration with formal economic development strategies [21].

Integrating sustainability into youth engagement involves not only economic empowerment but also environmental and social considerations. “Build Back Better” approaches advocate for reconstruction practices that reduce future vulnerability, enhance climate adaptation, and foster inclusive participation [17]. Youth engagement in such initiatives can generate both economic opportunities and long-term community resilience.

2.5 Policy and Research Gaps

Despite growing recognition of youth roles in disaster recovery, several gaps remain. First, most literature focuses on youth participation in immediate relief rather than long-term recovery and governance integration [12] [13]. Second, comparative analyses across different governance contexts in the MENA region are limited, leaving unanswered questions about how institutional capacity mediates youth engagement. Third, links between youth recovery efforts, sustainable development, and economic revitalization remain underexplored.

This study addresses these gaps by examining youth engagement in two contrasting North African contexts—Libya and Morocco—highlighting the interaction between governance, social capital, and sustainability. The comparative focus provides insights into how youth can be empowered as agents of resilience, while also identifying structural and institutional barriers that constrain participation.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study draws on social capital theory and institutional theory to analyze youth engagement in post-disaster recovery. These frameworks provide complementary perspectives for understanding how social networks and governance structures shape the capacity of youth to contribute to resilience-building and sustainable development.

Social capital theory emphasizes the role of networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity in facilitating collective action [1] [9]. In disaster contexts, social capital often enables communities to mobilize resources rapidly, coordinate relief efforts, and support vulnerable populations. A key distinction within the literature is between bonding social capital—strong ties among family members, close friends, and local communities—and bridging social capital, which connects individuals and groups across organizations, institutions, and social boundaries.

Bonding social capital is particularly effective in enabling rapid mobilization during emergency response, as close-knit networks allow for quick communication and mutual assistance. However, reliance solely on bonding networks can limit inclusivity and sustainability, as these networks may remain localized and lack access to broader resources or institutional support. Bridging social capital, by contrast, facilitates coordination across communities, NGOs, and government institutions, enabling recovery initiatives to scale and access funding, training, and policy support [2]. The relationship between these two forms of social capital therefore reflects an important trade-off between speed and sustainability: bonding networks are crucial in the immediate aftermath of disasters, while bridging networks are essential for long-term recovery and development.

Institutional theory complements this perspective by highlighting how formal structures, policies, and governance systems shape participation and resource allocation [9]. Institutions determine the extent to which youth initiatives can be recognized, supported, and integrated into broader recovery strategies. In contexts with stronger institutional frameworks, youth engagement is more likely to be coordinated through formal channels such as civil society organizations, municipal authorities, and development programs. Conversely, in politically fragmented contexts where institutions are weak or contested, youth participation may remain informal and disconnected from long-term recovery planning.

By combining social capital theory and institutional theory, this study provides a framework for understanding how youth engagement emerges and evolves in different governance environments. While social networks enable youth to mobilize and respond to disasters, institutional structures determine whether these efforts can be sustained, scaled, and translated into lasting contributions to resilience and economic revitalization.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a comparative qualitative case study design to explore youth engagement in post-disaster recovery in Libya and Morocco. Case study methodology enables an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena within their real-life contexts, allowing the researcher to investigate how governance, institutional structures, and social capital shape youth

participation. A comparative approach was employed to highlight similarities and differences between two distinct governance environments, providing insights into the ways institutional capacity and political stability influence recovery outcomes.

The study focuses on two recent natural disasters in North Africa. In Libya, the 2023 Derna floods occurred within a context of political fragmentation and weak institutional governance. Despite these challenges, local youth organized grassroots relief efforts to support their communities. Conversely, the 2023 Al Haouz earthquake in Morocco unfolded within a semi-authoritarian state with relatively structured governance and a strong civil society presence, which facilitated formal channels for youth participation in recovery activities. These cases were purposefully selected because they provide contrasting contexts, yet share the regional and cultural backdrop of North Africa, allowing for a meaningful comparative analysis of youth engagement.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals with direct involvement in disaster recovery initiatives. In Libya, the sample included a youth NGO coordinator actively engaged in organizing relief operations, a university student leading community rebuilding effort, and a municipal staff member supporting grassroots initiatives. In Morocco, participants comprised a youth organization director coordinating formal recovery programs, a young entrepreneur involved in reconstruction projects, and a municipal disaster recovery officer liaising with youth initiatives. These participants provided rich, first-hand insights into the roles, motivations, and challenges of youth engagement in post-disaster contexts. To protect their privacy and ensure ethical integrity, all participants were anonymized in reporting.

Data collection relied on semi-structured interviews, allowing flexibility for participants to share detailed experiences while ensuring that key themes were addressed. The interviews explored participants' backgrounds, their personal experiences of the disasters, the nature of youth-led activities, institutional support mechanisms, the role of community networks, and the contributions of youth to economic revitalization and long-term sustainability. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and was conducted either in-person or through secure online platforms. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and field notes were taken to supplement the recorded data.

Ethical considerations were central to the research design. All participants received detailed information about the study's objectives, procedures, and intended use of data before providing informed consent. They were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and all data were stored securely on encrypted devices accessible only to the research team. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained rigorously, with all identifying information removed from transcripts and analysis.

The study employed thematic analysis to interpret the qualitative data. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and initially coded to identify recurring patterns related to youth engagement, governance interactions, social capital, and economic activities. Through axial coding, these initial codes were organized into broader thematic categories reflecting the study's

research objectives, including institutional support, community networks, empowerment, and sustainability outcomes. A comparative lens was then applied to examine how these themes manifested differently in Libya and Morocco, highlighting the influence of governance structures, social cohesion, and resource availability on youth participation.

Finally, while the study provides rich, context-specific insights, it is subject to certain limitations. The sample size was small, which limits the generalizability of findings; however, this approach allows for a deeper qualitative understanding of the phenomena under study. Additionally, interviews were conducted relatively soon after the disasters, capturing immediate recovery efforts rather than long-term impacts. Access to participants in politically unstable areas such as Libya posed logistical challenges, which may have influenced the breadth of perspectives obtained.

Overall, this methodology provides a rigorous framework for examining youth engagement in post-disaster recovery, situating individual and collective experiences within broader institutional and social contexts, and enabling meaningful comparison between Libya and Morocco.

4 Results

This section presents the findings from interviews conducted with youth leaders, local authorities, and NGO representatives in Libya and Morocco. The analysis is structured thematically, focusing on five interconnected areas: youth engagement and motivation, institutional support and governance, social capital and community networks, economic revitalization and livelihoods, and barriers with recommendations for the future. A comparative perspective highlights both the convergences and divergences between the two cases, reflecting how differing governance contexts shape youth participation in post-disaster recovery.

4.1. Youth Engagement and Motivation

Across both Libya and Morocco, young people were the backbone of immediate post-disaster response. In Derna, Libya, youth volunteers mobilized within hours of the floods, organizing search-and-rescue efforts, clearing debris, and distributing aid in the absence of functioning local institutions. One youth coordinator explained, *“It was chaos at first. No one told us what to do, but we felt we had no choice but to act. We were the first responders.”*

In Morocco’s Al Haouz region, youth were also central, though their actions were more structured. They assisted with logistics in relief camps, helped rebuild damaged homes, and coordinated supply chains. Social media played a pivotal role in both contexts, but Moroccan youth described more reliance on organized platforms like NGOs and municipal committees, while Libyan youth depended primarily on informal WhatsApp groups and community calls for help.

Motivations were broadly similar: solidarity with their communities, a desire to protect families, and the opportunity to “prove” youth capacity. In Libya, motivation was also rooted in frustration with state neglect: *“We stepped in because no one else would.”* In Morocco, youth described their engagement as a continuation of pre-existing volunteering cultures fostered by civil society organizations.

4.2. Institutional Support and Governance

The most striking difference between the two contexts lies in governance and institutional support. In Libya, interviewees consistently emphasized the lack of coordination and trust in government institutions. Youth groups largely operated independently, relying on their own networks to organize relief efforts in the aftermath of the floods. One volunteer from Derna explained:

“We organized ourselves, but the municipality ignored us. Sometimes they even blocked our access because we didn’t have the right papers.”

Participants described how the absence of functioning institutions forced youth groups to fill critical gaps in disaster response, often coordinating search-and-rescue operations, distributing aid, and supporting displaced families without formal recognition or logistical support. While international aid organizations eventually arrived, interviewees noted that local youth initiatives were rarely consulted during the early stages of the recovery process.

In contrast, Moroccan authorities incorporated youth more directly into organized recovery efforts through partnerships with NGOs and civil society organizations. Municipal officials described how youth volunteers assisted with logistics in relief camps and reconstruction activities, often operating through local associations that served as intermediaries between communities and government agencies. As one NGO director explained:

“The government prefers to work through us, but that gave youth a seat at the table, even if mediated.”

These contrasting experiences illustrate how governance structures shape youth participation. In Morocco, relatively stable institutional frameworks enabled more coordinated engagement, while in Libya political fragmentation and weak administrative capacity pushed youth initiatives into informal and often precarious forms of participation.

4.3. Social Capital and Community Networks

Both countries highlighted the importance of social capital in organizing youth responses. In Libya, kinship ties, neighborhood solidarity, and religious networks were crucial for mobilizing volunteers and distributing resources. One local leader described it as, *“Without trust between families and neighborhoods, nothing would have moved.”* Social capital compensated for weak formal structures, but it also reinforced exclusivity: marginalized groups, such as displaced youth from other regions, were often left out.

In Morocco, social capital was similarly vital, though more embedded in formal structures. Youth associations, religious organizations, and village committees acted as conduits for coordinating aid and building trust. Importantly, the earthquake shifted perceptions of youth: older generations began to recognize their skills and leadership capacities. An NGO director observed, *“The disaster made youth visible as leaders. Before, they were seen as dreamers. Now, they are trusted.”*

Thus, while social capital played a role in both contexts, its expression differed. In Libya, it was hyper-local, informal, and exclusionary at times. In Morocco, it was institutionalized and linked to broader civil society structures, making it more sustainable for long-term recovery.

4.4 Economic Revitalization and Livelihoods

Economic revitalization emerged as a central concern in both countries, though with different pathways and challenges. In Libya, youth initiated small-scale livelihood activities—repair workshops, food distribution cooperatives, and informal construction teams. However, these efforts were largely unsupported by state or international funding. Youth faced immense challenges in scaling their initiatives, and many were forced back into unemployment once the emergency phase ended. As one participant explained, *“We tried to start small businesses, but without funding or training, it stopped quickly.”*

In Morocco, youth-led cooperatives were more effectively supported. NGOs facilitated microfinance opportunities, vocational training, and partnerships with larger businesses. Examples included agricultural cooperatives, beekeeping projects, and digital platforms to market crafts online. A municipal official noted, *“We tried to channel resources to make sure youth were not just volunteers but also part of rebuilding the economy.”*

Nevertheless, challenges persisted. Moroccan youth still struggled with bureaucratic red tape and limited access to credit, particularly in rural areas. Transportation and market access were additional barriers. Yet compared to Libya, Moroccan youth had clearer pathways to turn post-disaster engagement into long-term employment opportunities.

4.5. Barriers and Recommendations

Youth in both contexts identified common barriers: lack of financial support, inadequate technical training, and absence of mental health resources. In Libya, political fragmentation and lack of institutional trust amplified these challenges. Volunteers frequently reported burnout and disillusionment. In Morocco, while youth felt more supported, many expressed frustration that their voices were mediated through NGOs rather than being directly included in government planning.

Recommendations converged around the need for greater institutionalization of youth participation. Libyan respondents called for formal platforms to involve youth in disaster response planning, as well as targeted training programs in disaster management and entrepreneurship. Moroccan respondents emphasized the importance of embedding youth engagement into preparedness frameworks rather than improvising during crises.

Both groups highlighted that youth should be seen not merely as volunteers but as partners in shaping sustainable futures. As one Moroccan youth leader succinctly put it, *“Don’t just ask us to carry boxes of food. Ask us how to rebuild the village.”*

Comparative Insights

Taken together, the findings underscore both the universality and the contextual specificity of youth engagement in post-disaster recovery. Universally, youth across both cases demonstrated agency, creativity, and resilience in the face of crisis. However, their capacity to transform these qualities into sustainable contributions was deeply shaped by governance contexts.

In Libya, youth filled governance vacuums but lacked institutional support to sustain their initiatives. Their role was heroic but precarious. In Morocco, youth operated within a more enabling ecosystem of NGOs, municipal authorities, and community networks, which allowed their contributions to extend beyond immediate relief into long-term economic revitalization.

These findings highlight that youth engagement is not simply a matter of individual motivation but is mediated by institutional, social, and political structures. Effective post-disaster recovery requires not only mobilizing youth energy but also embedding it within sustainable governance and development frameworks.

Table 1. Comparative governance structures and youth engagement outcomes in post-disaster recovery.

Dimension	Libya	Morocco
Governance context	Fragmented political institutions	Semi-authoritarian but stable governance
Youth engagement	Informal grassroots mobilization	Structured participation via NGOs
Social capital	Strong bonding networks	Bonding + bridging networks
Institutional support	Limited or absent	Moderate institutional facilitation
Economic outcomes	Short-term initiatives	Cooperative-based livelihood opportunities

5. Discussion

This section interprets the findings from Libya and Morocco in light of existing theoretical frameworks, international policy instruments, and the broader literature on youth, disaster governance, and sustainability. It highlights three central insights: (1) youth as critical yet underutilized agents in post-disaster recovery, (2) governance and institutional structures as

enablers or barriers to youth agency, and (3) the potential of youth engagement to catalyze sustainable, inclusive development when embedded in policy frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

5.1 Youth as Agents of Recovery and Resilience

The findings from both Libya and Morocco affirm what recent scholarship has emphasized: youth are not passive victims in post-disaster settings, but rather critical first responders and long-term resilience builders. In Libya, young people's spontaneous mobilization filled the vacuum left by dysfunctional governance. In Morocco, youth played central roles in organized relief through established associations and NGOs. These cases highlight the energy, adaptability, and commitment of youth, aligning with the Sendai Framework's call to "promote the leadership of women and youth in disaster risk reduction" [17] [18].

However, while both contexts demonstrate the indispensability of youth, their roles remain framed as ad-hoc and supplementary rather than institutionalized and strategic. In Libya, youth were blocked from official recovery spaces, and in Morocco, their inclusion was mediated through NGOs rather than direct engagement with authorities. This reflects a global pattern where youth are praised for their contributions but rarely granted formal authority or long-term opportunities in recovery governance [12].

5.2 Governance and Institutional Structures: Enablers and Constraints

The sharpest contrast between Libya and Morocco lies in governance. In Libya, fragmented institutions and political contestation created an environment where youth initiatives lacked recognition, resources, and sustainability. Bureaucratic hurdles and mistrust from authorities left many youth-led efforts uncoordinated, short-lived, and exhausting for volunteers. In contrast, Morocco's semi-authoritarian but relatively stable governance structure enabled youth to participate indirectly through associations that had established legitimacy with the state.

These findings reinforce the argument that youth agency is contingent on institutional support and governance structures. Without enabling policies, even the most dynamic youth initiatives struggle to endure. Libya demonstrates how political fragility undermines social capital's potential, while Morocco illustrates how state-civil society partnerships can channel youth energy into structured and sustainable recovery pathways.

Importantly, both cases suggest that institutions do not need to dominate youth efforts but rather create spaces of facilitation and recognition. This aligns with institutional theory's emphasis on the role of formal and informal rules in shaping collective action [9]. Where governance is weak, as in Libya, social capital compensates but cannot fully substitute for institutional support. Where governance is stronger, as in Morocco, youth benefit from structured pathways to engagement, though risks of co-optation and limited autonomy remain.

5.3 Social Capital: Informal vs. Formal Networks

Social capital theory provides a useful lens for comparing Libya and Morocco. In Libya, social capital was largely bonding capital rooted in kinship ties, neighbourhoods, and religious networks. These relationships enabled rapid mobilization but lacked mechanisms for scaling up or sustaining action. In Morocco, by contrast, youth associations provided bridging capital that linked communities with NGOs and municipal authorities. This facilitated coordination and access to resources, while also enhancing youth legitimacy in the eyes of older generations.

The difference between bonding and bridging capital is crucial. Bonding networks, as seen in Libya, are highly effective in immediate response but risk exclusion and burnout. Bridging networks, as in Morocco, enable wider resource flows and sustainability but may dilute grassroots autonomy. These findings echo [1] work on social capital in disasters, which emphasizes that communities with diverse and institutionalized networks recover more effectively.

5.4 Economic Revitalization and Sustainable Livelihoods

One of the most significant contrasts lies in youth contributions to economic revitalization. In Libya, efforts to establish microbusinesses quickly collapsed due to lack of funding, training, and institutional support. The result was disillusionment and a return to unemployment. In Morocco, by contrast, youth cooperatives, supported by NGOs and small loans, created opportunities for long-term livelihoods, despite persistent challenges of market access.

These findings underscore the potential for post-disaster contexts to create opportunities for reimagining youth employment and entrepreneurship. Disasters disrupt existing economic systems but also open opportunities to invest in skills development, social entrepreneurship, and sustainable industries. Morocco's example demonstrates how partnerships with civil society and donors can help youth translate volunteerism into economic agency. Libya's case, however, reveals the dangers of leaving youth unsupported, where the energy of recovery dissipates without long-term gains.

This speaks directly to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). By linking disaster recovery to youth employment and sustainable livelihoods, post-disaster engagement can be transformed from short-term volunteering into pathways for inclusive development.

5.5 Linking Findings to Global Policy Frameworks

The comparative findings offer important insights for international policy frameworks.

Sendai Framework (2015–2030): Both cases illustrate partial but incomplete alignment with Sendai's priorities. Morocco demonstrates progress in promoting youth participation and strengthening disaster governance through partnerships, while Libya underscores Sendai's challenge of integrating youth in fragile states. The Libyan case highlights the Framework's

weakest point: its limited applicability in contexts where governance institutions are fragmented or absent.

- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Youth engagement in Morocco and Libya connects to multiple SDGs:
- SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): Youth entrepreneurship and cooperatives as post-disaster livelihoods.
- SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities): Community-led recovery and resilience-building.
- SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions): Youth participation as a pathway toward more inclusive governance, particularly in fragile states.

African Union Agenda 2063: The emphasis on harnessing Africa's demographic dividend also resonates with the findings. Morocco provides a model of how youth can be integrated into structured recovery pathways, while Libya warns of the risks of excluding youth in fragile governance environments.

5.6 Toward Inclusive Policy Pathways

The findings suggest three policy pathways for strengthening youth engagement in disaster recovery:

1. **Institutionalizing Youth Roles in Disaster Governance:** Youth should be formally recognized as stakeholders in disaster response plans, not just ad-hoc volunteers. This could include youth councils in recovery planning, training in disaster management, and integration into civil protection systems.
2. **Linking Recovery to Livelihood Opportunities:** Disasters should be seen as opportunities to invest in youth employment through vocational training, cooperatives, and entrepreneurship. International donors and NGOs can play a key role in seeding sustainable youth enterprises in disaster-affected areas.
3. **Strengthening Social Capital through Multi-Level Networks:** Policy should harness both bonding capital (family and community ties) and bridging capital (associations, NGOs, and government partnerships). This hybrid approach can ensure immediate mobilization while enabling sustainability and scale.

5.7 Comparative Insights

Ultimately, the comparison between Libya and Morocco reveals the critical role of governance in mediating youth agency. Both contexts demonstrate the energy and creativity of young people in post-disaster recovery, but outcomes diverge sharply depending on institutional scaffolding. Libya illustrates the costs of exclusion and fragmentation, while Morocco demonstrates the potential of structured inclusion, even within a constrained political environment.

This comparative insight adds to the literature by showing that youth engagement is not a binary of presence or absence, but a spectrum shaped by governance quality, institutional partnerships, and forms of social capital. For policy and practice, this means that supporting youth in fragile states like Libya requires not only resources but also innovations in governance that bypass or complement weak state institutions.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The evidence from Libya and Morocco confirms that youth are indispensable actors in post-disaster recovery, but their effectiveness is mediated by governance, institutional support, and social capital. Aligning youth engagement with frameworks such as Sendai and the SDGs can help transform their contributions from emergency relief into sustainable development pathways. Unless youth are formally integrated into disaster governance and economic recovery policies, their potential will remain underutilized, and opportunities for resilience-building will be lost.

6.1 Conclusion

This paper has examined youth engagement in post-disaster recovery through a comparative analysis of Libya and Morocco, two North African contexts shaped by contrasting governance structures and institutional arrangements. Drawing on social capital and institutional theory, the study demonstrates that youth are indispensable actors in disaster recovery, yet their capacity to contribute meaningfully depends on the quality of governance, the availability of institutional support, and the strength of social networks.

In Libya, the findings reveal a paradox. Youth mobilized energetically in response to the floods in Derna, providing essential services where the state faltered. Yet, in the absence of institutional scaffolding, these initiatives struggled to achieve long-term impact. The reliance on bonding social capital—kinship, neighborhoods, and religious networks—enabled rapid mobilization but limited sustainability and inclusivity. Political fragmentation and bureaucratic obstruction compounded these challenges, leaving many young volunteers disillusioned.

Morocco presents a contrasting picture. While also operating within a constrained semi-authoritarian system, youth found more structured entry points into disaster recovery through associations, NGOs, and local governance mechanisms. Bridging social capital enabled coordination and resource-sharing, while institutional recognition of youth contributions supported longer-term initiatives such as cooperatives and livelihood projects. Despite

limitations, Moroccan youth were better able to convert their energy into durable social and economic outcomes.

The comparative analysis underscores a broader insight: youth engagement is not determined solely by their will or capacity but is deeply conditioned by governance and institutional frameworks. Where these frameworks are absent or fragmented, as in Libya, youth contributions remain limited and precarious. Where enabling structures exist, as in Morocco, youth can play transformative roles in resilience-building and sustainable development.

These findings echo international policy frameworks. The Sendai Framework (2015–2030) calls for the inclusion of youth in disaster governance, while the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the importance of youth employment, inclusive institutions, and resilient communities. Yet both Libya and Morocco reveal gaps between global commitments and local practice, highlighting the need for more deliberate integration of youth into disaster governance at national and regional levels.

6.2 Recommendations

1. Institutionalize Youth Engagement in Disaster Governance

- National policies should explicitly recognize youth as stakeholders in disaster risk reduction and recovery planning.
- In Libya, this could take the form of youth recovery councils at municipal levels, operating in partnership with NGOs where formal institutions are weak.
- In Morocco, the state could expand its support by embedding youth associations into civil protection frameworks, ensuring they are consulted in risk assessments and planning.

2. Link Recovery to Youth Livelihoods

- Recovery should not only be about rebuilding infrastructure but also about creating economic opportunities for young people.
- Donors and NGOs can play a catalytic role by providing seed funding, vocational training, and mentoring for youth-led enterprises in disaster-affected areas.
- In Morocco, scaling up youth cooperatives into regional value chains could provide sustainable livelihoods. In Libya, international organizations could pilot cash-for-work and entrepreneurship programs that transform volunteering into employment.

3. Strengthen Multi-Level Social Capital

- Policies should harness both bonding capital (community trust and solidarity) and bridging capital (connections to institutions and NGOs).

- In Libya, strengthening horizontal networks between youth groups in different cities could improve coordination and resilience despite fragmented governance.
- In Morocco, investing in platforms that connect youth associations across provinces would reduce duplication and enhance collective learning.

4. International and Regional Support

- Regional organizations such as the African Union and the Union for the Mediterranean should create platforms for knowledge-sharing on youth-led recovery across North Africa.
- The UN system and international NGOs should adapt their programming to fragile contexts like Libya, where bypassing state institutions may be necessary to empower youth.

5. Bridging Policy and Practice

- Finally, governments and NGOs must move beyond symbolic recognition of youth toward practical inclusion. This means giving youth a seat at the table in recovery planning, resourcing their initiatives, and ensuring their voices are reflected in decision-making processes.

Disasters are often described as “windows of opportunity” for reform and innovation. This study shows that for youth in North Africa, such opportunities exist but are highly uneven. In Libya, political fragmentation stifles the potential of a generation eager to lead recovery. In Morocco, institutional scaffolding enables youth to transform crisis into opportunity, though structural constraints remain.

The comparative evidence is clear: youth are not simply the beneficiaries of post-disaster recovery—they are essential partners in building resilient, sustainable, and inclusive futures. Unlocking this potential requires more than goodwill. It demands policy innovation, institutional reform, and a recognition that the resilience of societies depends on the engagement of their youngest members.

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Interviews

[19] Participant A (2024) Interview with youth NGO coordinator, Libya, conducted online via Microsoft Teams, 14 June 2024.

[20] Participant B (2024) Interview with university student volunteer, Libya, conducted online via Microsoft Teams, 15 June 2024.

[21] Participant C (2024) Interview with municipal staff member, Libya, conducted online via Microsoft Teams, 16 June 2024.

[22] Participant D (2024) Interview with youth organization director, Morocco, conducted online via Microsoft Teams, 20 June 2024.

[23] Participant E (2024) Interview with young entrepreneur, Morocco, conducted online via Microsoft Teams, 21 June 2024.

[24] Participant F (2024) Interview with municipal disaster er recovery officer, Morocco, conducted online via Microsoft Teams, 22 June 2024.

Appendix A

Table A1. Summary of thematic analysis, open codes, illustrative quotations, and country context.

Theme	Open Code	Excerpt	Country
Youth Engagement & Motivation	Spontaneous mobilization	“It was chaos at first. No one told us what to do, but we felt we had no choice but to act. We were the first responders.”	Libya
	Structured volunteering	“The government prefers to work through us, but that gave youth a seat at the table, even if mediated.”	Morocco

	Community solidarity	“We stepped in because no one else would.”	Libya
	Continuity of volunteering culture	“This is not the first time. We always work in associations, so when the earthquake came, we were ready to help.”	Morocco
Institutional Support & Governance	Lack of government trust	“We organized ourselves, but the municipality ignored us. Sometimes they even blocked our access because we didn’t have the right papers.”	Libya
	NGO-mediated inclusion	“The government prefers to work through us, but that gave youth a seat at the table, even if mediated.”	Morocco
	State neglect	“There was no coordination. We were on our own for days.”	Libya
	Partnership with municipalities	“We tried to channel resources to make sure youth were not just volunteers but also part of rebuilding the economy.”	Morocco
Social Capital & Networks	Kinship and neighborhood ties	“Without trust between families and neighborhoods, nothing would have moved.”	Libya
	Religious/community networks	“Our mosque became the base of operations; everyone brought what they could.”	Libya
	Association-based mobilization	“The disaster made youth visible as leaders. Before, they were seen as dreamers. Now, they are trusted.”	Morocco
	Trust building	“We worked hand in hand with the older generations; for the first time, they saw us as equals.”	Morocco

Economic Revitalization & Livelihoods	Informal microbusinesses	“We tried to start small businesses, but without funding or training, it stopped quickly.”	Libya
	Lack of sustainability	“After a few weeks, everyone went back to unemployment. Nothing lasted.”	Libya
	Supported cooperatives	“We created a beekeeping cooperative; the NGO helped us with training and a small loan.”	Morocco
	Market access challenges	“We make products, but getting them to the city is expensive.”	Morocco
Barriers & Challenges	Bureaucratic barriers	“Even if we want to register, the process is impossible without connections.”	Libya
	Volunteer burnout	“We worked day and night with no support. Many just collapsed from exhaustion.”	Libya
	Mediated participation	“We don’t sit at the government table directly, only through associations.”	Morocco
	Limited credit access	“There are opportunities, but the banks don’t trust young people.”	Morocco
Recommendations & Future Vision	Formal platforms for youth	“We need official roles in disaster response, not just ad-hoc volunteering.”	Libya
	Training in disaster management	“Give us knowledge and tools, not just instructions.”	Libya
	Embedding youth in preparedness	“Don’t just ask us to carry boxes of food. Ask us how to rebuild the village.”	Morocco

	Long-term livelihood focus	“If youth don’t get jobs from this, they will leave the village.”	Morocco
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