

A Locally Driven Approach to Promoting Peaceful Elections and Building Relationships between Pen-Pen Drivers and the Liberia National Police in Bong County, Liberia: Summary of Project Impact and Indicators of Impact

Project Overview

The Purdue Peace Project's (PPP's) Peaceful Elections Project in Liberia focuses on decreasing the likelihood of political violence associated with pen-pen drivers/riders (motorcycle taxi drivers), as well as preventing the eruption of violence among pen-pen drivers, their customers, the police, and other law enforcement officials. The first PPP initiative in Liberia took place in Monrovia and resulted in a working group being formed in 2013, which was called the Pen-Pen Peace Network (PPPN). Through the support of the PPP and with the help of the PPPN in Monrovia, a number of relevant local stakeholders, consisting of representatives from the Liberia Ministry of Transport, representatives from the Liberia National Police, pen-pen driver unions, market women, and community members, participated in a local actor meeting held in Bong County, Liberia, to discuss the potential for violence in relation to pen-pen drivers. As a result of this meeting held in fall 2016, a local peace committee emerged and named itself the Bong Pen-Pen Peace Network Bong (Bong PPPN). The Bong PPPN comprised of members of the police, pen-pen union leaders, pen-pen drivers, and community members in various positions.

In early spring 2017, the PPPN in Bong County began focusing its attention on preventing violence associated with the upcoming October 2017 elections in the country, as elections in Liberia have historically involved political violence. The Bong PPPN developed a series of activities in the county designed to promote peace and reduce violence. These activities included holding weekly radio talk shows, town halls meeting, community outreach, peace marches, and football matches. In addition to addressing election tensions, this project incorporated the PPPN's original goal—to promote peace in relation to pen-pen drivers. This report summarizes impacts of the activities implemented by the PPPN in Bong County.

Indicators of Impact

The following section identifies indicators of impact that the PPP project in Bong has contributed to reducing the likelihood of political violence in the context of the 2017 presidential elections and to improving relationships between pen-pen drivers and the police. Indicators are given based on comparative data over the last year since this project began in Bong County as well as specific critical incidents that have occurred during the project.

Comparative

- Prior to the start of this project, the community experienced frequent acts of violence involving pen-pen drivers and especially during election times. Because of the history of violence in this area, various members in the community came together during a town hall meeting in fall 2016 to form the Bong PPPN. Data from July 2017 reveal that the activities organized by the Bong PPPN have already proven to contribute to reducing

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violence. Members of the Bong PPPN have stated that there is notable reduction in poor behaviors from pen-pen drivers and there have not been any recent incidents of violence between pen-pen drivers and police. There have also been no reported acts of violence in the county, even with elections looming in October.

- The impacts of the work of the Bong PPPN have also been noticed by other groups of people. PPP's Liberia country director and members of the Bong PPPN said that other organizations are inspired by the work of this group and have adopted some of their practices, such as doing community outreach to share messages about peace. Some of these organizations include the Federation of the Liberia Youth, Foundation for International Dignity, Center for Justice and Peace Studies, and others. These organizations are getting involved in peacebuilding activities and asking about the PPPN's work.
- Through the project activities, the attitudes toward pen-pen drivers are changing. A member of the Bong PPPN stated that one of the biggest impacts of this project so far is that pen-pen drivers are starting to give back to the community and work toward peace, and that community members and police officers are accepting them and not labeling them as violent, as they had in the past.

Critical Incidents

- Evidence of the importance of the work of the Bong PPPN in the community has been noted. For instance, during community outreach in July 2017 when the Bong PPPN visited five different areas within the community, there were approximately 40-75 attendees at each stop. Pen-pen riders, young children, market women, and other community members gathered to watch the performance of a small dancing group and listen to the Bong PPPN members make announcements promoting peaceful elections. Several of the onlookers followed the group to continue watching.
- Members of the Bong PPPN provided an example of when they stepped in to prevent violent actions among pen-pen drivers. They talked about a previous incident where there was an accident involving a motorcyclist and a car, which led to pen-pen drivers getting into a fight with the driver of the car and setting the car on fire. The Bong PPPN began speaking with pen-pen drivers to “teach them to be more peaceful” and to call the police to handle situations such as this one from now on. Members of the Bong PPPN have agreed that they no longer see violent incidents like that happen.
- There have also been examples that showed the impacts of the peacebuilding activities. The Bong PPPN has organized a series of confidence building weeks, which involve three days of activities such as a peace march, town hall meeting, and a football tournament. During a confidence building week in Bong during spring 2017, there was a final football match played between the pen-pen drivers and the police, which the pen-pen drivers won. A member of the Bong PPPN (who is also a police officer) noticed that many times when pen-pen drivers and police now see each other, the pen-pen drivers joke with the police officers about beating them in the football match. This is one point of connection between these two groups of people who have historically fought and not



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participated in activities together. Due to the peacebuilding activities organized by the Bong PPPN, pen-pen drivers and police had an opportunity to meet each other and form friendly relationships.

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