

## PPP Project in Delta

The Purdue Peace Project's (PPP) work in Nigeria focuses on testing the theory of change that if we bring together a representative and inclusive group of local citizens, they will identify and implement an effective set of strategies to prevent political violence.

### Focus of PPP's Work in Delta, Nigeria

PPP's work in Delta focused on preventing a land dispute between two small communities (*ogboli Ibusa and Asaba*) from degenerating into violent conflict, and ensuring peaceful resolution of the exact boundary between them. The dispute occurred because the communities relied on oral account and not documented boundary. Despite a subsisting court order restraining both factions from gaining access to the land pending the final ruling, the youth were forcefully entering the land and selling portions to foreigners, a situation that would trigger violent conflict between the communities. The land under dispute had also turned into a gathering venue where politicians recruit jobless youth, pay them money, and use them as electoral thugs, a situation that has the potential to trigger violence.

### Project and Data Collection Design

The PPP's project in Delta state utilized primarily qualitative and participatory research methods. These methods were considered appropriate because of the cultural context that favors storytelling and the low literacy level of some of the participants. Data collection and workshops were conducted in English, and occasionally in the native language, with translation assistance provided by our local collaborator, Health Matters Incorporated, a Nigerian not-for profit organization. The Executive Director of HMI is a native speaker of Delta language.

- Preliminary Research: Desk review; HMI met with key informants, elders, and youth representatives from both communities for relationship building (August-November, 2013)
- PPP built on its collaboration with HMI from its work together in Port Harcourt, another Nigerian state
- Time 1 Field Data Collection (December 2013) conducted by PPP researchers.
  - Focus groups with key actors from 7 groups comprised of representatives from both communities
  - Observations and documentation from a one-day actor meeting with 21 participants consisting of elders, chiefs, women, the youth, and religious leaders. At the end of the actor meeting, a 10-member peace committee called Obi Ogadi and Ogboli Ibusor Peace Committee (OOPC) was formed to execute the ideas that emerged from the actor meeting.
  - PPP researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 15 meeting participants
- Time 2 Field Data Collection (August 2014) conducted by PPP researchers.
  - Observations and documentation of OOPC's open exchange boundary resolution strategy meeting. OOPC members consisted of representatives from the disputing communities conversed about how to resolve conflict. The first day of the meeting was held in Asaba; the second day shifted to Ibusa.
- Time 3 Field Data Collection (December 2014) conducted by PPP researchers
  - Observations and documentation from a one-day boundary demarcation meeting in Asaba, Delta.
- Time 4 Field Data Collection (February 2015)
  - Observations and documentation of a two-day Peace boundary demarcation strategy meeting with OOPC members.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The PPP research team and HMI monitored media coverage and the impact of OOPC's activities in Delta. Since its formation in December 2013, the OOPC met 1-2 times monthly depending on its activities at the time. Minutes of the meetings are shared with PPP through HMI.

To assess the effectiveness of the PPP's process, the following has been implemented:

- Post-meeting interviews have been used to gain feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of project's actor meetings and peacebuilding meetings
- PPP research team members have conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews with OOPC members at different phases to evaluate the process and outcomes.
- PPP researchers record (with permission) and transcribe all interviews and focus groups. Using a thematic analysis, team members closely look through the data for indicators of success, as well as areas of concern.

## **Strategies Employed by OOPC**

During the Time 1 and Time 2 data collections, members of the OOPC proposed a number of strategies to help resolve the land dispute between the Ibusa and Asaba communities. The activities are highlighted below:

- In February 2014, OOPC organized dispute resolution meetings in their separate communities. The meetings attended by respective community members centered on strategies to end the dispute. The event provided space for dialogue among the actors.
- In April 2014, a joint peace meeting with representatives from disputing communities was facilitated by OOPC. Following the conclusion of separate meetings in their respective communities, the local peace committee organized a larger community meeting comprising of representatives from Asaba and Ogboli, Ibusa. This meeting provided a space for both communities to dialogue on ways of settling the dispute.
- In May 2014, the OOPC visited the ministry of lands and surveys to seek speedy facilitation of demarcating their boundary.
- In June 2014, the OOPC made efforts to clear the land in anticipation of the demarcation by the commission. The effort was covered by the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). According to OOPC's report, the coverage was meant to serve as evidence in the court that both communities have agreed to peacefully resolve the matter.
- In August 2014, the OOPC organized open exchange meetings in both communities. The meetings were spaces where community members reviewed their effort towards settling the dispute, and pointed out resources to facilitate the boundary demarcation as a major obstacle to their desire to resolve the dispute.
- The OOPC organized a follow-up exercise on how to sustain established relationships, review its effort toward boundary demarcation, as well as finalize strategies to engage with youth after the demarcation for wider community acceptance of the demarcation. OOPC still plans to engage the youth in income generating activities to prevent post-boundary demarcation violence that is likely to occur if the youth and wider community members are not adequately prepared.

## **Before PPP's Engagement**

- Prior to our project in Delta, the relationship between both factions was strained. There was no exchange of visits among members of the communities. Data collected by HMI prior to our field visit as well as data collected from community members during the initial phase of campaign attest to this (these data sets include audio-recorded focus group discussions with actor groups from both communities, an audio-recording from the actor meeting, and follow-up in-depth interviews).
- There were fears about the likelihood of violent clash between youth groups from the two communities over indiscriminate sale of the contested land.
- There was no communication between members of the two communities. Community representatives only saw each other in the court rooms during court hearing of the case.

- There were reported cases of killings in the farms. Due to fear of molestation by enemies from the disputing communities, women went to farms in groups and were often accompanied by their husbands.
- The data gathered in the initial phase of our project also revealed that there were reported cases of indiscriminate selling of portions of the disputed land by unemployed youth.
- Both communities were bent on a court ruling as the only mechanism to resolve the dispute, and they vowed to pursue the case until a court ruling was pronounced. These positions were unearthed in the data sets collected by PPP during the initial site visit in December 2013. Such a hard stance is problematic because of the bureaucratic delay in court rulings in Nigeria. The delay in ruling on cases leaves room for the likelihood of political violence among the disputing communities.

### **Impact to date**

- The original site visit, data collection, and actor meeting brought together for the first time in several years members from the disputing communities to discuss the impact of the land dispute and what needed to be done to encourage resolution.
- Following the initial meeting, a local peace committee was formed to drive the resolution process. The group consisted of members from both factions. It still exists to date and its members have become peace advocates in their communities.
- There is improved relationship among the communities. Community members now freely attend marriages and burial ceremonies in the opposing community without fear of attack by their former enemies. Time 2 & Time 3 data collected by PPP researchers in August 2014 and December 2014 point to this. The data include testimonials from community representatives during the open exchange meetings in August, a boundary demarcation strategy meeting in December, as well as reports from the local peace committee.
- There was ongoing dialogue among the local peace committee on how to finally resolve the land dispute out of the court. This was especially important because it reduces the likelihood of violence often associated with delayed court ruling. Settling out of court increases the acceptance of the ruling by disputing factions, and also reduces the likelihood of post-ruling violence that is characteristic of such disputes in the local context. The local peace committee met at least 17 times to plan and executive strategies on how to resolve the dispute.
- To date, PPP is the only organization engaging the communities on how to peacefully resolve the conflict. The discontinuation of health programs in Delta by the UN Millennium project on account of reduced incidence of malaria reinforced the need for PPP's presence in the Delta state.
- There has not been a reported case of violent conflict related to the land since the beginning of PPP's project in December 2013.
- There has been open exchange of visits between the two communities, where peaceful conversations about resolving the dispute were agreed to by representatives of the communities.
- Both communities have now collectively resolved to settle out of court. Their collective decision to resolve the dispute out of court rooms was conveyed to PPP and HMI team during the boundary demarcation strategy meeting in December, 2014. Cultural members who represented their communities also stated their commitment to abide by boundary decided by the boundary commission.
- The community representatives have collectively agreed to a boundary demarcation as a lasting solution, and have initiated the demarcation processes. They have also agreed to accept and abide by the boundary delineated by the boundary adjustment commission.
- The OOPC has also initiated youth engagement strategies that will ensure that peace is maintained even after the demarcation exercise. The OOPC has planned activities that will engage the youth in income generation as integrated strategy that they believe also will contribute to reduce the likelihood of political violence.

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