

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

### **Project Overview**

The Purdue Peace Project's (PPP's) initial work in Liberia focused 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. Through the support of the PPP, a number of relevant local stakeholders (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 Monrovia, Liberia, to discuss the potential for violence in relation to pen-pen drivers. As a result of this meeting, in July 2013, a local peace committee emerged and named itself the Pen-Pen Peace Network (PPPN). The PPPN comprised of members of the police, pen-pen union members, pen-pen drivers, market women, and community members. Since its inception, the PPPN has organized a multi-media campaign to prevent violence related to pen-pen drivers (2014, Monrovia) and an Ebola Prevention Campaign (2014-2015, Monrovia) to prevent violence associated with Ebola in Liberia.

As elections in Liberia have historically involved political violence, in September 2015 the PPPN began focusing its attention on preventing violence associated with the upcoming October 2017 elections in the country. Some Liberians are concerned about the potential for violence around the 2017 presidential elections, as the elections are the first political race after the civil strife (1989-2003) marked by a reduced presence of the UNMIL (United Nations Mission in Liberia). Citizens find this alarming considering that during the past two elections, the UNMIL played an instrumental role in restoring peace in the country. Major development organizations such as Catholic Relief Services and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) suggest that there could be potential violence in the context of the 2017 elections.<sup>1, 2</sup>

Electoral violence has emphasized existing divisions within Liberian society and the difficulty of relevant stakeholders (such as the Liberia National Police, pen-pen drivers, the community) to be united during elections. Furthermore, electoral violence has oftentimes been associated with pen-pen drivers (former ex-combatants during the civil war) who have traditionally been used by political candidates to instigate political violence during election campaigns. Additional sources of tensions during elections originate in the negative relationship between pen-pen drivers and law-enforcement officials, such as the Liberia National Police (LNP). Pen-pen union members have at times been violent when they disagree with the police or other law enforcement officials.

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<sup>1</sup> Catholic Relief Services. (2016). *State of peace, reconciliation and conflict in Liberia*. Retrieved from [https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/state-of-peace-reconciliation-liberia\\_0.pdf](https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/state-of-peace-reconciliation-liberia_0.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> USAID. (2016, August). *Electoral security assessment, Liberia: Final report*. Retrieved from [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00MB5X.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00MB5X.pdf)

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PPP data from September 2015 suggest that pen-pen drivers are often subjected to unfair arrests, confiscation of their motorcycles by the police, and beatings by LNP representatives. Such a tense relationship has been complemented by pen-pen drivers' involvement in cases of armed robberies and repeated occurrences of mob violence after incidents involving pen-pen drivers.

Given these factors, the PPPN designed and organized a series of violence prevention activities in Monrovia related to October 2017 elections. 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 Montserrado County.

### **Indicators of Impact**

The following section identifies indicators of impact that the PPP project in Monrovia has contributed to reducing the likelihood of political violence in the context of the 2017 presidential elections and to improving the relationships between pen-pen drivers and the police. Indicators are given based on comparative data over time (between 2013 and 2017) as well as specific critical incidents that have occurred during the project.

### ***Comparative***

- The Pen-Pen Peace Network (PPPN), established in July 2013, continues to play an important role in addressing the issues related to political violence in Liberia. Data from February 2016 suggest that the PPPN's peaceful elections work is shifting existing pre-election trends in the relationships between Liberians. Through the project activities, relevant stakeholders (such as the LNP, the National Election Commission, pen-pen unions, pen-pen drivers, and community members) who previously did not collaborate in securing peaceful elections have started to cooperate and take action towards peaceful elections.
- Changes have been occurring in the relationship between pen-pen drivers and the police. February 2016 interview data reveal that instead of using violence in their interactions, both representatives of the LNP and pen-pen drivers are increasingly relying on peaceful talk to resolve conflicting situations. In fact, as a member of the PPPN stated, bringing people together to discuss differences peacefully has been one of the most visible impacts of the project. This change also coincides with other changes that are occurring in the attitudes of pen-pen drivers and the LNP about one another from negative to positive.
- PPP data also revealed that project activities, such as confidence building weeks, town hall meetings, and radio talk shows, contributed greatly to spreading the word of peace, as well as encouraged citizens to openly and jointly discuss the issues concerning electoral violence in the context of the 2017 presidential elections in Liberia. At the time of project launch in September 2015, this was a first-of-its-kind constructive dialogue initiative in Monrovia.

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### Critical Incidents

- Evidence of the effectiveness of the PPPN's activities in improving relationships between the LNP and pen-pen riders has been noted. For example, during a peace march at a confidence building week in February 2016, members of the LNP were seen riding on the back of motorcycles driven by pen-pen riders. Another instance occurred during the opening ceremony where various participants made speeches about the week's activities. After the LNP Chief made his speech, the large attendance of pen-pen riders was seen applauding and one of the riders ran up and shook his hand in front of everyone.
- There have also been incidents that showed the effectiveness of the peacebuilding initiatives. For instance, during another confidence building week, there was a fight instigated by one person, but many other participants in the event rushed in to break it up. Several such examples were noticed on the third and final day of a soccer tournament that was part of the confidence building week. During the final tournament, a pen-pen driver who was playing on the field was injured by a pen-pen driver from the opposing team. He approached the opposing member to initiate a fight, but several members of his own team rushed in to prevent this from happening. Several other pen-pen drivers and members of the PPPN ran onto the field, not to participate in the fighting but to also break up the fight. There were a couple additional critical incidents after the tournament when a pen-pen rider attacked another pen-pen rider, but other riders quickly intervened to separate them and talk to them. The riders who intervened reminded the instigators about the need to be peaceful.
- While planning and implementing the project in Monrovia, the PPPN also experienced a few internal challenges and tensions among the network members that could negatively affect the relationships among one another as well as their work on the project. One of the major problems during the initial stages of the project was irregular attendance of the PPPN monthly meetings. Despite these challenges, the PPPN members remained persistent and determined to work together on the project towards a common goal – peaceful elections. Furthermore, since the commencement of its peaceful election activities in Monrovia, the PPPN has actively supported the creation of three local peace committees in Bong County, Margibi County, and Nimba County in the second half of 2016. The experience of the PPPN group in Monrovia has inspired these three groups in commencing peaceful election activities in their own counties in 2017.

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