

PURDUE PEACE PROJECT

A Locally Led Approach to Violence-Free Elections in Nandom, Ghana: Summary of Project Impact and Indicators of Impact

Project Overview

The Purdue Peace Project's (PPP's) work in Nandom aimed to prevent violence before, during, and after the 2016 national elections. The Nandom district in the Upper West Region of Ghana had been considered a flashpoint for potential violence related to the elections. In particular the existence of inter-ethnic and land conflicts, lack of access to information and challenges such as poverty and illiteracy were thought to contribute to the potential for election violence in and beyond the district. The Nandom Youth for Peace and Development (NYPAD), a local peace committee formed during one of PPP's early initiatives (see **Nandom Land Disputes**), decided to take action. NYPAD held a three-day meeting with Nandom district assembly members in March 2016 to identify causes of conflict and develop an action plan to avoid outbreaks of violence related to the December 2016 elections. Activities included radio programs, town hall meetings, community outreach programs, school visits focusing on voter registration and regulations, a clean-up exercise and peace walk to sensitize the community about the need for peace, video shows, and an inter-community football tournament. Additionally, NYPAD received training by the Election Commission of Ghana, and created stickers and banners to spread their message of peace to surrounding communities.

Indicators of Impact

The following are indicators that the Nandom violence-free election project has contributed to a reduction in the likelihood of political violence. Indicators are based on comparative data over time as well as specific critical incidents that have occurred.

Comparative

- Despite being considered a focal point for potential violence, community members reported that the 2016 election was the “most peaceful election in Nandom ever.” Community members consistently reported that there was no violence before, during or after the election and described this as a marked difference from previous elections. In post-election focus groups, community members attributed this to NYPAD's efforts.
- Community members reported that campaigns were held without the rough riding of motorbikes, insults, or clashes that were commonplace in previous elections. A NYPAD member who works as a nurse reported that the hospital did not see the increase in injuries coming in that they did during previous elections.
- Community members reported being fearful during previous elections due to threats made about voting or encounters with members of different political parties, but that after NYPAD's outreach they became relaxed and did not have the same fears during the 2016 elections.
- Community outreach in four separate communities during May and July 2016 each drew crowds of 50-70 adults who were reached by NYPAD's efforts.

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- After these outreach efforts, focus groups with community members suggest participants gained knowledge about the voting process and voter registration process as a result of this experience.
- In these same focus groups, participants expressed an increased understanding about the importance of keeping peace and avoiding violence, as well as feeling newly inspired to educate their families and others in the community on promoting peace during the election season.
- A NYPAD member who was selected to become a member of the Electoral Commission shared that the communities in which NYPAD conducted outreach and advocacy had a higher amount of registered first-time voters as compared to other areas where NYPAD members were unable to visit.
- During post-election focus groups, community members were able to recite the lessons they learned during this outreach and describe how they enacted them.
- NYPAD reported that people followed the rules laid down by the Electoral Commission on election day and during the registration. A NYPAD member involved with the Electoral Commission said that the voting was as “clean” as possible and believes this was because of NYPAD’s campaign.
- The town hall meeting held in Nandom in August 2016 resulted in 70 participants, including representatives from electoral areas, police commanders, assembly men and women, and other local leaders, engaging in discussion of avoiding insults and advocating peace.
 - In evaluation worksheets from this town hall meeting, participants stated that they learned about the need to advocate peace, to avoid insults, to express their concerns through the right channels, and to accept the results from the Electoral Commission. Evaluation also suggests participants were committed to preaching peace and educating others before, during, and after the election.
 - According to NYPAD, representatives from the parties, when speaking on the radio, focused on issues rather than attacking personalities, in line with NYPAD’s calls for an “insult-free” election. Community members in post-election focus groups also discussed not hearing any insults exchanged.
 - Candidates also are reported to have educated their supporters not to cause problems.
- NYPAD’s radio programs were received well as evidenced by the increasing number of call-ins by community members with questions about voting and registration. In post-election focus groups, community members regularly referenced lessons learned from the radio programs, even those who did not have radios.
- NYPAD has become recognized for its peacebuilding efforts, particularly related to elections.
 - Assembly members from surrounding communities recognized NYPAD’s efforts with peaceful elections and invited them to organize and conduct outreach in their communities.

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- NYPAD was asked to provide a representative for the district assembly's peace council focusing on peace during the elections. They were also asked to have a representative on a district security task force.
- One NYPAD member was asked to facilitate debates between representatives of the two major political parties.
- Additionally, community members reported that the football tournament contributed to improved relations between communities and the youth in particular, a decrease in fighting and quarrelling among the youth, a decrease in alcohol consumption, and a decrease in domestic violence and disputes.

Critical Incidents

- On June 4, 2016 – a date historically significant in Ghana for a violent and bloody political revolution in 1979 – NYPAD led a peaceful march of hundreds down the streets of Nandom to call for peace during the election season.
- Following outreach programs, two families came into the Electoral Commission with their children who had illegally registered to get their names removed from the system.
- In follow-up meetings with communities where outreach had been conducted, community members reported a lack of violence during the registration. In at least one of those communities, the chief made an announcement to his community to the effect that if they misbehaved he would not support them.
- On the day of the election, no incidents of violence were reported. Community members reported going to vote and then returning home, following NYPAD's advice not to loiter around the polling locations.
- One NYPAD member who was present during the announcement of the results anticipated violence, as members from both parties were present. However, there was no clash. Members discussed that they expected there to be celebrations after the results were announced, which is usually when casualties can happen. Instead, they were surprised to find that the community was quiet and calm, as if nothing had happened. This was something NYPAD members had encouraged in their outreach. Community members reported that everyone had accepted the results, even if they voted for different parties.

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