

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

Project Overview

The Purdue Peace Project's (PPP's) primary work in Liberia centers around preventing violence between pen-pen drivers/riders (motorcycle taxi drivers) and their customers and police, and also focuses on reducing the likelihood of political violence associated with pen-pen drivers. The first PPPN was formed in Monrovia in 2013, and this original group assisted in expanding the Peaceful Elections Project to Nimba, Bong, and Margibi counties. With the PPP's support, relevant local stakeholders, including representatives from the Liberia Ministry of Transport, representatives from the Liberia National Police, pen-pen driver unions, market women, and community members, were brought together to participate in a local actor meeting held in Nimba County, where they discussed the potential for violence in relation to pen-pen drivers. From this meeting that took place in fall 2016, a local peace committee was formed. This group, called the Nimba Pen-Pen Peace Network (Nimba PPPN), was made up of members of the police, pen-pen unions, Ministry of Transport, and the mayor's office.

The Nimba PPPN began working in early spring 2017 toward violence prevention, which is historically a concern around election time in Liberia. Since elections are being held in October of this year, the Nimba PPPN designed and organized a number of activities focused around election-related violence prevention. Some of these activities consisted of radio talk shows, town halls meetings, 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 the impacts of these activities implemented by the Nimba PPPN.

Indicators of Impact

The following are indicators of impact that the PPP project in Nimba has contributed to the reduction in 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 Nimba County as well as specific critical incidents that have occurred during the project.

Comparative

- The work of the Nimba PPPN has brought together groups of people who have historically not interacted peacefully. Through their activities, such as peace marches and football matches, 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, came together during these events and have started to working with one another toward ensuring peaceful elections.

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- Interview data from July 2017 reveal that pen-pen drivers and police are beginning to interact peacefully to resolve conflicts instead of using violence. A member of the Nimba PPPN stated that one of the biggest impacts of this project so far is that there is a notable decrease in violence in the area. This change aligns with positive changes that have been noted in the behaviors and attitudes of pen-pen drivers and the LNP about one another.
- Data collected during community outreach in July 2017 suggest that the peace promotion in Nimba County has already had positive impacts. One Nimba PPPN member noted that because there is peace in their town now, and they can go into the market without worrying about incidents of violence.

Critical Incidents

- There have been incidents that show the effectiveness of the Nimba PPPN in action. For example, during a community outreach stop, a Nimba PPPN member asked a man in the crowd to speak about peace and peaceful elections, and the man began talking about politics and asking about what to do if the police do not come when there is an accident. The man began getting upset while talking about this, so the Nimba PPPN member calmly listened and addressed his concern. He instructed the audience to rise above politics and work together toward peace. He also encouraged them to call the police for help when there is an issue. The audience became engaged in this conversation and seemed to receive the advice well.
- Evidence of the interest in the activities of the Nimba PPPN has been seen throughout this year. For example, in recent community outreach in July 2017, there were approximately 20-75 people actively gathering at each of the six stops to watch and participate with the members of the Nimba PPPN as they danced to music and spoke messages of peace over loudspeakers. Another example occurred during what the Nimba PPPN referred to as a “confidence building week” focused on outreach when attendance at all of the activities was more than double the expected amount of people, with approximately 100 people attending the town hall meeting, 250 people in the peace march, and up to 400 people at the football tournament.
- The Nimba PPPN members have also demonstrated their commitments to peace by overcoming internal tensions within their group. Specifically, two members of the Nimba PPPN come from different pen-pen unions that have previously had disputes with one another. One union even filed a lawsuit against the other. Even though the members of the Nimba PPPN were directly affected by this lawsuit, they have made amends on the basis of their shared goal of building peace and they have been actively working together to spread messages of peace within their community.

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