

A Locally-Driven Approach to Re-Integrating Pen-Pen Drivers and Combating Ebola in Liberia: Summary of Project Impact and Indicators of Impact

Project Overview

The Purdue Peace Project's (PPP's) initial work in Liberia focused on helping decrease the likelihood of political violence associated with pen-pen drivers (motorcycle taxi drivers), as well as preventing the eruption of violence among pen-pen drivers, their customers, the police, and other law enforcement officials. With the support from PPP, a number of relevant local actors (including representatives from the Liberia National Police, the Liberia Ministry of Transport, Pen-Pen Drivers Unions, market women, and community members) took part in a so-called actor meeting held in Monrovia, Liberia, to discuss issues related to pen-pen drivers in Liberia. As a result of the meeting, in July 2013, a local peace committee emerged, which named itself the Pen-Pen Peace Network (PPPN). The PPPN comprised of the police, the Ministry of Transport, pen-pen unions and the pen-pen drivers themselves, market women, and community members. In collaboration with a local NGO, the Women Movement for Sustainable Development of Liberia (WOMSUD-Liberia) and PPP, developed and implemented a multi-media campaign to prevent violence related to pen-pen drivers and promote peace, understanding and coexistence between pen-pen drivers, policymakers, and community members.

However, the rapid spread of Ebola in Liberia during the summer of 2014 caused societal instability. Compounded by the Liberian government's perceived mismanagement of the outbreak as well as by citizens' distrust of the government and those perceived to be working with/for the government, the Ebola outbreak became linked to an increased likelihood of civil unrest and political violence. Under such circumstances, the PPPN, an organized group of Liberians who came into contact with people regularly as a result of their professions, was well-positioned to interact with everyday citizens. For these reasons, during the summer of 2014, the PPPN shifted its focus and designed and implemented an Ebola Prevention Campaign to prevent instability associated with the Ebola outbreak. Thus, PPP's most recent work with the PPPN and WOMSUD-Liberia focused on preventing political violence and instability in Liberian society caused by the Ebola outbreak.

Indicators of Impact

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

Comparative

- The pen-pen drivers are mostly ex-combatants who fought during the Liberian civil war. As they engaged in the process of disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR),

many of the ex-combatants used funds from the DDR process to buy motorcycles and became pen-pen drivers. They were perceived as lawless and aggressive in their driving practice as well as in their interaction with police and community members. Before the PPPN's work, some of the pen-pen drivers were implicated in conjunction with cases of armed robberies. There were repeated occurrences of mob violence after accidents with pen-pen drivers. Members of motorcycle transport unions would often react violently when they were in disagreement with the police or other law enforcement officials. The pen-pen drivers were also reported to be hired by politicians and political parties to mobilize political protests during campaign and election time, which could lead to political violence.

- The data collected before the actor meeting in July 2013 indicated the necessity of consultation and collaboration with local leadership to prevent violence related to pen-pen drivers. The data collected during and after the actor meeting suggested that the actor meeting itself helped enhance mutual understandings and communications among the actor groups, especially among the pen-pen drivers, the police, and community members. The meeting also helped bond actors who had been previously in strong disagreement with one another. Participants in the meeting shared that the meeting changed their belief that they could not sit in the same room with the rest of the groups and work with them to build peace in Liberia. Stakeholders who participated in the meeting shared that the discussions within and across groups in the meeting promoted an understanding of pen-pen drivers' situation at the time. The meeting provided a platform for stakeholders who were previously in disagreement to generate subsequent peacebuilding strategies relevant to pen-pen drivers.
- The participants of the abovementioned actor meeting (including representatives of the pen-pen drivers, the Liberia National Police, the Ministry of Transportation, community members, and market women) collaboratively established the PPPN. The PPPN continues to exist to date (May 2015), and is actively involved in preventing political violence and securing peace in Liberia through its ongoing campaign initiatives. Interviews with the community members suggested that the pen-pen drivers, especially those who work on and with the PPPN, are not considered to be associated with the occurrence of violence with the police, law enforcement officials, or community members anymore. Members of motorcycle transport unions wear uniforms during work, pay attention to hygiene issues, and behave in polite manners. As a community youth said, he felt that through the experience, the PPPN members and the campaign volunteers have all changed, especially about practicing non-violent behavior, “[team members have all changed] about the way you respond to things.... when you go to places, and you would just not get the preferable results or answer that you want, ... and if you are someone who have anger, your friend would tell you don't get angry, let me to talk to them this way and make them understand. And in that manner, you will understand that once you have gone to talk to people on a specific thing, no matter what they come up with, no matter what they say, your idea should not be about going back on what they say; it should be about persuade to be there to listen to you (about Ebola prevention). And I think that is one thing that I have actually changed, and you know, our interaction with people, we have understood how to interact with unrest people, some people will be angry, some people will like to welcome you, other people would not like to welcome you, and I think that way we have actually learned how to talk to people.”

- The pen-pen drivers also noted how their work on the campaign activities has changed them from perpetrator of violence to people who actively contribute to the prevention of violence. As a pen-pen driver said, “The pen-pen riders used to be involved in reckless behavior. We used to be involved in acts that were not compatible with norms and values of our society. But with the help of the PPPN we have been creating awareness, we have been talking to our friends and brothers who also happen to ride a motorbike in Liberia. We have been talking to them so personally you can see us, we wear our helmet because the PPPN are telling us to wear our helmet, to wear shoes and stop holding money in our fingers and...and also to respect the rural law. We used to be outlaws. No respect for the police, no respect for the government, but for now because of the PPPN their intervention, we can see most of us are law-abiding. Personally, we now understand conditions; they make sure they keep themselves clean. The way that it used to be before is not like that again. So I speak to you with the help of the PPPN most of them are accepting good behavior for society in Liberia now.”
- More importantly, interviews with the pen-pen drivers during the Ebola Prevention Campaign suggest that they now consider themselves to be citizens who make positive impacts in society. As one pen-pen driver articulated, “We go on the field to talk with people about preventative measures. If they (the community members) do not want to listen to us, we make the effort to make sure that we go back and talk to them. We want the message to go across. We want you (the community members) to be able to talk to your children, your family about the prevention message. So we try all means to convince you. And the next time, you go to them, and they listen to you. At the end of the day, they will say, ‘wow, it was good that you were very, very patient in coming and talking to me about it, so I really appreciate it.’ At the end of the day, they feel good about it, and myself, I also feel good, too, because my aim is accomplished.”

Critical Incidents

- There is evidence that after the establishment of the PPPN, the potential for violence related to pen-pen drivers has decreased. Data collected in January 2015 indicate that a year and a half after the PPPN’s initial multi-media campaign and community outreach initiatives, pen-pen drivers have started respecting the law and cooperating with the Liberian police. Public attitudes towards pen-pen drivers have also moved in a positive direction. Overall, such changes have led to a more peaceful social climate. One of the leaders of the United Motorcycle Transport Union-Liberia, the union of pen-pen riders in Liberia, stated: “...[in the past] government were against us because we came from war. After the war, there was no other alternative [than pen-pen driving], we didn't have any job, I mean opportunity. This [being pen-pen drivers] is the only means that we have, but the police on the other hand, they used to actually give us a hard time, so they would arrest our bikes. Some of them beat us. So we became so arrogant because we believed that they didn't have any right. With the presence of the PPPN where we have been going to see the workshops and other similars, we believe that today, the police is a good friend of ours. Other citizens, marketers, they are becoming a very good friend of us as pen-pen riders. So we are working together to ensure that Liberia becomes a peaceful place.”
- Before the PPPN started its activities, pen-pen drivers were often used by politicians to instigate instability during election time. In December 2014, Liberia experienced Senatorial elections. At this time, the PPPN was involved in the third round of its Ebola

Prevention Campaign. Data from December 2014 indicate that this campaign was an opportunity for the PPPN to observe its impact not only in the area of Ebola prevention, but also in peaceful attitudes associated with pen-pen riders. In multiple interviews with campaign volunteers pen-pen drivers emerged as a major collaborator in Ebola prevention. Importantly, in the context of the Ebola Prevention Campaign and the Senatorial elections, pen-pen drivers acted more peacefully than before. A campaign volunteer shared the following: “The good thing that we have learned in this present campaign that is going on, unlike before the motorcyclists were used by politicians. But I tell you, this time around it is so different. We are seeing that politicians are in the street and the motorcyclists are there, they are moving smoothly with their jobs. So I feel that WOMSUD and the PPPN have done so much good. I was so shocked and was so surprised because when we went on the street to see if they were going to be violent and they were saying ‘We know now our values. We know now our right. We know how to get in the street, to demonstrate. We don’t have to get in the street. We’ve learned it.’ So they don’t want to be moved back by politicians who jump in the street. So, we are like wow we’ve made significant impact in the lives of the motorcyclists. They were all parking and looking at politicians dropping in the street here and there and 85 percent of them did not go there to be part of the violence that was going on.”

- Ebola Prevention Campaign volunteers associated their prevention campaign with a decreased likelihood of political violence not only in relation to pen-pen drivers, but also in a more general sense. Interview data from October 2014 indicate that the communicative nature of the campaign contributed to community understanding and peace. A volunteer stated: “Yes, you see, by carrying out the awareness process and other processes, for example, moving to the communities to engage our people, telling the people that indeed, we are all Liberians, that’s part of the facts, this deadly virus Ebola, we should continue to live...So we have to talk to them to the lowest, for them to understand, and to bring peace to this nation, we should realize that we are all Liberians, we are not different nationality, we should be able to guard ourselves against violence. Not only one, but every one of us that is included as a citizen.”

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Last updated May 2015