

## **PPP Project in Port Harcourt, Nigeria**

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 Port Harcourt, Nigeria**

PPP's work focused on preventing the likelihood of violent conflict between students of university of Port Harcourt, and their host community following the killing of four undergraduates of the university over allegations of stealing by members of the community vigilante. The incident was a concern because of the history of Nigerian students to revenge such attacks. Often times, students' reprisal results in the loss of lives, and carnage that spill to neighboring communities. This impact document highlights the situation in Port Harcourt before and after our engagement with the students and the host community.

### **Project and Data Collection Design**

The PPP's project in Port Harcourt utilizes primarily qualitative and participatory research methods. These methods are considered appropriate because of the cultural context that favors storytelling. Data collection and workshops have been conducted in English.

- Preliminary Research: Desk review, our Nigerian collaborator, Health Matters Incorporated, a Nigerian non-profit met with key informants, chiefs, university officials for relationship building (January-March, 2013)
- PPP's initial meeting and relationship building with HMI (May 2013)
- Time 1 Field Data Collection (July 2013) conducted by PPP researcher:
  - Focus groups with key actors from 7 groups comprised of community groups as well as university representatives
  - Observations and documentation from one-day actor meeting with 21 participants comprised of chiefs, women, the youth, religious leaders, and university representatives. At the end of the stakeholder meeting, a 15-member peace committee called Community Peace Development Initiative (COPEDI) was formed to execute the ideas that emerged from the stakeholder meeting.
  - In-depth interviews with 15 meeting participants
- Time 2 Field Data Collection (December 2014) conducted by PPP researcher and COPEDI members:
  - Administered survey among the students
  - Observations and documentation of COPEDI's launch planning meeting. COPEDI members elected new leaders and fine-tuned strategies for the official launch of COPEDI
- Time 3 Field Data Collection (March 2014) conducted by PPP researchers:
  - Observations and documentation from a 1-day official launch of COPEDI in Port Harcourt

## PURDUE PEACE PROJECT

- Time 4 Field Data Collection (August 2014):
  - Observations and documentation of 2-day peace campaign planning meeting with 10 COPEDI members

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The PPP research team, with the assistance of our Nigerian collaborator, Health Matters Inc., continues to monitor media coverage and the impact of COPEDI's activities in the Aluu, Uniport, and broader Port Harcourt area. Since it was formed in July 2013, COPEDI met 1-2 times monthly depending on its activities at the time. Minutes of the meetings are shared with PPP through our collaborator, Health Matters, Inc. PPP monitored the impact COPEDI's planned activities.

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

- Post-meeting interviews: Used to gain feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the project's actor meetings and peacebuilding meetings.
- Focus Groups and In-depth Interviews: PPP research team members conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews with COPEDI members at different phases to evaluate process and outcomes. PPP researchers recorded (with permission) and transcribed all interviews and focus groups. Using a thematic analysis, team members closely looked through the data for indicators of success, as well as areas of concern.

### **Strategies Employed by COPEDI**

During the Time 1, and Time 2 data collections, members of COPEDI proposed a number of strategies to help strengthen the relationship between host communities and university students. The activities are highlighted below:

- On March 6, 2014, COPEDI was formally launched as a local peace committee. University leaders, chiefs from the communities, and students attended the ceremony. COPEDI members also publicly took an oath, demonstrating their commitment to peacebuilding and they preached the message of peace to students and community members present. The event provided space for dialogue among various actor groups.
- Ahead of the general elections in Nigeria, COPEDI started a weekly live radio peace campaign on a local station that has a wide reach in their local environment. The radio live program featured COPEDI members on a peace panel. Since the program's debut on January 8, 2015, a total of four episodes were aired with themes that revolved around prevention of electoral violence. In addition to discouraging electoral violence, members also responded to questions from the larger community who called into the program. Below is a summary of the four themes covered in their weekly episodes. COPEDI developed each theme:

## PURDUE PEACE PROJECT

- Episode 1 provided listeners with an introduction to COPEDI and its goals, mission, membership and history.
- Episode 2 posed a rhetorical question: Is politics a dirty game? This theme was meant to discuss the importance of engaging in violence-free politics. The episode stimulated conversation with community members who called into the program to share their views, and who also pledged support of COPEDI's effort.
- Episode 3 focused on the peaceful conduct of elections. COPEDI conversed about the importance of peaceful elections, and provided additional information about COPEDI and what it represents. The panel received numerous calls from attending members about how to join COPEDI. Members gave out information on how to join the group. After their appearance on the live program in week 3, COPEDI members carried the message of peace to the university campus and gave a talk to history students.
- Episode 4 was targeted at the youth and the key message was: Do not be used by politicians. The panel discouraged the youth from engaging in electoral violence.

### **Before PPP's Engagement**

- The relationship between the host community (Aluu), the site where four undergraduates of university of Port Harcourt were killed by a vigilante over allegations of stealing, was strained. The baseline data sets generated during the early phase of our community engagement attested to this.
- Following the killing of the four undergraduates, there was fear about students' reprisal. The fear was profound given the history of students' reactions to similar incidents in Nigeria.
- There was a communication breakdown between the larger university community and the host community after the killing of the students. Data sets gathered during our initial meetings suggested this. These data included focus group discussions with stakeholders, an actor meeting, and one-on-one in-depth interviews. The groups brought together for the actor meeting included Aluu chiefs, student union leaders, Aluu women groups and church leaders.
- Prior to PPP's involvement there had not been an opportunity for dialogue among the host community, the university, and the students, nor had there been discussion about the ways to prevent the likelihood of violence as a result of the incident. These were the collective views of stakeholders who spoke during our initial meetings in Port Harcourt (their views are documented in audio-recorded focus group discussions files, in-depth interviews, and actor meeting audio-files).
- There was a likelihood of violence as a result of the acrimony between the students and members of the host community. According to the data collected during the actor meeting, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews, the acrimony created feelings of mistrust, suspicion, and hatred towards the students, a situation that could have potentially triggered violent conflict between the students and the community members.

## Impact to Date

- There has been no reported incidence of violent conflict between the students and the community since the beginning of PPP's work in Port Harcourt.
- At the time of the project, PPP was the only peacebuilding organization working on strengthening university- host community relationship at the University of Port Harcourt.
- There has been improved dialogue between the students and host communities. PPP's actor meeting was the only forum that brought together the students, community members and university representatives to dialogue about ways to prevent a recurrence of violence.
- A local peace committee was formed after PPP's initial engagement with the community in 2013, and it remains a strong advocate of peace in Port Harcourt.
- Following their formation, the local peace committee brought together chiefs, university representatives and students to engage in peaceful dialogue on how to prevent violence in their community.
- Since their formation in 2013, the local peace committee has created an atmosphere for peace through the execution of different activities. Through a weekly live radio program that featured COPEDI members conversing about peace, COPEDI created space for dialogue with the wider public about peaceful conduct of elections. According to reports from the peace committee, the increasing number of callers into the program attests to its reach and impact.
- The local peace committee formed peace partnerships with other social organizations in the state (e.g. with Rotary Club, Center on Peace & Ethnic Conflicts, University of Port Harcourt)
- The radio program increased the profile of COPEDI as peace advocates in their environment. The number of persons seeking to join COPEDI attests to this. Second, COPEDI is now cited as a reference point for peacebuilding in the state. The group mentioned a couple of examples, including being cited by chiefs, academics, and lawyers.
- Following their appearance on the weekly live peace project, COPEDI members reported feeling a sense of confidence about their capacity to engage in public discourse on peacebuilding. They are also being received as positive members of their communities because of their engagement in peacebuilding. They are being recognized by friends, family members, and associates as ambassadors of peace.
- In addition to its local activities, the local peace committee is evolving as a strong center for peace in the state. Participants have become peace advocates, who organize as a group and continue to discuss peace promotion strategies on a regular basis in their environment.
- As of May 2016, COPEDI has become as a legally recognized peacebuilding nonprofit in Nigeria.

*Last updated in September 2017*