

THE EBOLA CAMPAIGN

“Liberians for Liberians”: A Locally-Led Ebola Campaign in Liberia

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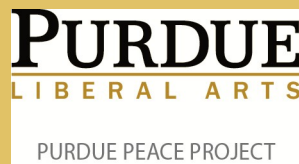
The Ebola Awareness Campaign in Liberia was supported by the Purdue Peace Project
(PPP) and Women Movement for Sustainable Development-Liberia (WOMSUD)



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The Pen-Pen Peace Network, a local peace committee in Liberia, has been fighting the Ebola outbreak with its own Ebola Campaign, with the assistance and encouragement of the Purdue Peace Project (PPP), USA, and the Women Movement for Sustainable Development-Liberia (WOMSUD). This report summarizes and highlights the work that these local Liberians have done to date and the preliminary findings that have emerged from systematic data collection of their work.

***Acknowledgements:** PPP and WOMSUD wish to thank all Pen-Pen Peace Network and the Ebola Campaign Volunteers for their contribution to preventing political violence and the spread of Ebola in Liberia.*



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BACKGROUND

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- ◆ As of September 30, 2014, Ebola has killed 2069 Liberians, according to the [Center for Disease Control](#). Nearly 4000 cases of Ebola have been reported in the West African nation. Compounding this problem is the [government's mismanagement of the outbreak](#) and the [citizens' distrust of government](#) and those they perceive to be working for/with government. This is in part due to perceptions and fears that Liberian citizens have about the disease and what they do as a result of those [perceptions and fears](#). As a result, the Ebola outbreak has been linked to [an increased likelihood of civil unrest and violence](#). Nobel Prize winner Lehmah Gwobee likens the outbreak to what the country experienced during the 14-year Civil War (1989-2003), as [Ebola continues to destabilize Liberia](#). Violence related to Ebola threatens to erupt in Liberia as is evidenced by the events of August 20, 2014, when [fighting broke out between government forces and local residents in a quarantined area](#).

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- ◆ Despite these challenges, local organizations in Liberia are engaging in Ebola awareness and prevention activities to reach out to populations in Monrovia and other counties. One successful, locally-driven initiative is the Pen-Pen Peace Network, a peace committee of local leaders and citizens constituted in July 2013 with the assistance and encouragement of the Purdue Peace Project (PPP), USA, in collaboration with the Women Movement for Sustainable Development-Liberia (WOMSUD). [The Pen-Pen Peace Network](#) was initially established to help decrease the likelihood of political violence associated with pen-pen drivers as well as prevent the eruption of violence between pen-pen drivers and their customers and the police. The rapid spread of Ebola in Liberia led to its focus shifting to preventing the spread of Ebola and attendant violence through an awareness campaign.
- ◆ In collaboration with the PPP and WOMSUD, the Pen-Pen Peace Network along with local volunteers who joined their efforts, have developed and implemented the Ebola Awareness Campaign. Launched in September 2014, the campaign to date has involved setting up 25 sanitary stations in Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia; disseminating Ebola awareness messages (in English and eight different local dialects) in person, in print, and on radio, including more than 500 brochures, about 200 posters, and 65 flipcharts for house-to-house health education; and interpersonal door-to-door, citizen-to-citizen awareness raising activities. Trained by the Liberian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare on how the virus is spread and how it can be prevented, the Pen-Pen Peace Network and the campaign volunteers disseminate Ministry of Health-approved information about Ebola to the public. Members also encourage safe practices among citizens and fellow drivers and attempt to reduce the continued risk of civil unrest and violence against aid workers fighting Ebola in the area.

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- ◆ The campaign activities at all stages are being documented and evaluated with observations and interviews. This systematic data collection allows for longitudinal analyses and evaluation of the campaign. Based on a preliminary analysis of the data collected to date, the following are our initial findings regarding challenges in the field and indicators of impact.

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CHALLENGES: NOTES FROM THE FIELD

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- ◆ *Denial that Ebola is Real*

Ebola Awareness Campaign volunteers shared that they go from home to home to spread the message about Ebola. This has allowed the volunteers to observe attitudes and perceptions about Ebola among Liberians.

- ◆ As a result of their daily outreach, the volunteers shared that “there are many Liberians who are still denying the reality of this virus” (Interview, Oct. 6, 2014).
- ◆ Volunteers reported that as a consequence of this denial, many Liberians are not aware of how Ebola spreads and how it can be prevented.
- ◆ One of the volunteers interviewed related an incident of a woman whose uncle had recently passed away. The woman did not understand why she was not being allowed to attend the funeral. Upon meeting with the woman, the volunteer talked to her about Ebola, and discovered that she had no idea what Ebola was or that she might contract it by participating in funeral traditions.

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CHALLENGES: NOTES FROM THE FIELD

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- ◆ *Resistance to “Government” Volunteers*

Related to denial that Ebola exists is the resistance that volunteers face when they go from house to house to speak with local citizens.

- ◆ Volunteers regularly report that when they go from house to house people “would not even let them enter their homes because they don’t want to hear about it [Ebola]” and because they think that the volunteers are from the government “to just make money” (Interview, Oct. 6, 2014).
- ◆ The theme of a strong, underlying mistrust of the government runs through these interactions.
- ◆ Overcoming the initial resistance of perceived governmental involvement in their work is a challenge the volunteers face daily; they report having to reassure people regularly that they are local citizens just like them.

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INDICATORS OF IMPACT

INDICATORS OF IMPACT: SIGNS OF HOPE FROM THE FIELD

◆ *Liberians for Liberians*

Once the campaigners are able to assure the people that they are, in fact, volunteers and not government representatives, they commence with their awareness work.

- ◆ The uniqueness of this particular Ebola awareness campaign is that it is a purely voluntary effort by Liberians for Liberians; this facet of the campaign is gaining recognition among the citizenry.
- ◆ The campaign volunteers consistently report that the people they interact with express appreciation for their efforts.
- ◆ The fact that the campaign volunteers are ordinary citizens of Liberia who are spreading awareness for the good of their fellow Liberians resonates strongly with the people they speak to.
- ◆ A sentiment expressed by the volunteers is that “working together and fighting this virus is the best thing we [Liberians] can do for our country” (Interview, Sept. 29, 2014).

The Pen-Pen Peace Network and WOMSUD will work with other local community groups as it expands its efforts to Bomi, Bong, Lofa, Margibi, Montserrado, and Nimba counties. These expanded campaign efforts will initially be through Ebola prevention messages carried on local radio stations (radio is the most popular mass media form in Liberia).

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INDICATORS OF IMPACT

INDICATORS OF IMPACT: SIGNS OF HOPE FROM THE FIELD

- ◆ *Preliminary Campaign Outcomes*

Several preliminary outcomes stand out in relation to the Ebola Awareness Campaign.

- ◆ Volunteers report that as a result of the campaign, they are seeing behavioral changes among Liberians. For example, Liberians to whom the campaign message was spread have said that they “know it [Ebola] is real and they are taking preventive measures,” such as washing hands more regularly, as well as avoid hugging and handshaking (Interview, Oct. 6, 2014).
- ◆ Additionally, volunteers report that as they continue their house to house awareness efforts they find that more and more houses are keeping buckets of chlorine and water outside for visitors to wash their hands and feet with before entering.
- ◆ One of the volunteers said, “Some of them [the people we speak to] are telling us we are doing great. They send their children for us to talk to them” (Interview, Oct. 6, 2014).
- ◆ A team from the volunteers estimate having reached more than 900 households through their house-to-house efforts, and over a hundred individuals come to the hand-washing stands on a daily basis.

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INDICATORS OF IMPACT

INDICATORS OF IMPACT: SIGNS OF HOPE FROM THE FIELD

- ◆ The Pen-Pen Peace Network's locally-driven efforts complement what the Liberian government, the United Nations, international non-governmental organizations, and Liberian civil society organizations are each currently doing to contain Ebola and educate citizens on how to prevent its further spread. Indeed, the Pen-Pen Peace Network has worked carefully with the Liberian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in order to make sure the messages it is sending are endorsed by the Ministry. At the same time, the Pen-Pen Peace Network's efforts are an example of how local citizens can act swiftly and in such a way that their fellow citizens are open to receiving their message. At a time when sadly, distrust in government institutions appears to be high, a citizen-to-citizen approach may be one way to effectively promote the kinds of preventive behaviors necessary to contain the deadly virus.
- ◆ This report showcases the work of the Pen-Pen Peace Network, with the assistance and encouragement of the PPP and WOMSUD, in fighting the Ebola outbreak in Liberia. It reflects the initial findings of the locally-initiated Ebola Awareness Campaign in Liberia from Sept. 15, 2014 to Oct. 7, 2014. As the campaign continues, additional themes, challenges, and impacts may emerge. Lessons learned from the project and recommendations for future practices will be included in future reports. It is hoped that the campaign activities will continue to have a positive impact on Liberia and its people.

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FUTURE UPDATES AND RELEVANT LINKS

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- ◆ For up-to-date information, please contact PPP Director Dr. Stacey Connaughton at 765-494-9107 or sconnaug@purdue.edu

- ◆ Relevant Links:
 - ◆ Ebola Awareness Campaign: <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/ppp/Ebola.html>
 - ◆ Purdue Peace Project: <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/ppp/>
 - ◆ Read more about the Pen-Pen Peace Network's work in Liberia in Building Peace: "Peacebuilding with local citizens": <http://buildingpeaceforum.com/2014/09/peacebuilding-with-local-citizens/>

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- ◆ Ebola Awareness Campaign volunteers after project orientation. WOMSUD-Liberia office, Garden Terrace Apt. Complex, Monrovia, Liberia.



- ◆ Volunteers urge Liberians to take Ebola seriously during the Ebola Awareness Campaign launch. Monrovia, Liberia.

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- ◆ Large crowd stands by to wash their hands during the Ebola Awareness Campaign launch in Monrovia, Liberia.



- ◆ A Liberian child washes her hands during the Ebola Awareness Campaign at one of the sanitary stations in Monrovia, Liberia.

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PARTICIPANTS

- ◆ **About the Pen-Pen Peace Network**

The Pen-Pen Peace Network is a local peace committee based in Monrovia, Liberia, which formed in July 2013. The network is made up of local leaders and citizens including pen-pen drivers and union leaders, police, the Ministry of Transport, market women, and other community members. For more information, please contact Grace Yeanay Mayson at gracemayson@gmail.com.

- ◆ **About WOMSUD**

The Women Movement for Sustainable Development (WOMSUD-Liberia) is a non-governmental women based organization, established in October 2009, in response to the many social-economic, education, health inequalities and the systemic marginalization of women in decision making in all areas of governance and the need to research and document facts confronting marginalized and disadvantaged women and girls of Liberia. For more information, please contact Grace Yeanay Mason at gracemayson@gmail.com.

- ◆ **About the Purdue Peace Project**

The Purdue Peace Project (PPP) is housed in the [Brian Lamb School of Communication](#), which is part of the [College of Liberal Arts](#) at Purdue University. The PPP sees to encourage and assist local leaders in fragile states to address clearly identified situations that threaten to lead to political violence. In promoting locally-driven and inclusive approaches to peacebuilding, the PPP seeks to reduce the likelihood of political violence and contribute to lasting peace. In addition to Liberia, the PPP also currently has projects in Ghana and Nigeria. Purdue alumnus, Milton C. Lauenstein, a retired businessman and philanthropist, funds the project. For more information, please contact Dr. Stacey Connaughton, 765-494-9107, sconnaug@purdue.edu

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