

# The Purdue Peace Project Post

*The mission of the Purdue Peace Project is to convene groups of local citizens in fragile states where clearly identified situations threaten to lead to political violence, and encourage and assist these citizens in their efforts to bring about peaceful solutions. In promoting locally-driven and inclusive approaches to peace-building, we seek to reduce the likelihood of political violence and contribute to lasting peace. In doing so, we also seek to add to the body of knowledge in this field by documenting and disseminating our work to practitioners and scholars alike.*



Upon entering Frederick's Island on the bridge, the WOMSUD-Liberia Executive Director, Grace Yeanay Mayson, meets some kids from the island fishing. She tells them about how to keep safe from Ebola and things that might harm them.

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**Promoting Peace Through Local Action**

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# Pen-Pen Drivers and Local Citizens Work Together to Help Prevent Ebola's Spread in Liberia

With the encouragement and assistance of the Purdue Peace Project (PPP) and in collaboration with the Women Movement for Sustainable Development-Liberia (WOMSUD-Liberia), the Pen-Pen Peace Network (PPPN) in Liberia successfully concluded its Ebola Prevention Campaign in February, 2015. Focusing on disseminating Ebola awareness messages and promoting preventive behaviors among local citizens in and outside Monrovia, the PPPN team, together with local leaders and volunteers, designed and implemented their Ebola Prevention Campaign in August, 2014. The Campaign lasted for 6 months and reached more than 8,600 houses and more than 28,000 persons. Throughout the campaign, the local citizens set up 25 sanitary stations in five communities in Monrovia, and distributed approximately 2,500 brochures, 250 posters, and 65 flipcharts. They developed radio dramas about Ebola which were broadcasted in eight local dialects in five counties (Bong, Bomi, Lofa, Nimba, and Margibi). All campaign activities and reflections were documented through campaign team members' field observations in 294 daily logs and 61 interviews with PPP researchers conducted from September 19, 2014 to January 28, 2015.



As the team concluded its Ebola Prevention Campaign in February, 2015, the concluding interviews with team members suggested how the campaign has contributed to raising awareness about Ebola in these local communities and how they considered the Campaign to have changed them as well as the Liberian society as a whole. For example, one volunteer talked about how the campaign contributed to the decrease in the number of Ebola cases: “The fruitful results they are, the number of cases of Ebola is reducing. We used to [speak] to hundreds of people on a daily basis. But presently the number of cases are reducing. There are treatment units that do not see an Ebola patient for now, so those are some of the fruitful results I was talking about and you find out the way people use to come down, every time you see people coming down in our community, it's hard to see someone coming down with the Ebola virus for now. So those are fruitful results” (Interview with Ebola Prevention Campaign volunteer, January 28, 2015). Another volunteer reflected on how the Liberians became willing to abandon traditional cultural practices that may spread the Ebola virus: “A little girl was very ill in the community for more than a month but later died from the sickness so the parents of the child called the Ebola burial team to come and take the body for testing before they bury their child. Because of the awareness people are taking all the preventive measures” (Daily field log, January 9, 2015).

More importantly, the Campaign volunteers talked about how the locally-driven, community-based campaign has transformed people and the society at large. One pen-pen rider (motorcycle taxi driver) and Ebola Prevention Campaign volunteer recalled what he had hoped to achieve through the work and what he actually achieved. He said: “What I hope to achieve is the same thing that I am achieving now because I should go to someone and talk to them about positive behavior and know about it because that's what the Peace Project is promoting to be law abiding citizen, so that's what I hope to achieve...so I am so happy because my dream is being achieved. I can be able to convince you, I can be able to be a patient man and I am happy about that. It has taught me a lot (Interview with a pen-pen rider, January 21, 2015).

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A team of field volunteers share Ebola prevention messages with residents in the Old Road--Gaye Town Community



Liberia

# Local Citizens Take a Message of Peace to the Streets in Delta State, Nigeria

Members of the local peace committee in Ibusa and Asaba Delta State, Nigeria recently took the message of peace to the streets of Ibusa. Ibusa and Asaba are at loggerheads over their boundary, a case that has strained their hitherto cordial relationship. The recent peace rally is a follow-up to their commitment to work with Nigeria's boundary demarcation agencies to end the disagreement. The rally was attended by representatives from both disputing communities, including Ibusa elders, chiefs, women, and the youth as well as representatives from Asaba.

In March 2015, participants gathered at the Ibusa town hall where the members of the local peace committee, Obi Ogadi and Ogboli-Peace Committee (OOPC) which the PPP helped to create, spoke about the importance of the rally and urged community members to embrace peace. Following the remarks by OOPC representatives, the eldest man in Ibusa gave his blessings in accordance with cultural norms, and the dance troupe took to the streets singing, dancing and distributing flyers containing message of peace.

The spokesperson of the local peace committee, Sebastine Oba told PPP that, "the aim of the rally was to create awareness and sensitize the general members of the community about the peace process, and to encourage all to embrace it." He recalled that the reconciliation effort began in December 2013, when PPP convened both communities to dialogue on peaceful resolution. According to Oba, the peace rally is part of the activities geared towards strengthening the peace process between both communities. Another peace committee member representing Asaba, Amechi, told the audience that the participation of representatives from Asaba at the rally symbolized considerable progress in the peace effort of the committee. He recalled that prior to the formation of the OOPC, there was no exchange of visits between community members due to their acrimonious relationship linked to the boundary dispute.

The OOPC was formed in December 2013 after an actor meeting convened by the Purdue Peace Project and its local collaborator Health Matters Incorporated. Since then, the committee has remained a strong voice in promoting peace between both communities and working to resolve the boundary dispute.







OOPC members and volunteers lead a peace march through the streets of Ibusa



The eldest man of Ibusa addresses the OOPC members and community members



# Feature on COPEDI member - Handsome Kinikanwo

Growing up in Umuigwe Aluu, a small community in Rivers State, Handsome Kinikanwo had a flair for social justice. He states: “As a child growing up, I wanted to see a better society because I witnessed a lot of militancy.” This quest for social justice led him to join Press Club in junior high school, and subsequently student union government at the University of Port Harcourt. Little wonder when the Purdue Peace Project (PPP) and its Nigerian collaborator Health Matters Incorporated (HMI) sought community members’ participation in a local peacebuilding initiative, Handsome joined: “I was called by a community youth leader and I promised to attend the PPP/HMI stakeholder meeting. Shortly after the call, I showed up.” The meeting brought together an inclusive group of community and university representatives who conversed about strategies to strengthen the university and host community’s relationship as well as ways to prevent the likelihood of political violence. The gathering led to the formation of Community Peace Development Initiative (COPEDI), a group of local citizens committed to locally-driven peacebuilding.

Since the formation of COPEDI in August 2013, Kinikanwo has remained committed to building peace in Port Harcourt. In his late 20s, Kinikanwo is the secretary of COPEDI. He also serves as the media coordinator of COPEDI’s media program. He shares his engagement with COPEDI, memorable experiences and lessons learned, as well as challenges and aspirations for his group in the following statement:

I am the secretary of COPEDI, and the media coordinator of our radio program. The radio program educates the public about peace and the need for violent free election. We contributed to peace post-election in the state. We devoted the epi-

sodes of our radio program before, during, and after the just concluded general elections in Nigeria to the message of peace. COPEDI has given us an opportunity to reach out to people with messages of peace, and we provided opportunities for people to phone into our radio peace program. In collaboration with other members of COPEDI, we brainstormed on the topics for our weekly talk show. By participating in COPEDI, I have learned the importance of working with others, as well as the importance of accountability and documentation. Despite the challenges of limited resources and human development that we currently face, I see a brighter future for COPEDI, and

remain committed to the cause of peacebuilding.

Kinikanwo shares the impact of COPEDI’s program on political violence prevention in this way: “I hardly hear of any Not for Profit talking about peace during, after or before the election. But our talk on radio gave people an opportunity to talk about peace. After the governorship election there was no protest,

at least we witnessed peace post-election and I think COPEDI contributed because we were at the forefront of advocating for peace in the state through our weekly radio program.”

In addition to contributing to peace in Port Harcourt, participating in COPEDI has also brought public attention to Handsome and other members of the group. He says: “COPEDI has made us popular in the community and we receive commendations from friends and community leaders because of our weekly radio program. I have memorable experiences from participating in COPEDI. For example, after the inauguration of COPEDI in March 2014, I received accolades from my community Development Chairman, and the university representatives because of the welcome speech I made. COPEDI has also provided me the skill to appear on the radio to preach the message of peace.”





# Feature on COPEDI member - Gladys Gogo



In August 2013, the Purdue Peace Project (PPP) in collaboration with its local collaborator, Health Matters Incorporated (HMI) convened a meeting of local actors in Port Harcourt. The participants conversed about strategies to strengthen university-host community relations, and ways of preventing the likelihood of political violence in Aluu, a small community that hosts a part of the University of Port Harcourt in Rivers state. Participants were Aluu community representatives, chiefs, women, the youth, religious leaders, University of Port Harcourt representatives, and student union leaders. PPP's engagement with the communities emanated from the killing of four university undergraduates over allegations of theft in Aluu. After the actor meeting, a local peace committee called the Community Peace Development Initiative (COPEDI) was formed. Members appointed Gladys Gogo as its coordinator. In collaboration with nine other members of COPEDI, Gladys steers the ship of peacebuilding. Gogo shares her volunteer experiences with COPEDI as well as her passion for peacebuilding in the following paragraphs:

“I was a graduate student in the Center for Ethnic and Conflict Studies at the University of Port Harcourt at the time (CENTECS). I was also the assistant course representative, so the coordinator of CENTECS appointed four of us to attend the PPP/HMI stakeholder meeting and that is how I got involved. I am passionate about things that impact humanity, especially students. I belong to Rotary Club, so volunteering for COPEDI is in line with my interest to positively contribute to my community.”

Like her COPEDI colleagues, Gladys notes that COPEDI's weekly radio programs have brought her fame at the University of Port Harcourt, where she heads the technical unit of the film production and theatre department, “The COPEDI radio talk show is very popular. So many people have been calling me and asking if it is the same COPEDI that they hear on the radio. Because of the radio program, many people have indicated interest to join COPEDI. Even faculty have indicated interest and have told me to inform them when we are planning other activities. Despite challenges we face sometimes, I remain committed to the mission of COPEDI to build peace.”

# Kato Citizens Come Together For Peace

With the support and encouragement of the Purdue Peace Project (PPP), local citizens came together in March 2015 for the first time in several months in order to begin working toward peace in their Ghanaian community. They convened to discuss a chieftaincy dispute between two royal families in Kato, Ghana, a small town just outside of Berekum in the Brong Ahafo region. The PPP convened an inclusive, representative actor meeting, providing a space for various groups to come together, discuss issues and identify strategies for peacebuilding.

During the actor meeting, approximately 23 people, including individuals affected by and involved in this dispute, came together to dialogue on ways forward to maintain peace in Kato, in some cases speaking to each other and working together after a long period of animosity. Participants engaged in group discussions with people from disputing parties and together, put forth strategies to maintain peace in the community.



Group photograph of all actor meeting participants



# Nandom Community Members Discuss Land Disputes, Shared History

More than 50 people from communities in the Nandom Traditional Area gathered in March 2015 to discuss land disputes and the possibility of land demarcation. During this meeting with the *tengan dem* (land custodians), community elders shared oral histories of the land.

Two key outcomes emerged from this meeting. First, the participants agreed that there was no point in continuing to fight given the interrelated nature of the conflicts. Second, the attendees discussed the need for further meetings where communities might learn about the differences between customary laws and Ghanaian land laws. Efforts are underway to move forward on specific solutions related to land demarcation and documentation.



# Research Assistant Spotlight

When the newly formed Purdue Peace Project (PPP) was searching for individuals committed to locally-driven peace-building approaches with an intimate knowledge of how political violence impacts communities, they looked no further than BLSC doctoral candidate Agaptus Anaele. Agaptus, a former journalist from Nigeria, brought to the PPP his research interests in social change, an interest recognized and felicitated by the Ford Foundation through its International Fellowship Program, as well as cultural and political knowledge of West Africa, the site of most of the PPP's current work. His experiences as a journalist, as well as his training at Purdue as a health communication scholar working towards reducing health disparities in Indiana's underserved communities, inform his work in helping reduce the likelihood of political violence in West Africa, especially in his motherland of Nigeria.



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