

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 peacebuilding, 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.



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Quarterly Newsletter
ISSUE 14 September 2016


New Project: Local Citizens in Tuobodom, Ghana, Call for Peace and Unity

With the aim of resolving a chieftaincy dispute that has been dividing people of Tuobodom, Ghana for decades, representatives from the two factions in conflict united in a two-day actor meeting in August to discuss potential strategies that can bring peace to the community.

Over the years, this conflict has seriously affected various spheres of the local citizens' lives, with numerous negative outcomes including underdevelopment of the region as well as stigmatization of people living and working in Tuobodom. In addition, a series of recent violent outbreaks due to the dispute have not only resulted in numerous deaths, but has also led to panic and fear among local citizens in their day-to-day lives.

In August, the Purdue Peace Project (PPP) met with various stakeholders from the two factions to discuss the possibility of bringing representatives of both sides together to engage in building peace in the community. Following initial meetings with chiefs, elders, religious leaders, politicians, youth, and other community members, the PPP team in collaboration with the Concern Youth of Tuobodom (CYT), a self-organized youth group engaged in promoting peace in the area, facilitated an actor meeting with representatives of each of these stakeholder groups. More than 44 people who attended the meeting took an active part in discussing the causes and effects of this conflict as well as strategizing ways in which they can bring peace to Tuobodom.

At the end of this actor meeting, participants formed a local peace committee named the Tuobodom Peacemakers Committee (TPMC), consisting of 11 community members who represent each faction and various stakeholder groups, including the youth. In the coming months, the committee plans to build on and implement the strategies for peace identified at the meeting ranging from community outreach programs and shared activities to reconciliation processes and steps toward resolving the chieftaincy dispute. CYT continues to play a vital role in spreading the word on the importance and need of peace in the area through various channels and events, such as movie viewings, school education, and similar activities, and plans to work in collaboration with the newfound peace committee to bring an end to the dispute.





Local chiefs, elders, religious leaders, youth, and other community members participated in an actor meeting in Tuobodom in August 2016.



Local citizens brainstorm possibilities for peace in Tuobodom, Ghana, during the August 2016 actor meeting.



Expansion of the Peaceful 2017 Elections Project in Margibi County, Liberia



Over the past few months, a group of local citizens in Margibi County has been working closely with the Pen-Pen Peace Network (PPPN) to organize various activities and events that aim to promote peace during the 2017 presidential elections in Liberia. The project in Margibi County is a continuation of the PPPN members' success in peacebuilding efforts around political and electoral violence in Montserrado County.

Following the formation of a working group in Margibi in May of 2016, the initial meeting brought together various stakeholder groups, including pen-pen drivers and pen-pen union representatives, members of the Liberia National Police (LNP), representatives of the National Election Commission (NEC) and the Ministry of Transport, and other community members to discuss effective strategies and tactics that could be implemented to promote and ensure peace within the months prior to the 2017 elections.

In early July 2016, the Purdue Peace Project team travelled to Kakata, Margibi, for three days to attend the events around peaceful elections organized by the PPPN and project volunteers in Margibi. Among the main activities that took place were a town hall meeting, followed by a peace march on the main street of Kakata, and a Confidence Building Week with soccer tournaments among the police and pen-pen riders. Around 500 local citizens joined the events, among them the LNP, NEC representatives, pen-pen riders, and other community members. The organizers received positive feedback from community members. They hope to be continuing with promoting peace and stability during the election period in the months to come.



Liberia



A peace march and a soccer tournament between pen-pen riders and representatives of the Liberia National Police were some of the activities organized by the PPPN and local volunteers in July 2016 in Margibi County.

New Project: Peaceful Water Management in Cabañas, El Salvador



Local rivers surrounding the community of San Isidro, El Salvador, are sources of drinking water and livelihood for local citizens.



In June 2016, with the support and encouragement of PPP, local citizens commenced a dialogue on how they can protect their local waters peacefully.

El Salvador

Following PPP Director Stacey Connaughton's visit to El Salvador in June 2016, the PPP is excited to begin working towards the resolution of conflict surrounding water management in the Cabañas region, in concert with a locally led peacebuilding organization, MUFRAS-32. The group has gained national visibility in recent times thanks to its public support of el Comité Popular por el Hábitat Inclusivo, Sustentable, y Digno (People's Committee for Inclusive, Sustainable, and Dignified Housing). MUFRAS-32 joined the People's Committee in a meeting with José Roberto Gochez Espinoza, deputy minister of housing and urban development, to highlight seven housing-related stipulations inspired by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Development, of which access to water and adequate water sanitation infrastructure are key. Espinoza expressed support for the legislation, according to MUFRAS-32. Jessica Berns, consultant to the PPP director, and PPP Research Assistant Lauren Potts traveled to the Cabañas in September 2016 to support efforts leading up to MUFRAS-32's "Festival for Sovereignty," a community-wide event focused on awareness of and advocacy for water rights.

Hector Berrios of MUFRAS-32 speaks about water management issues in San Isidro during a meeting of relevant local stakeholders in June 2016.



Local Peacebuilder: Kuku Yeanay



Kuku Yeanay (far left) at a radio talk show speaking about the work of the PPPN .

Kuku Yeanay was one of the very first members of the Pen-Pen Peace Network (PPPN), a locally led peacebuilding group in Liberia whose initial work involved finding ways to overcome violence and tensions between the local taxi drivers on motorbikes (also called pen-pen riders) and the Liberia National Police (LNP).

Since 2013, Kuku has played an active role in informing commercial motorcyclists about their rights as well as how they should obey traffic rules in Liberia. Together with other PPP members, she has been active in initiating and promoting various strategies and tactics to overcome conflicts between the police and pen-pen riders. She speaks fondly of the work that PPPN has been doing in order to bring the two groups together to engage in a peaceful dialogue. As she notes: “Normally, in Liberia police and riders were not friends and there was always a tension. [...] It was amazing to bring them together [so that] they can talk to one another and shake hands and say we’re brothers and friends, and do activities together.”

She recognizes that her peacebuilding work with the PPPN has not always been easy. “Changing people's minds is a process. [...] To win someone over you have to take time to talk to them. As a peace worker you cannot get angry with them, you must be very kind.”

In addition, one project activity that Kuku has been involved in has been educating pen-pen riders in Liberia about personal hygiene during the time when Ebola hit her home country two years ago. Kuku admits that at first pen-pen riders were skeptical of the existence of Ebola in Liberia. For her and the rest of the PPPN team it was important that these taxi drivers recognize the dire need for taking health precautions themselves. “The riders’ families and the nation depends on them so it is important that they take care of their own health.” After taking the streets day and night and by informing local citizens how they could protect themselves against this deadly epidemic, their campaign turned out to be successful, says Kuku.

Kuku and other PPPN members are currently involved in organizing various activities and events (such as town hall meetings, peace marches, soccer tournaments, games, and radio talk shows, to name a few) to promote peace during the 2017 presidential elections in Liberia. “Once you've decided to be a peacemaker, you must always be a peacemaker,” Kuku adds. “You’re molding the minds of people, and it takes time. [...] We should be patient with each other and work hard to see peace in our country come 2017.”



Kuku with PPP team members (above) and volunteering to promote peace in relation to the 2017 presidential elections in Liberia (right).

Research Assistant Spotlight

Jennifer Ptacek is a second-year PhD student at the Brian Lamb School of Communication, Purdue University. Her research interests intersect Organizational Communication and Health Communication, with a specific focus on communication processes and workplace relationships in health organizations. In her own research, Jennifer uses qualitative research methodologies as she likes hearing about others' experiences and perspectives. Once she heard about the Purdue Peace Project (PPP), Jennifer immediately became drawn to it because of its involvement in helping with real problems around the world. Jennifer is passionate about the possibility of seeing positive change through her contributions to PPP and her own research. In her experience as a research assistant on the peaceful elections project in Liberia, Jennifer has had first-hand experience of the intricacies of peacebuilding. Although she sees peacebuilding as a long process, she believes that peace is a real possibility when it is done through dedicated, locally-driven efforts. Jennifer is looking forward to her upcoming trip to one of PPP's future project locations—Sierra Leone.



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