



Learning Summary

Preventing violence and recruitment to extremist groups in Northern Nigeria

This learning summary highlights the main successes, challenges and lessons learned during a project implemented by our local partner Peace Initiative Network (PIN) to build community resilience to violence in Northern Nigeria. This summary is based on an evaluation conducted in January 2019 to assess the project's impact, efficiency and sustainability from January to December 2018, with the view to PIN strengthening its implementation strategies.

To achieve its goal of strong, resilient communities who are willing and able to resolve disputes non-violently, this project focused on supporting young men and women at risk of joining extremist groups to be better integrated within their communities. Their work also focused on building sustainable incomes, while increasing awareness of conflict resolution and citizenship at both the community and state level.

With the aim of reducing unemployment and idleness as an incentive for recruitment into violence, and with a view to engaging young people to be ambassadors for peace, PIN provided vocational training with leadership and conflict resolution skills. This training was given to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in eight out of 44 of the local government areas across Kano state. Women were a focus of the project due to their important role in the community, and the project included a women-only programme.

Kano has historically been the epicentre of violent conflict and divisions between Christian and Muslim communities, and although this is not always the cause of conflict now, it is often used to explain violence, perpetuating the false narrative that Christians and Muslims cannot live together peacefully. As well as engaging young people to choose peace, the project focused on bridging divides between different ethnic and religious groups through football and Peace Clubs in schools. This has helped to disprove the common perception of irreconcilability between these groups, and shift the narrative towards hope for a peaceful future based on positive relationships.

To achieve these objectives, the clubs provided enabled dialogue and the development of critical-thinking skills, leading to the evolution of friendships, and the formation of coalitions for peacebuilding and violence prevention, between different groups of young people aged 10-18. Meanwhile, quarterly 'Town Hall Meetings' regularly brought together the wider community for discussions about peacebuilding mechanisms and for the creation of joint strategies for community development.

Potential for long-term impact:

PIN provided space for long-lasting relationships to develop and be built where violence had previously taken hold, transforming these into peaceful relationships. For example, **youth groups that were previously involved in violent rivalry now play football together and participate in peace meetings.**

Social inclusion and a multicultural approach are very visible in all the activities, with PIN continuing to work with women, young people and people with disabilities from all economic backgrounds and religions. There is a focus on inclusive 'Town Hall Meetings' for all interested parties to come together to discuss areas for community development. This aims to have potential long-term impact on participants' tolerance, behaviour and attitude towards each other, as well as on the attitudes of outside observers.

PIN builds on its previous projects rather than reinventing the wheel, harnessing existing community capacities at the grassroots level which leads to sustainable results. It builds on existing activities by using lessons from one project to improve its implementation of other projects, rather than creating a new project with each new funding cycle. This is evident in the way that Peace Clubs have become embedded within other activities, such as the peace through sports programme which has been developed over many years to harness the peacebuilding power of young people.

“No one brought us something better from Zoo Road to Naibawa [streets], politicians bought us drugs and hemp, but you brought us for training on leadership, I would never forget this.”

Hassan Kaku, a community leader, quoting an agitated youth selected for training.

Challenges:

There are currently no financial sustainability considerations taken into account in PIN's model or as part of this project, meaning activities will stop after funding has ended. Nonetheless, as demonstrated above, there is significant potential for the activities to have had a lasting impact on a local and regional level, even if they do not continue.

Reflections and recommendations:

These reflections and recommendations are from both Peace Direct and PIN, and might be useful for those carrying out or supporting similar work or activities.

There has been some involvement of participants in the design of activities, and their feedback has led to some changes. Most significantly, this has led to increased participant ownership, for example **the inclusion of a Project Advisory Committee in the participant selection process, which is made up of participants from each target group and community elders.** However, participant ownership does not go beyond this. A formal participant-led design process would be more inclusive and participatory.

The collection of data on outcomes and impact is done informally, as is follow up with current and past participants. Both PIN and participants would benefit from having these activities formalised as part of the Monitoring and Evaluation framework.

Participants suggested that if they were able to contribute financially to their materials or equipment, they were more likely to use and keep the kit than if they were given it free of charge. It is worth considering this with caution as many trainees have no income at all. PIN is considering whether contributions can begin after a regular income is achieved and whether this could help keep the project sustainable.

In order to drive equity and inclusion across the board, women's participation in peacebuilding should be championed among PIN's staff by increasing the work of women in paid field positions and in programmatic roles.

