



PDev II

Strengthening Civil Society to Make Communities More Resistant to Extremism

A strong civil society sector can serve as an important bulwark against extremism taking root in a community. Committed residents can work together to detect early signs of problems—whether involving serious issues or the inevitable daily challenges that come with co-existence—and help neighbors address them before they fester and possibly lead to violent antisocial behavior.

The Peace through Development II (PDev II) program has been working to strengthen this sector in Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger in numerous ways, including offering formal and informal trainings for community members and supporting civil society organizations (CSOs).

One area of focus has been to train youth in areas such as leadership, strategy and public relations, and in the use of tools such as social media, film production, mobile cinema, participatory theater and global positioning system (GPS)-based community mapping. This has empowered young men and women to assess pressing community challenges and develop effective responses to them, resulting in more than 900 youth-led community events.

In Niger, for example, PDev II-produced films with themes designed to counter violent extremism were shown to almost 12,000 community members across the country, who were then also given the opportunity to participate in follow-up discussions that were facilitated by trained youth leaders. In the aftermath of the 2015 political upheaval in Burkina Faso, youth also organized fast-action participatory theater performances and mobile cinema that were designed to ease tensions and facilitate a return to normalcy by promoting messages of peace, tolerance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Youth leaders trained by PDev II have also designed and implemented other types of community projects, including public forums on peaceful elections, tree plantings, and clean-up days for public spaces.



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2015 SNAPSHOTS

Organization Capacity

Assessment Tool applied to

59 civil society organizations to help improve reach & effectiveness

17 civil society organizations implemented projects supported by PDev II grants, reaching more than **40,000** citizens across Burkina Faso, Chad & Niger

1,202 religious leaders & teachers trained as advocates for peace & tolerance

There has been a lot of positive feedback from the community. “I never knew our problems could be transformed into a performance, and at the same time provide us with useful solutions,” said one grateful spectator of a theatrical performance addressing herder-pastoralist conflicts, staged by youth trained by PDev II. “Thank you for shedding this light.”

Promoting Tolerance and Collaboration

Such activities have helped to strengthen community bonds and have promoted collaboration and communication, thereby increasing community stability and resiliency. For example, youth-organized peace and reconciliation events staged in the aftermath of religious violence in Niger led to some public expressions of regret for the violence and the return of some stolen goods to their rightful owners.

Another focal point has been the training of community leaders, many of them religious figures. Quranic school teachers in Chad have received training in modern methods of pedagogy and communication, and religious and other community leaders have attended sessions focusing on conflict resolution, public speaking, communication and leadership. PDev II has also worked with local radio partners, providing them with equipment and training to produce programs that highlight moderate voices—this has led to, among other things, the broadcast of roundtable discussions and call-in shows about the role of women in countering violent extremism and helping calm student tensions on a university campus.

Creating Strong Civil Organizations

PDev II staff have provided training to CSOs to help them build their capacity to develop activities and formulate proposals. To serve them most effectively, staff have been using an Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT), which assesses the capacity of an organization in five key areas: finance, project management, strategy, infrastructure and service delivery. This allows program staff to tailor their interventions to fill the most pressing gaps.

For example, a lack of funding and weak collaboration with local authorities were impeding the efficient operation of most CSOs in Burkina Faso. PDev II therefore began offering training sessions on topics such as community mobilization, public relations, fundraising, financial management, participatory development and collaborating with local authorities.

Among the ranks of CSO participants are groups—known as Community Action Committees (CACs) in Burkina Faso and Chad, and Cadres de Concertation (CDCs) in Niger—that serve as liaisons between communities and local government. Armed with new skills and knowledge on how to spread effective messages, mobilize residents and resolve conflicts, for instance, these CACs and CDCs have organized meetings to raise awareness of citizens’ roles in contributing to peaceful elections; helped to resolve issues between farmers and herders; organized a community campaign on public health issues related to unauthorized garbage dumping; and helped identify services and assistance required by refugees.



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