

PEACE BREEDERS

System and Structure Strengthening Approach Against Radicalisation to Violent Extremism (SARVE II PROJECT)

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United against COVID-19. Despite years of ethnic clash that has led to destruction of life and infrastructures in Tundun Agabu, the community is uniting and determined to keep the novel corona virus out of her shore. Members of the Community Action Response Team picked up the baton and began house to house sensitisation after a training by ActionAid Nigeria.

WHAT'S NEW?

In the period under review, the SARVE II project commenced public awareness campaigns on COVID-19 in the 24 communities, in 12 Local Government Areas of Kogi and Nasarawa state using door-to-door model of sensitization following growing insecurity report and misinformation amongst project beneficiaries on the dreaded virus.

The first batch of the skill acquisition and livelihood support initiative of the SARVE II project commenced with 429 youths and 185 women trained in various centres across Nasarawa State; beneficiaries are learning economic viable skills of their choice ranging from shoe and bag making,

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tailoring and fashion designing, ICT and phone repairs, groundnut oil making, bird rearing (poultry), hairdressing, rice processing, carpentry and cosmetology.

The Nasarawa State Action Plan on Peace and Security of Women and Girls which aims to enhance the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction was validated by stakeholders.

Also in the news, as a result of the establishment of the Community Action and Response Team (CART) in the Nasarawa and Kogi States, 57 cases of conflicts and potential violence have been resolved by these CARTs who have the mandate to build and strengthen systems and structures to address violent extremism in their communities. In addition, the Local Conflict Management Alliance in Kogi State was established and inaugurated for effective consolidation of CART efforts on security concerns and conflict issues at the community level.

The “System and Structure Strengthening Approach against Radicalization to Violent Extremism” SARVE II project was informed by the need to decrease vulnerability of at -risk young men and women to violent extremism, strengthen community systems and structures to address violent extremism, and to create an enabling environment for preventing violent extremism. The commencement of a second phase was as a result of the impact and achievements recorded in the 1st phase of the project which was designed to systematically address the source of extreme restive violence that played out in Kogi state as a result of its numerous porous borders by digging deep into the fundamental causes of the type of violence in the state and to create workable community driven solutions to prevent and address internal conflicts and general restiveness.

With funding from the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), SARVE II is now being implemented in Kogi and Nasarawa States in partnership with ActionAid Nigeria's Local Rights Partner in Kogi State; Participation Initiative for Behavioural Change in Development (PIBCID) and Global Peace Development (GPD) & Beacon Youth Initiative (BYI) in Nasarawa State. The project is also working closely with the office of the Governors, Ministries of Women Affairs and Social Development; Ministries of Agriculture; Ministries of Youth and Sports Development; Ministries of Education; Ministries of Commerce & Industries and other relevant MDAs, Community Based Organisations and youth groups in the states.

The 33-months project will reach 36,000 direct (18,200 youths (12,600 male and 5,600 female), 4,160 women; 7320 men and 6,320 in-school children (3,160 male and 3,160 female) and 129,360 indirect beneficiaries (40,200 female and 89,160 male) by supporting the benefitting communities against injustice and inequalities through building tolerance, strengthen community agencies where violent extremists exploit weak governance, and providing positive socio-economic alternatives and life skills to what violent extremists claim to offer. The project is being implemented in six LGAs in Kogi State (Igalamela/Odolu, Ankpa, Adavi, Okehi, Lokoja and Kogi) and six LGAs in Nasarawa State (Obi, Lafia, Nassarawa-Eggon, Akwanga, Toto and Nassarawa).



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PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: **A COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH**

Review of the situational report on the spate of violence before, during and after the 2019 gubernatorial election in Kogi State

Kogi State is traditionally a hotspot for some acts of violence. Historically, the people were famous for pulling strong defence to external attacks against their resources and territories.

Tough environmental conditions, topographical landscape, and poverty add to the underlining drivers of violent extremism. Though these conditions have remained unchanged, the sustained efforts of ActionAid's System and Structure Strengthening Approach against Radicalisation to Violence Extremism, (SARVE) Project in selected parts of the State have shown empirical evidence of reduction in all forms of extreme violence.

Prior to the 2019 gubernatorial election, the civil society as well as the security intelligence community had warned of movement of weapons and military wears into the State. They cautioned against militarisation and potential use of weapons during the election. There was a probe on the allegation but it's report is yet to be published.

The build-up to the election witnessed threats of war, intimidation and reported physical attack on the only prominent female candidate in the race, Mrs. Natasha Akpoti. It was palpable that there would be an 'election-war'. The response from the federal government was to deploy more troops on the ground. There were 35,000 additional police deployed on the election day aside other paramilitary and military presence. This response became counter-productive as it scared potential voters from participating.

The Kogi State, November 16, 2019 gubernatorial and senatorial election presented a case of both exceptional and exemptional classes of violence described by Nigerian human right lawyer and activist; Femi Falana as "a theatre of war". But the interesting variation is that the 'theatre' was a shift from communities once prone to high incidences of violence to other parts of the State.

Abdulahi Ibrahim, 34 captured the reason for such shift: "they (the politicians) know that they cannot bribe us, no matter what they do to us, because we have seen the light through what we learnt from ActionAid youth peace camp, no matter the amount of money they share, they know that we can no longer be available for violence during election" Ibrahim participated in a youth peace camp where for the first time he learnt how to negotiate without putting up a defensive affront.

The official reported death during the election corroborated by the Police and security agencies is 10. This was the count on election day. Few days after the election, violence and act of revenge against political opposition continued. One of such sadly notable mayhem was the gruesome murder of Salome Abuh, 60, the women leader of Ochadamu ward in Ofu Local Government Area. The State Police PRO said: "She was sleeping in her home when political thugs believed to be of the opposition party, set the building alight shortly before sunset".

In a joint statement released by Diplomatic Watch, a group of International election observers from Australia, European Union delegation, United States of America, United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands the elections were marred by "reports of fatality, vote buying, intimidation, gunshots, ballot snatching, thugs preventing voting, people missing; including staff of Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC" the report stated.

Most communities in Kogi East bore the brunt of election related violence. Civil Society Situation Room report vote buying in 60percent of the polling units. The concentration of violence in that part of the State is an indication of the success of SARVE 1 project which has drastically restricted and reduced incidences of violent extremism and specific electoral violence experienced prior 2019 elections. The scale of violence could have been far worse especially within once highly volatile communities but for the SARVE 1 interventions.

This report is a fact-laden evidence showing how once highly volatile communities are leading, learning and integrating peace building capacity and culture.

NOW AT **EASE**

Abdulahi Ibrahim, 34 struggled to find the words to express how his once restive community is now at peace with itself and other surrounding communities. He paused; took a hard look at the patched dusty floor surrounded with assortment of wastes from dry flakes of cassava chaffs.

You could tell he was in deep thoughts, not lacking words but the right word to convey his new experience; he said: "I was born into this community, I grew up here and attended school here but I have never experienced the new level of cooperation in this community" In an emotional laced voice he said: "I have never experienced an election period where there is no news of one form of casualty or even death"

Kotokarfe community is surrounded by rocks. It is a place historically known for refuge at times of war. When war breaks out, the people hid in caves some of which could still be sited but are now historical monuments. Still, that warring temperament runs in the people. Issues of land disputes, determination of boundaries put them at conflicts with Osuku and Onzo communities. "We have found a new way to resolve all crisis in this community" said Ibrahim, boasting of the impact of the Community Action and Response Team, CART in advancing the community's approach to conflict resolution. Ibrahim noted that before the 2019 gubernatorial election members of CART met and agreed on new strategies to mitigate electoral violence in the community, the members organised what they termed "door to door election peace campaign".

They met with different social cultural groups in the community preaching peace and no violence election. It was the first time they organised such program and it worked as expected.

As the 2019 gubernatorial election approached, Ibrahim along with the CART members mobilised 200 young men and women to the palace of the traditional ruler. "We matched to the Emir palace, it was our own peace rally, we briefed him about the activities of ActionAid in the community, we shared our experience of how we want to implement what we have learnt from ActionAid's CART program" he said.

Perhaps shocked by the reasoning of the CART group, the traditional ruler put them to test by appointing the group into the community peace council made up of vigilante and night watch groups.

Their resolve to experience for the first time a violence free election was put to test.

Few days to the election, Ibrahim gave an account of how an early morning distress call from the traditional ruler disrupted his sleep : "As early as 6 a.m. one morning, crisis was already brewing as youths from other communities invaded their community and began tearing down election posters and pulling down billboards of their opposing candidates. Some members of the community where already mobilising for a reprisal attack.

"We saw those gathering cutlasses, machetes and other weapons but we quickly intervened through negotiations. I asked those who wanted to fight and kill themselves for politicians how many of the children of those politicians where present? I asked them how the politician has improved their lives" he said. Like magic those words pierced their conscience, they dropped their weapons.

Ibrahim said the knowledge acquired at the CART engagements inspired them to engage in peace building activities which has helped them achieve a violence free election in the community: "For the first time Kotokarfe recorded no election related death or any violence during the 2019 gubernatorial election" Ibrahim insists.

CULTURE **REVERSE**

In Abache community, women lived on their own terms. Mariam Alidu, the women leader presents an example of the self-dignity of the women. To get to that point of independence, the women had to fight their way through knowledge. “We are not really educated but we practiced everything we were taught at ActionAid training” said Mariam through an interpreter.

Mariam explained that it was a norm for women of the community to rely on their husbands for entire household financing, she noted that it was the absolute responsibility of a man to provide for the household. This tough stance is the cause of most domestic violence in the community.

She said: “we took a lot of things for granted: our hygiene, the way we dressed, the way we communicate at home, the way we raise our children were not properly done. It was such negligence that caused domestic conflicts. When we put everything, they (ActionAid) taught us into practice, we observe the cooperation of our husbands and we experience reduced instances of violence at home”. She noted that the notion that a man is absolutely responsible for the upkeep of the family is no longer endorsed in the community. Women in the community are now engaged in petty trading to assist their spouse when an emergency need arise.

The women wear a new contagious look in self-confidence and in their ability to negotiate. This made it easy for them to shun politicians who approached them for vote without showing them what exactly they would do for the community. It takes a lot of guts to turn down offers from politicians who they once consider with dreadful reverence. They did turn them down because they now have a communal vision bigger than the peanuts the politicians throw at them.

Inspired by how the women are leading change in the community, the men now take seats at the women's safe space meetings (Peer Review Circles) to listen and learn how they are making the change happen.

Lami Suleiman is one of the young women whose testimonial is inspiring other young women in the community. She is an active member of CART in the community, she says her life has improved because of the knowledge shared during the monthly CART meetings “To be honest, I now behave well, I dress well and I relate better with my children and husband. There is no more quarrel at home” she said.

Mariam Alidu, Woman leader and a member of Abache Community Action and Response Team narrating how culture has been evolving to accommodate women in her community since SARVE II project came along to ActionAid Nigeria



THE END OF A NIGHTMARE

Herdsmen and Farmers clashes were a regular occurrence at Ujagba. Some of the incidences reported on a national scale took place at Ujagba. In November 2015, the entire community was almost sacked because of the level of attacks and reprisal attacks.

They wanted peace but it was going to cost them their crops, food and land. It was too much to sacrifice for peace, so they brazed up for defence. When they began to count their losses in human and property, they had reached their wits end: “We knew we could no longer continue, in one of the occasions farms were destroyed during harvest period, there was food shortage that period but we knew we needed peace at all cost but we couldn’t find the way to reach that desire for peace” said Joseph Yusuf, a member of Community Action and Response Team (CART) in the community.

They reached their point of exhaustion when they discovered that a traditional chief in their community had compromised: “we discovered that one of us; a chief of this community would go to the herdsmen to collect money, which was one of the reasons for the delay in finding solution” Yusuf said.

The herders attack abated as soon as the Chief was deposed. But that was not the end to the incessant attacks. Monday Achimugu, the Chairman of CART for the community decided to apply some of the skills picked during training and different engagements with ActionAid: “we had to negotiate, we had to go to the Fulani community and ask for a truce meeting, and we signed a pact which brought relative peace of mind” Achimugu said.

The peace management skills also helped them organise the community for a violent free election. Okpapata, Ojiofa and a few other surrounding communities experienced some forms of electoral violence but the CART members at Ujagba had organised a peace procession to register their desire for a peaceful election, they moved from house to house on a different kind of campaign; they asked the people to vote and not kill.

Like magic the strategy worked. It was reported that the 2019 gubernatorial elections at Ujagba was crisis free.

Gladys, a woman farmer in Kogi state, walking through the lonely path to her farm that was once attacked by herders.



Osisi community woman leader and CART member Faith, speaking to ActionAid Nigeria about the peace match held in her community to prevent violence during the 2019 election.

THE SWEET BITE

In 2007, Osisi Community witnessed a bloody election. That year; hundreds of houses were touched, dozens reported killed, many missing. The wreck of that electoral violence has not been erased from the mind and the sight of the people. Many locations are yet to be rebuilt.

Elections at Osisi community in Central Kogi is always held under palpable scare; but the 2007 gubernatorial election was one like no other; people scamped for safety, hid in mountains for days until calm finally returned. So, as the 2019 gubernatorial election approached, the community was a spot for extra attention by observers and the security personnel.

But, it turns out something has changed.

“After witnessing several elections in this community, I am always concerned during elections, it is usually a time I pray more because of the past bitter experience. It was an experience in which every household in this community suffered one loss or the other” said Faith Mataga, Women leader of ActionAid’s Community Action and Response Team, CART initiative.

The entire CART team mobilised young people to join in a peace march: “It was the first time we had such an activity. We visited the traditional ruler, we called on the politicians, we knocked on doors around the community preaching peace and urging people to maintain peaceful conduct during the election” she said

That peaceful procession attracted the attention of the traditional institution in the community, which promised to sanction any person or group who ferment trouble during voting.

After the election the traditional ruler called the CART members to thank them for taking actions that made the community witness the first violence free election in many years.

Adabara Abdulrahman was an election observer for ActionAid, he claimed to have witnessed few incidences of vote buying at the point of voting, but there was never a case of injury, gun shots or death: “It is the first time that I am seeing the level of calmness during election” he said.



BUILDING ECONOMIC RESILIENCE THROUGH SAFE SPACES FOR WOMEN IN CONFLICT ZONES

Hafsat, 40 years old mother of five and a member of Community Action and Response Team, (CART) in Osisi community of Kogi State is the third wife of a retired military man. She, like many other women in her community is perturbed due to the constant misunderstanding between couples and the popular opinion that men do not live up to their responsibilities.

Hafsat has no land, she can only farm on the land acquired by her husband. Since she cannot afford to pay a labourer to till the farmland, she has discontinued farming and has no source of income. She often quarrels with her husband for not providing for the family and sending her children to school as she wanted more for her children; the highest education attained by her first child was secondary school.

Women are the most vulnerable in conflict prone areas, and they also play a pivotal role in peace building processes. Sadly, the patriarchal nature of most communities in Nigeria has not given women much space to play this role. For the most part, the old mindset of women belonging to the kitchen and to their husbands is what still holds true in most communities. This makes the recognition of women in communal decision-making a major challenge. But this is beginning to change. Hafsat is one of 1000 women benefiting from the 24 Women Safe Spaces set up in all the 24 SARVE II project communities with the aim of engaging women to curb conflicts at the family level which when left unattended often leads to radicalisation. The program will also build the confidence of community women to demand for their rights at the community level.

As soon as Hafsat heard about the women's safe space held every Monday from her neighbour, she decided to give it a try hoping that spending few hours with other women in the community would take her mind off her immediate problems. Surprisingly, at the safe space, she met other women facing similar challenges and learned how they are managing such issues.

The key lesson from the women's safe space that stood out for Hafsat was the fact that being independent and having a means of livelihood, rather than depending solely on her husband for subsistence, would help solve her biggest problems. She also figured that having constant misunderstanding with her spouse would only compound the issue. Rather, through dialogue, they can both agree on what will work best for the family. Ever since, her relationship with her husband has improved.

Hafsat now makes N200 daily by weaving local fabrics for designers in and around her community. She knows that her wage is very little, but it is certainly a start! She uses the money to cater for her children's feeding, school charges and to complement what her husband can offer.

"Now I have peace of mind, thank you ActionAid for bringing the women safe space to my community and I hope to save enough money so that I start my own tailoring business" She said happily. Hafsat is also a member of the Community Action and Response Team (CART) and is contributing to resolving issues faced by women in the community.

OUTCOME OF 2019

YOUTH PEACE CAMP

ON PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM SULEIMAN'S STORY

My mother used to have sleepless nights because of all the troubles I caused in the house and in the community. If there was a fight somewhere in my vicinity, I must be right there in the middle taking or giving blows, but now, I am no longer like that. What I learnt from the peace camp has changed me and I am happier being engaged in this livelihood skills training by ActionAid Nigeria". Suleiman Abdulahi, 21 years.

There were notions Suleiman never understood; how engaging in conflict could slow down his development and even that of his community, Ukowa and that he could resolve misunderstanding among age grades through dialogue. After his secondary education in 2011, his parents could no longer afford to finance his education and out of boredom, Suleiman, started hanging out with other boys in the community who soon introduced him to drugs and thuggery. He became highly addictive to the drugs and known for always getting into fights in his neighbourhood.

Suleiman's notorious popularity informed his enrolment by the CART leader in his community for ActionAid Nigeria to be part of the 2019 Youth Peace Camp in Kogi state, Suleiman was excited for the opportunity to travel, Being the first time Suleiman was leaving his community, he was excited about the Peace camp. During the session on the Effect of Drug Abuse on Youth Development presented by the Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Suleiman learned how drug abuse could affect him psychologically, make him prone to violence and hamper the realisation of his aspirations. After further counselling by the Peace Camp mentors, he decided to stay away from drugs and thereafter enrolled for a rehab programme with the support of the CART leader in Ukowa. He is happy to have been rehabilitated after three months and now participating actively at the SARVE II Skill acquisition programme where he learns more about poultry farming for business. Now, he is helpful at home.

"My mother is happy with me now and I will continue to make her happy", he expressed.

Suleiman is determined to stay focused and make huge profits from the poultry business so he can finally attain a higher education. He is eager to live an exemplary life and use the knowledge gained from the Peace camp to sensitise other youths on the need to shun violence and maintain peace. He aspires to provide practical solutions to some of the needs within his community such as unemployment and access to education which, according to him, are the major issues faced by Ukowa youths which makes them vulnerable to violent extremism.



Suleiman

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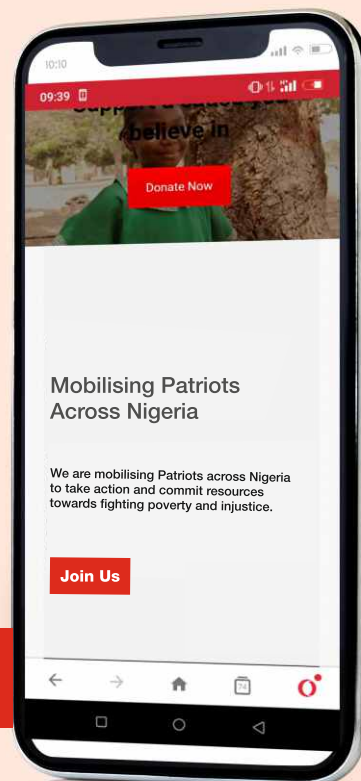


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PEACE AMBASSADORS SPOTLIGHT.

"Today, I leave this camp as a changed person. My key learning from this camp is that every misunderstanding among individuals or communities can be dealt with through dialogue. I understand better what it means to live together in peace with everyone and when I go back to my community, I would ensure that I share what I have learnt here with my friends and relatives" **Paul MaryAnn Maya, Participant, 2019 Youth Peace Camp, Kogi State.**

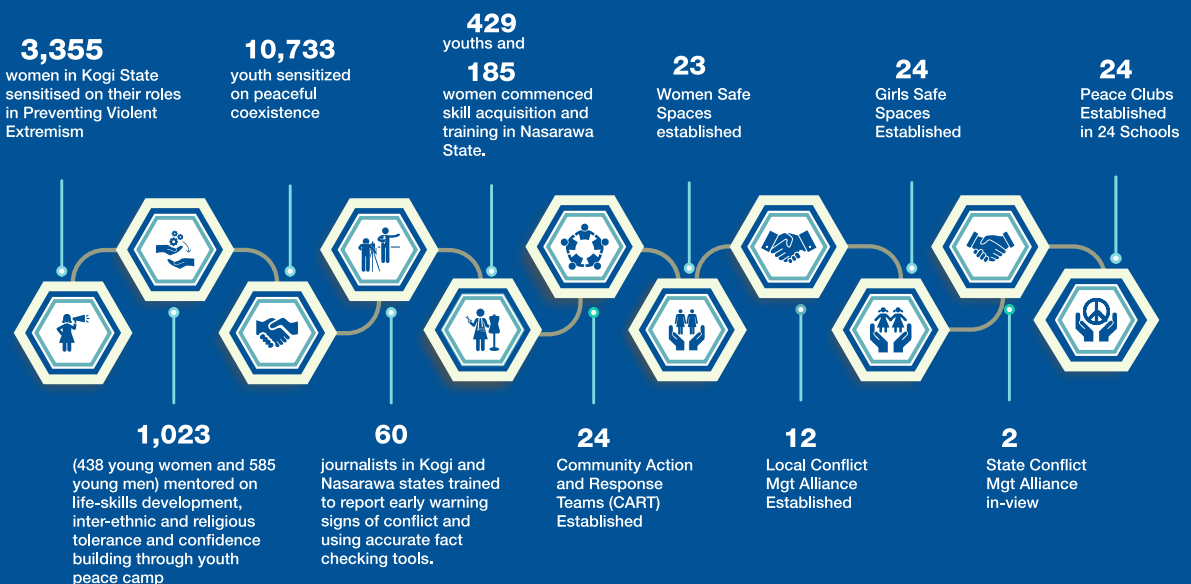
"The SARVE II Project gave me the privilege to participate in the Youth Peace Camp where I had the opportunity to meet and interact with fellow youths from different communities with different ideologies and in just one week, I have been able to stay/work together in peace with them even though we disagree sometimes, we have learnt to put all our differences aside and work together to achieve a common goal. When I go back to my community, I will continue living like this, accommodating everyone and no longer getting into fight for what I can now resolve through simple dialogue". **Iliyatu Anna Wamba, Participant, 2019 Youth Peace Camp, Nasarawa State.**

"My 19 years son Sulieman, used to be very rude whenever I point out something, he didn't do right. He was very lazy and troublesome in the house, but since he came home from the Peace Camp, I have seen a tremendous change in his life. He now shows me a lot of respect and even offers to wash the plates for everyone after dinner. Now there is nothing he wishes more than going back to school as he studies every day. I lack words to express my gratitude" **Mrs Ojonugwa, Osisi Community, Kogi State.**

"If you want to change your life, you must be willing to change what you do every day. These words from the camp director kept ringing in my head and this prompted me to change some bad things I used to do like smoking which often made me volatile and dangerous to my fellow youths. I am happy that I was at the youth peace camp, Thank you ActionAid and PIBCID" **Saleeman, Participant, 2019 Youth Peace Camp, Kogi State.**

"Before now, whenever I hear that there is a fight somewhere, my heart skips because I think that my son would be involved. Since he got back from the Youth Peace Camp, he no longer fights, he always talks to me about going back to school and I am happy because I will support him" **Mrs Gladys, From Osisi Community, Kogi state.**

QUICK FACTS





ActionAid Nigeria and Nasarawa state partner, Global Peace Development (GPD) sensitising Azuba Bashayi community gatekeepers together with the Community Action and Response Teams (CARTs) on COVID-19.

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