

REPORT ON YOUTH FOR PEACEFUL ELECTIONS IN MAKENI

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Abstract

60% of registered voters in the 2023 elections were youth, which gives them a greater stake in the elections but most often they are usually the victims and perpetrators of violent activities which mar the credibility of the elections. The coalition for peaceful elections engaged youth groups in Makeni to educate them on leadership, non-violence, peace building and civic responsibilities in elections so as to disengage from politically motivated violence before, during and after

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Youth for Peaceful Elections – Makeni

Introduction

The National Council for civic education and democracy (NaCCED) engaged youth groups ahead of the June 24 multitier elections to provide critical education on the election process and to clarify doubts and misconceptions to curb election related violence before during and after elections. Youths between the ages of 18 and 35 years made up about 60% of the registered voters, which made them major stakeholders in the election process. However, they are mostly manipulated and used by rogue politicians to wreak havoc on their political opponents for the expressed purpose of securing political capital.

Related to these politically motivated youth incidents of violence were the bye elections uprisings in Goderich in Western Rural, Tonko Limba in North Western region, Koinadugu district in North Eastern region and Sambaia Bendugu in North Eastern region. All of these uprisings were devastating with loss of lives, properties, disruption of normal state processes and the corresponding loss of government resources. Obviously, these incidents have dented the national security rating at the global space.

On the basis of the above problem scan, the need for practical engagement with youth groups and leaders across the country for greater understanding of youth identity, roles, responsibilities and opportunities is compelling.

Justification:

Sierra Leone is yet to fully graduate from the vulnerability of a fragile state. The effects of the civil war are still pervasive and threatening of an undesirable reoccurrence.

The country is politically charged with a significantly high population of youth unemployed, under employed and unemployable. The incredible polarization of the state and the extremely undesirable weaponization of tribe are flammable ingredients for conflagration. With a youthful generation on standby and completely disillusioned, the recipe for uncontrolled violence is neatly complete.

As we approach the 2023 general elections, the need to disengage youth from politically motivated violence is not only critical but absolutely compelling. The incidents of repeated politically motivated youth related violence in almost all bye elections conducted are a casting shadow to the outlook of the 2023 general elections in Sierra Leone.

Project specific objectives

The main goal of the youth for peaceful elections program was to educate youth of Makeni on leadership, non-violence, peace building and civic responsibilities in elections

Other specific objectives included:

1. To increase knowledge of youths on elections, diversity and peaceful coexistence
2. Raise awareness on the civic responsibilities of youth in maintaining the peace before, during and after elections

3. To organise dialogue forum between youth and election management boding to create clarity on the election process
4. To support youth groups to conduct outreach activities to preach peace in their respective communities
5. To promote partnerships with local organisations for civic education

Description of Activities

1. Groups mobilization:

Local partners especially, youthbuild, CAVE and the DYC were to Mobilise youths and organise them for the duty bearer dialogue session. We targeted 11 group meetings of 50 participants each. These will include the group executives.

2. Duty-Bearer dialogue forum and Edutainment:

The 11 youth groups identified will send 10 participant each to the duty bearer dialogue sessions, which will be their executive and active members. The DYC will also facilitate the participation of all CYCs. This activity targeted 112 youth, 10 duty bearers, 10 partner representatives and 5 media houses. This activity will be carried out together with the edutainment activity.

3. Media engagement:

This will target 2 radio discussions and it will require air time, 3 panellists, jingle production and airing, and IEC materials including T-Shirts, caps, banners, 500 posters and 1000 handbills.

4. Outreach Workshop:

This training will target five members of each youth group and the CYCs to be trained and provided with outreach materials.

5. Outreach sessions:

It was agreed that after the training, the trainees would conduct outreach sessions in their respective communities. Thus, they would be provided with bullhorns or megaphones, batteries, stipends for transportation and lunch, coordination costs for partners.

Activities implemented

Groups mobilization:

NaCCED in collaboration with YouthBuild, CAVE SL, District youth Council and some musical Artist had a deliberate strategy to target youth as they make up about 60% of the voting population. More so, they are usually the victims and perpetrators of violent activities. The coalition decided to mobilise eleven categories of youth including; car wash youth, Ataya bases, Artist union, disabled youth, Cliques, Ghetto youths, Commercial service worker, Tertiary institutions, Road side pawn shop youth (Jebu), Chieftdom council youth and Okada riders. These groups were met in their various hangouts or spots where the coalition sensitized them about the need for peaceful elections and what needs to be done and their participation

in the events planned. Approximately, 50 youth were target per category with a good mix of males and females. They were given t-shirts and posters on the youth for peace campaign and invited to a youth –duty bearer dialogue forum and edutainment activity to sensitize more youths



Car wash, Ataya base, Ghetto youths, Okada rider and disable youth after mobilisation meeting

Duty-Bearer dialogue forum and Edutainment:

The youth – duty bearer dialogue was organised to create a platform for youths to dialogue with election management bodies and the security forces but also to clarify misconceptions, misinformation and answer frequently asked questions. Duty bearers in attendance were, The ECSL, ONS, PPRC, SLP, RSLAF and Paramount chief. Over hundred youth representatives were in attendance to engage duty bearers. The dialogue proper started with each duty bearer explaining their mandate, their role in the upcoming elections, preparations so far, which were followed by questions and answers from the youth and duty bearers respectively. Several clarifications were made and misconceptions cleared.



A cross section of participants and duty bearers at the dialogue session

Edutainment

Youths from car wash, Ataya bases, Artist union, disabled youth, Cliques, Ghetto youths, Commercial service worker, Tertiary institutions, Road side pawn shop youth (Jebu), Chiefdom council youth and Okada riders participated in the edutainment event which was organised in collaboration with the Makeni artist union. The event was meant to educate and entertain youth. Educate them on the need for peaceful elections, national cohesion and rule of law but also to entertain them with music and comedy. The event was organised at the Makeni Clock Tower, which attracted several youth and passers-by. Civic education, violent free election and national cohesion messages were frequently aired to educate the general [populace on the need for a violent free and peaceful election.



Edutainment session at the Makeni Clock Tower

Radio Discussions

Members of the youth for peaceful election coalition ie. NaCCED, YouthBuild, Campaign against violent events (CAVE) SL were panellist in a radio discussion to explain to the general populace the need for the campaign and how they can be part of the campaign. Phone lines were opened to allow people to participate and share their thoughts. The Campaign was widely acknowledged and several who called in said they will participate and also spread the message for peaceful elections. According to a female caller “when violence occur, we are the ones who suffer the most. We will talk to our husbands, brothers and children to maintain peace before, during and after. Everybody should exerciser their rights to vote but we should do so peacefully”. Similar sentiment followed during the phone –in calls

Outreach Workshop

The outreach workshop was organised for youth from car wash, Ataya bases, Artist union, disabled youth, Cliques, Ghetto, Commercial service worker, Tertiary institutions, Road side pawn shop youth (Jebu), Chiefdom youth council and Okada riders to be trained in non-violence and peace building. This was meant to build their capacity to be able to preach peace to their peers and in their various communities. Some of the topics covered included; Rights and responsibilities, Nationalism and Patriotism, Rule of law, Elections and electoral processes, Leadership, Non-violence and peacebuilding. The training was facilitated by NaCCED’s curriculum development expert with support from the Director of Programs and Research, The regional coordinator and coalition partners, who frequently explained in the local language. According to a youth from Peace Ataya base, “ the training I have received has given me more confidence to engage my friends and even my community on why we should maintain peace, we are all one family. Nobody ever ask God on where they should be borned therefore, we should accept ourselves and live together in peace. That is the only way we can develop as a nation”



Outreach training workshop

Outreach sessions

The youth for peaceful elections coalition, which was headed by NaCCED gave incentives to all youth groups (including car wash, Ataya bases, Artist union, disabled youth, Cliques, Ghetto, Commercial service worker, Tertiary institutions, Road side pawn shop youth (Jebu), Chiefdom youth council and Okada riders) to conduct outreach sessions to their peers and communities. Youth groups were given megaphones, stipend for lunch and transport to

conduct outreach session for a week to their communities wherever people are gathered and to their peers. Violent free and peaceful elections messages were aired



Outreach sessions conducted by Ghetto boys

Key Challenges:

Although the project is considered very successful so far, there were challenges that impacted the smooth execution of the project. They include

1. Managing local partner expectations. Local partners were disillusioned as they wanted more control of the resources. They preferred NaCCED to act as the donor and not as a partner. It took a lot of explanations on NaCCED partnership approach by the Director of programs before nerves were calmed
2. The political polarisation of the country also served as a challenge as any action to bring peace and national cohesion was dim government action inimical to the opposition in whose strong hold the activities were carried out
3. The activity was very close to polling day and was therefore considered very little very late. It is good that such actions are regular and far removed from elections to be looked at as genuine.

Lessons Learnt

The Youth-Duty bearer dialogue sessions as well as the edutainment sessions were well organised and youths were able to ask critical questions and received satisfactory responses from the duty bearers present. The successes of these events were partly due to the active involvement of the District youth council, and local partners like YouthBuild and Campaign Against Violent Events (CAVE)SL, who were charged with the mobilisation of youths and the Regional Coordinators of NaCCED, who also ensures the presence of duty bearers.

We have learnt that effective collaboration has to delegate tasks and ensure follow ups. Also because the youths were well orientated and coached on how to engage duty bearers, the

dialogue sessions were civil with youths respecting authorities but asking the critical questions. The youths also participated in the radio discussions after receiving trainings and were confident on air disseminating peaceful, nonviolence and drug free messages. We learnt that when beneficiaries are empowered, they can take action to change more youths in their communities and the district.

High unemployment and pervasive poverty constitute the dominant motivating factors that make youths to be susceptible to rogue politicians to perpetuate violence on political opponents. Given the lack of economic opportunities, association with groups is often perceived as a source of income. Experience worldwide indicated that demobilization and reintegration of members of violent gangs are based on processes of empowerment that includes education, economic inclusion and political participation. If youths are empowered through civic education and counselling on prevention/treatment of substance abuse and are included in decision-making processes in their communities. Then the incentives for youths to join gangs and cliques will reduce significantly. This will mitigate the exploitation of youth for political gains and of young women for sex work and SGBV; and the voices of youth in decision-making will become stronger; thereby contributing to sustaining the peace and social cohesion in Sierra Leone

Conclusion and Way Forward

Civic education activities should be promoted to enable the reintegration of youth into families and communities and their participation in decision-making processes enhanced. Civic education ensures that youths have better understanding of their rights, responsibilities and possibilities to participate as citizens. More so, youths will develop leadership skills and abilities to engage with authorities, including local and traditional authorities and security agents in a non-violent manner.

NaCCED will continue creating the platform for youths to engage their duty bearers to ensure they are active participant in the development process of the country. Moreover, Youth ambassadors will be identified, trained and supported to organise outreach activities in their various communities to continue spreading non-violent and peace building messages to ensure national cohesion and peaceful coexistence.