

Empowering women through Networking in the Upper West Region is a gender transformative USAID/OTI funded PVE activity under the auspices of the Littorals Regional Initiative (LRI) program. The activity adapts a behaviour-led approach that identified and empower 125 women group and network leaders to champion preventive actions towards fostering peace building and prevention of conflicts and violent extremism in the localities. Barely 4-month after the implementation of the activity, most beneficiary women leaders reports refreshing outcomes.



GHA019

Empowering Women Through Networking in Upper West Region

Close-Out Report

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1) Introduction

Preventing violent extremism (PVE) is more effective, sustainable and meaningful if it includes the participation and perspectives of women. Violent extremism is a growing threat to security and social cohesion in the Sahel Regions including boarder districts and communities in the Upper West Region of Ghana.

Too often, women appear left behind in PVE activities. In some cases, female perpetrators of violent extremism are perceived as “followers” of their husbands into violent extremism. Many stakeholders particularly state officials rarely consider women’s possible roles as proactive supporters or recruiters, or the specific push and pull factors that influence women to join violent groups.

As part of efforts to address the gender gaps in the implementation of PVE activities in the Upper West Region the “Empowering Women through Networking Activity was initiated.

The activity seeks among others to empower women group/network leaders in the Upper West Region to play a more critical role in PVE and related peace activism.

A total of 125 women group/network leaders, covering four (4) Municipalities and Districts namely Sissala East, Wa Municipal, Nandom and Lambussie Districts were mobilized, trained and empowered with information, education and knowledge to champion PVE activities in their localities.

The beneficiary women leaders following the capacity building sessions, carried out peer to peer education, sensitization and related peace activism in their localities aimed at addressing the underlying causes of radicalization and violent extremism.

On the 15th of June, 2022, the Community Development Alliance (CDA) convened a project close-out conference at the SEM B Lodge in the WA Municipality. The conference was to officially bring to a close the sub-award agreement signed

between CDA and Creative Associates on the implementation of the gender transformative PVE activities titled; “Empowering Women through Networking in the Upper West Region”.

This close-out report thus seeks to highlights the key issues discussed, success stories shared as well as lessons learnt from the implementation of the GHA019 Activity. The report is being submitted in fulfillment of the terms of the sub-award agreement signed between CDA and the creative associates.

2) Purpose

This report highlights the key outcomes, success stories and the lessons learnt from the implementation of the GHA019 Activity. The report is being submitted in fulfilment of terms of the sub-award agreement and brings to closure the implementation of the GHA019 Activity.

3) Participants

A total of 45 women leaders out of a target of 50 attended the close-out conference (Find attached attendance sheet). The distribution of participants covered 4 Districts and Municipalities namely; Sissala East (10 participants) Nandom (10 participants) Lambussie (7) and WA Municipal (18). Most of the participants are women group leaders aged (25 -40) who are mostly married and lived with families. Approximately 60% of the participants have at least High School Education.

4) Description of Activity

On Wednesday, the 15th of June, 2022, CDA organized a close-out conference to climax the implementation of the GHA019 Activity. The conference was held at the SEM B Lodge located in WA the capital down of the Upper West Region.

A total of 45 women leaders drawn from Sissala East, Lambussie, Nandom and WA Municipality participated in the conference. The participants deliberated and shared their experiences around their key domains namely: i) What has changed? ii) What is the significance of the Change and How did you contribute to the change.

The close-out conference was used also as a final monitoring and evaluation session. The outcome harvesting; which is a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) methodology was used to help participants identify and describe what change has been triggered as a result of the GHA019 Activity, Explain the significance of the change if any and also describe how the GHA019 ACTIVITY contributed to the change story. The methodology basic sought to guide participants to reflect, brainstorm and identify what has changed, ascertain and describe the significance of the change as well as analyse how the project contribute to the realization of the change/outcomes.

In the context of this report and the methodology used, an outcome is defined as a change in the behaviour, relationships, actions, activities, policies, or practices of an individual, group, community, organisation, or institution.

Participants were categorized into 3 groups with each group composed of 15 members. The groups discussed their individual, group and community experiences with the GHA019 Activity.

Figure 1 A cross-section of women leaders harvesting outcomes from the GHA019 Activity



The participants reflected and identified key outcomes/observed changes emanating from their participation in the GHA019 activity. Each group identified their outcomes, the significance of the outcomes and how the GHA019 activity contributed to the outcomes.

Below are highlights of the key outcomes/changes observed by the participants:

What has Changed?

On the question of What changed all three break-up groups identify the following outcomes/changes:

i) Shift in mind-sets:

Most women leaders (95%) indicated observed changes in their mind-sets and perceptions about PVE. For most of the women participants, prior to their participation in the activity, PVE was perceived as an issue for men and the security agencies. Women were generally left behind, rarely involved in PVE related decision making and their voices are hardly heard on PVE. Despite the vast networks of women, cross-border training and participation in social and religious affairs, the role of women multiple role in violent extremism was vastly underestimated. For most of the women participants the GHA019 activity has shift their mind-sets on PVE either as survivors, supporters, potential perpetrators, family members of perpetrators of violent extremism, and preventers, peacebuilders, policy makers and security actors in prevention efforts. In the words of Zanabu Diara a 38-year-old woman from Sissala East ***“This training is like none other. My beliefs, mind-sets and attitude towards PVE have been shifted significantly. I have become more security conscious, very alert and observant. Prior to this activity, a though Violent Extremism was far away from us but now my thoughts have change.***

Thanks to this program, I am now a local champion and activist for PVE in my community”.

ii) Knowledge Change

Following the outcome harvesting discussions and reflections among the participant women group leaders, most (90%) affirmed they have gained new knowledge and understanding on PVE, Conflict prevention and peace building. For most of them, prior to their participation in the activity they had little or no knowledge on PVE, Conflict Prevention and peace building. They lack knowledge on the drivers of conflict and violent extremism, how to analyse their local context, identify specific ways that women experience extremism - from radicalisation, to prevention, to becoming survivors. According to Miss Vida Abaching a young woman living in WA Municipality ***“Before this training I was just in the dark. I had no knowledge on radicalization, drivers of conflicts, violent extremism and PVE. This training has increased my knowledge and enhanced my understandings of these issues. I am now better informed, better equipped and better prepared to play an active role as a local champion for peace, social cohesion and prevention of violent extremism”***

Figure 2 Ms Vida and her colleague women deliberating on the change/outcomes from the GHA019 activity



For most of the women, the change in knowledge and understanding of women’s possible roles as proactive supporters or recruiters for VE groups as well as the specific push and pull factors that influence women to join violent groups was particularly transformative. Participants testified, that the knowledge gained was used to promote peace through peer to peer education, sensitization and awareness raising among women groups on prevention of violent extremism. According to Adisatu a leader of the Women in Agriculture Platform (WAP) ***“The training I received from the GHA019 Activity has been useful and transformative. After the training, I went back to my community in the Sissala East District. I observed a number of new mosques being constructed in the village. I became suspicious of what was happening. I was concern about who was funding the construction of these mosque and why the person was doing so because there are already many mosques in the community. Based on the knowledge I acquired, I decided to engage the young men from my village who were being used to construct the mosques. Some of them were my son’s friends. When I asked them who was sponsoring the mosques, how they got into contact with the person and why they were funding the mosques; the young men appear confused. They realized the potential danger in receiving external support to construct a mosque when they barely know the source of funding and the motive of the funders. My inquest on this issue raised some awareness about the potential security risks. This resulted in a decision of my village elders requesting to have a meeting with those funding the construction of the mosques. They are yet to show-up and the project have stalled. People in my village are becoming more conscious, alert and vigilant of happenings around them. This outcome is directly attributable to the GHA019 Activity”***

iii) Enhanced Agency and increased Momentum in PVE activism

Additionally, most of the women leaders (95%) during their deliberations and discussions on what has changed noted that the GHA019 Activity has contributed to enhanced agency and increase participation of women in peace activism.

The women shared stories of how after they reached out to other women in their networks, associations and work places to with information and education on peace building, conflict prevention and prevention of violent extremism.

For most of these women, their confidence, agency and vigilance on security concerns has been heightened as a result of the knowledge gained from the project interventions. "I am happy to be part of this Activity. As a women group leader, my participation in the GHA019 Activity have increased my knowledge on conflict prevention, peace building and violent extremism. My confidence and participation in peace and security issues in my community have improved. I thank CDA and the USAID/OTI for implementing this project" (Rafatu Ahmed)

5) Lessons Learnt

The close-out conference for the GHA019 Activity offered an opportunity for sharing of lessons among participating women leaders. Some key lessons highlighted throughout the discussions are:

- i) One key lessons highlighted during the close-out conference was the unanimous recognition that preventing violent extremism (PVE) is more effective, sustainable and meaningful if it includes the participation and perspectives of women. The critical role of women in peace activism has been highlighted

- ii) The possible role of women as proactive supporters VE groups or recruiters of violent extremist must not be lost on state officials. There is the need to deliberately target women and ensure their active participation and inclusion in PVE activities,

- iii) There is clearly differential vulnerability of women to violent extremism. PVE activities must thus focus on addressing the specific push and pull factors that influence women to join violent groups.

- iv) Last but not the least, the close-out conference participants learnt that networking among women groups could help address the drivers that push individuals towards violent extremism before vulnerable individuals get radicalized to lean towards violent acts

6) Challenges

The close-out meeting also identified a few challenges encountered by some women networks and groups who participated in peace activism related activities.

Limited scope of the activity to only 4 out of the 11 Districts/Municipalities in the Region, despite growing threats of violent extremism in the region

Limited understanding amongst some volunteer women PVE champions/change agents on the broader conflict systems, stigmatization of minority fulbes

Limited understanding among some women of individual behaviours of violent extremist actors and the interlinkages with structural drivers that enable a conducive environment for VE and individual drivers and triggers;

Limited resources to scale-up the program interventions to cover the remaining districts

7) Recommendations

The following recommendations were made after deliberations, reflections and appraisal of the progress made, lessons learnt and challenges encountered.

- i) Scale-up the intervention to cover other Districts: Participants were unanimous in recommending the scaling-up of the GHA019 Activity to cover the 6 remaining Districts and Municipalities in the Upper West Regions. The women leaders were happy with the outcome of the activity and its potential to contribute to the reduction of the risk of violent extremism in the Upper West Region
- ii) Deliberately target young women (15-25): participants at the close-out conference also recommended highly the need to deliberately target young women aged 15 – 25 years. The recommendation was premised on the observations that young girls and women are more vulnerable most likely to be prime targets for violent extremist groups
- iii) Support women networks to promote peace activism and sensitization activities. The women leaders were also unanimous in recommending support for existing women networks who have been trained to continue to champion peace activism in their localities. It is the view of the women leaders that efforts to sustain activities that foster social cohesion and peace building should be encouraged.
- iv) Strengthen collaboration with state actors to address the specific push and pull factors that

influence women to join violent groups. Last but not the least, the participants also recommended that efforts be made to strengthen collaboration between women networks and state agencies such as the police, immigration, NCCE and the peace council. This they believe will enhance information sharing, confidence building and enhance efforts to prevent the threats of violent extremism.

