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SUCCESS STORY

Expansion of the People Against Violence in Elections Program



PAVE training being conducted in Kaligonj Upazila in Khulna on June 9-11, 2015.

From March – June 2015, following an initial piloting of the *People Against Violence in Elections* (PAVE) training curriculum, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) expanded its PAVE Program across 28 Upazilas in Bangladesh in collaboration with The Hunger Project – Bangladesh.

The PAVE training program is designed to help participants better understand the root causes of violence, learn how to deal with conflict in society through a non-violent electoral process and foster dialogue between opposing groups. IFES currently focuses on training people identified as leaders within their community; this knowledge and new skillset contributes to their capacity as influencers, and ultimately helps to change their attitudes and behavior. The goal of this program is to prepare and motivate

participants to play a constructive role in preventing or mitigating electoral violence in their communities.

Impact of PAVE at a Personal Level

"We always blamed either the ruling party or the opposition party. We came to know about the main factors behind the violence." - *Amzad Master, former teacher and political party member, Mohadevpur Upazila*

"The achievement from this training is tolerance and respect for others' opinion. Diversity is the natural element of society. It is the beauty of our society. We have to work together, this is the learning of this training." - *Kaleda Atik, Vice Chairman, Mymensingh Sadar Upazila*

"It was one of the most effective trainings of my professional life and a replicable one. I will transfer my learning to my students for their betterment and to work for peace in the community." - *S.M. Mohebullah, Teacher, Ashahuni Upazila*

This training is a timely initiative. We all are tired of violent politics and we need to stop this. This training will help us a lot in establishing peace in our locality... We need a critical mass prepared to work for peace." - *Sk. A Wahed Maruf, Mathureshpur Union Parishad Chairman, Kaliganj Upazila*

Prior to each PAVE training, IFES organized orientation sessions for local stakeholders, including members of political parties and civil society, with the objective of informing and engaging them on the PAVE implementation process. Over 1,000 local leaders have attended these orientation sessions since their start in March 2015. Attendees engaged in dialogue about the issues violence causes in their communities as well as the source of this violence arising from the current political context. Leaders in attendance were then asked to nominate participants from their respective organizations and networks for participation in the PAVE trainings.

Following these orientation sessions, 28 three-day PAVE trainings were conducted for 174 women and 386 men from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, in order to encourage participants to engage with people with different views. Discussions and participatory activities were used to teach about a range of topics, including the difference between conflict and violence, the role of the election commission, electoral codes of conduct, the electoral cycle and how to identify interests versus positions. Conversations were enhanced by the willing participation of highly regarded political and social leaders of the communities, who drew on their life experiences to show examples of peaceful political transitions in Bangladesh. Participants left the training inspired to initiate changes in behavior within their communities and through their daily work.

IFES plans to continue engaging influencers who demonstrate an interest and ability to prevent and mitigate electoral violence through trainings to sharpen their conflict mitigation skills, including facilitation and moderation, creating safety and build relationships, developing codes of conduct, and engaging in conflict resolution. Their efforts will be connected through a network of like-minded "Ambassadors for Peace," who will be empowered by their peers to promote peaceful electoral and political engagement in their communities.

Building Peace One Community at a Time

Mr. Md. Sirajul Islam is a 70-year-old retired school teacher who has been volunteering in his village of Gangni for more than 10 years. According to Mr. Sirajul, Gangni has a long history of distrust between members of political parties which has often resulted in inter- and intra-party clashes. Hoping to help resolve these communal issues, Mr. Sirajul decided to join The Hunger Project – Bangladesh as a trainer for IFES' People Against Violence in Elections (PAVE) program.



Mr. Sirajul Islam sharing his experience as a PAVE master trainer.

Mr. Sirajul described bringing together participants for the PAVE program orientation session as difficult given that many political party affiliates refused to attend an event with opposing party representatives. However, a total of 50 attendees (37 men and 13 women) ultimately show up for a half-day orientation, and were surprised that they were able to sit together with representatives from other parties and have fruitful conversations. Twenty activists from Gangni invited to attend the PAVE training in the nearby city of Jessore reported that they found that the message and tools sparked spontaneous, constructive conversations on village issues. The participants ended with a promise to resolve the political crises and violence in Gangni.

Following the training, Mr. Sirajul watched as the PAVE participants organized two meetings in Gangni and invited local journalists, political activists and candidates, and members of civil society. They presented a detailed plan of action and asked for scrutiny from their community. These meeting resulted in the formation of a community group that plans to create awareness among people not yet reached with the ultimate goal of ending the use of violence to resolve political differences.

IFES looks to Gangni as an example for other upazilas as it works to encourage peaceful resolution to conflict as opposed to resorting to electoral and political violence.

Small Steps Indicate Large Progress

The PAVE program has had a profound effect on the attitudes and behavior of participants. One example of this was observed during a training with participants from Sitakunda Upazila. Before the training, rivalry between political party members was so bitter that they refused to travel in the same vehicle with members of the opposing parties. IFES and The Hunger Project – Bangladesh were forced into arranging a second bus so that the two opposing parties did not have to travel to the training venue together in order to have participants attend the training.

Throughout the training, facilitators encouraged the opposing political party members work together in activities and participate in discussions on the electoral process, democracy, unity in diversity and peace and conflict. The trainer noticed that the hostility in their voices and body language slowly faded over the three day training.

By the end of the third day, the participants were friendly enough with one another that they chose to return home in buses according to their neighborhoods, rather than political affiliation. These participants have committed themselves to holding a “tea meeting” for further discussion amongst the political party representatives and to plan a press conference against violence in their community.



Above: Participants from the PAVE training in Sitakunda Upazila on May 7-9, 2015.

Below: PAVE training being conducted in Fakirhat Upazila in Khulna on June 21-23, 2015.



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