

## **EMPOWERING WOMEN IN NORTHERN GHANA FOR PEACE**

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### **Background**

While Ghana is generally known for being a peaceful nation, the northern part of the country has been plagued with violence for many years. In 1994-95, land disputes in northern Ghana between the Kokomba and Namumba tribes led to the deaths of 1000 people and the displacement of a further 150,000 individuals.

In recent times, the violence has been on a smaller scale, but is still ever present, whether between two clans or two tribes. There has been violence between the Sambana and Damdanga clans over land, as well as clashes between the Kusasi and Mamprusi tribes over politics and chieftancy disputes.

One town that has been greatly affected in all these clashes is Bawku, where curfews are constantly being set in an attempt to curb the violence, almost to no avail.

Whenever fighting breaks out in any part of the world, it is usually amongst men, with women and children bearing the consequences. Women suffer the trauma of seeing family members killed, being abused themselves and trying to put their lives back together while taking care of their families.

Women in northern Ghana are no different, but have their problems compounded by the higher levels of poverty and illiteracy that exist in northern Ghana, compared to the rest of the country. In a 2002 study done by McGadney-Douglass and Ahadzie, it was found that 8 years after the Kokomba-Nanumba conflict, women were still struggling to rebuild their lives and survive in poverty. Now with recent conflicts, the situation of women just keeps getting worse. These clashes can be attributed to inequality, bitterness, discrimination, prejudice, injustice, sense of retaliation, land disputes and reprised deeply rooted in ethnic and clan animosity. The Bawku conflict assumed a strange trend in which women and children have become targets for murders as seen in a gruesome murder of ten (10) women and children (including babies) in 2008. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 2008, four (4) houses were attacked and massacred at Buabula which included 7 women and 4 men. Too often, the perception of women as victims obscures their role as peace builders in reconstruction and peace building processes. However, moving beyond the "victimhood" paradigm, recent conflicts have highlighted the multiple roles that women play as peace builders during conflict as facilitators of dialogue between warring factions. It is believed that women can play a more effective role in conflict resolution and peace building than men if given the knowledge and skills; hence the need for this project.

### **Project**

My project will involve me returning to Ghana in summer 2011 to work with The Hunger Project Ghana, a development NGO based in southern Ghana, and together with resource personnel, travel to the Upper-East Region of Ghana to

- Have talks with women in Bawku to determine how their lives have been affected by the violence and present these findings to the local government.
- Provide the women with leadership training (especially assertive skills) to help raise their sense of self worth, thereby empowering them to engage with the community leaders in finding lasting solutions to ethnic problems plaguing them.

- Provide them with training in Mediation skills to empower the community at large, to look out for alternative dispute resolution means other than violence to settle their differences.
- Promote effective participation of women in decision making process at various levels and should be included in the peace advisory councils.
- Women as wives and mothers will be empowered to persuade their husbands and sons to bury their differences in order to create conditions for development to take place.

The project will be held over a two week period, with the first quarter of the time spent interviewing the women, and the rest spent on training.

I chose The Hunger Project Ghana because I have worked with them in the past and have seen for myself the results their training has had on people in rural communities in the southern part of Ghana. The Women Empowerment Program (WEPP), which is run by The Hunger Project Ghana has greatly improved the livelihood of many women in rural communities in the southern part of Ghana. They are in the process of scaling up their activities to cover the whole nation, but due to funding the process has been slow.

I am in a unique position to undertake this project because, being from the southern part of the country, I have no affiliation with any group in the northern part of Ghana and will therefore be regarded as a neutral entity, which is important for the success of this project.

### **Benefits**

- This project will highlight the problems faced by women in Bawku as a result of conflict, which has been overlooked for the most part by governing bodies.
- As a result of training provided, the women will learn that they do not need to depend on men for their survival and can take charge of their lives.
- An indirect result expected is that as a result of talking about their problems the women will obtain some psychological benefits that come from being provided a listening ear.

### **Results**

- The workshop proceedings will be documented in a report, to be submitted to the local government as well the Davis Projects for Peace.
- The women will be surveyed after the workshop to find out what they have gained from the workshop and how they plan on using their newfound skills to promote peace in their communities, and the results compiled and submitted as well.

### **Conclusion**

Winning the Davis Peace Project grant will enable me provide women of northern Ghana the skills they need to bring peace back to their lives, by minimizing their daily struggles with inner turmoil.