

# People Against Violence in Elections An IFES Program

November 2018



## Acknowledgements

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has developed a People Against Violence in Elections (PAVE) training and peace initiative that aims to provide local leaders and influencers with the tools and skills needed to anticipate, mitigate and prevent violence around elections through peacebuilding activities. The PAVE initiative was established as part of IFES' Bangladesh Election Support Activities (BESA) program, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), with further development of PAVE under the Support for Peaceful and Democratic Elections (SPADE) in Bangladesh program, funded by DFID. PAVE has also been piloted in Papua New Guinea through the Electoral Strengthening Support Program, supported by the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

## Introduction

The inherently competitive nature of elections increases the potential for violence during an electoral process. While individuals may face different types of election-related violence (harassment, intimidation, physical violence), the end result on a broader scale is usually the same: disenfranchised voters, loss of trust in the electoral process, and a lack of electoral integrity. At the same time, elections can be used as a vehicle to decrease violence if leaders are elected through a fair and transparent process – endorsed by all political parties – and there is a peaceful transfer of power and a legitimate role for the opposition.

The right to safely participate in the electoral process is both a human right and a fundamental pillar of electoral integrity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) enshrines the right of all people to participate in the electoral process in a peaceful and safe environment. These rights are reinforced through other international legal instruments, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Recognizing the importance of creating safe spaces for inclusive political participation, the PAVE initiative enables IFES to work with key electoral stakeholders to better anticipate and prevent violence and manage conflict. This resource highlights the key elements of the multi-staged PAVE initiative as a model for the effective engagement of grassroots leaders in mitigating electoral and political violence.

### **Rights Guaranteed by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)* Related to Electoral Participation**

**Article 3:** the right to security of person

**Article 20:** the right to assemble and associate peacefully

**Article 21:** the right to periodic and genuine elections, by universal and equal suffrage and through secret vote

## Conceptual Framework – Why Mitigating Violence in Elections

Conflict, which is present when two or more individuals or groups pursue mutually incompatible goals,<sup>1</sup> is not only inevitable but can even contribute positively to competitive processes that champion the betterment of society, like elections. Despite its potential benefits, electoral conflict can escalate into violence, preventing citizens from exercising their fundamental rights to participate in credible, transparent and inclusive elections. Unlike conflict, there are no societal benefits to violence.

Strengthening respect and understanding through civil initiatives is one effective way of addressing systemic instigation of the inter-party or inter-group violence that undermines peaceful elections.<sup>2</sup> Such respect does not require that all viewpoints are accepted, but rather that there is an attempt to “understand the points of view of others, ...and [appreciate] the shared interests that people of diverse groups have in cultivating common objectives and finding common ground.”<sup>3</sup> Recognition of shared objectives is critical to countering ethnic, political, religious, or other identity-based divisions that can contribute to the escalation of violence. Examples from around the world demonstrate that when people from opposing political parties and communities come together and learn about the mutual benefit of peaceful elections, then “the other” is humanized, making politics a contest of ideas, not people. For countries where elections consistently escalate to polarized and violent competition, concerted efforts are needed to cultivate understanding and a preference for peaceful resolution over violence.



### PAVE Operational Definitions

**Electoral Security:** the protection of electoral stakeholders (e.g. voters, candidates, poll workers, media and observers); electoral information (e.g. vote results, registration data and campaign materials); electoral facilities (e.g. polling stations and counting centers); and electoral events (e.g. campaign rallies) against death, damage or disruption during the election period [USAID]

**Electoral Violence:** any harm or threat of harm to any person or property involved in the election process, or to the election process itself, during the election cycle [IFES]

**Safe & Secure Election Environment:** an environment characterized by freedom from intimidation and violence against any and all election stakeholders (including voters, candidates, poll workers, media and observers) during the entire election cycle (pre- and post-election as well as the election period) [IFES]

In order to be effective, initiatives to prevent, manage and mitigate violence must involve inclusive engagement of all electoral stakeholders –including political party representatives, elected officials, media, and civil society as well as people traditionally marginalized from the political process. Safe spaces must also be created for individuals from competing parties as well as those of various ethnic and religious backgrounds to engage in dialogue and collaborate on peacebuilding measures. IFES’ experience implementing PAVE in Bangladesh shows that such diverse actors working toward the same cause can

<sup>1</sup> This is the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) definition of conflict.

<sup>2</sup> *Peace and Democratic Society*, edited by Amartya Sen, 2001, pgs. 33 – 68.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

play a critical role in mobilizing a movement that fosters political pressure for and accountability to peaceful elections.

## PAVE in Bangladesh

IFES' PAVE initiative was first piloted in Bangladesh, a country where violence has become endemic to the political process. Historically, the most significant cleavages that cause electoral violence occur between those with different political party allegiances and in power struggles within political parties. In addition to a vicious and ongoing cycle of intimidation, violence, and retaliation between and among parties, a second major cleavage exists between the majority Bengali-Sunni Muslim community and other ethnic and religious minorities, including indigenous peoples. While most Bangladeshi citizens desire more peaceful elections, violence is so prevalent that it has come to be accepted and tolerated as a natural part of politics.

Following the 2008 election, violent demonstrations, destruction of public property and intimidation and harassment of voters and candidates have persisted throughout Bangladesh's electoral cycles. Tackling such pervasive violence in society ideally involves a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approach: government policy and institutions that denounce



Peace Ambassadors lead peacebuilding events.

and punish violence, coupled with anti-violence advocacy and conflict mitigation efforts at the grassroots and civil society levels. In creating the PAVE initiative, IFES drew on Bangladeshi civil society and political leaders' will to engage in mitigation and prevention efforts on an individual basis. This engagement has demonstrated that even absent comprehensive government involvement, a movement toward violence-free elections can be supported and promoted by local leaders, political parties and civil society organizations.

First implemented in Bangladesh, PAVE demonstrates principles that can be applied to help address electoral insecurity in other country contexts. PAVE's emphasis on improving understanding of electoral violence, decreasing public tolerance for violence, cultivating safe spaces for difficult conversations and implementing public advocacy and peacebuilding events has broad applications in advancing a movement for secure, non-violent elections.

## Objectives of the PAVE Program

IFES' PAVE programming is designed to equip a cadre of trained individuals—including political party activists, human rights advocates, elected representatives, women's leaders, journalists and students—





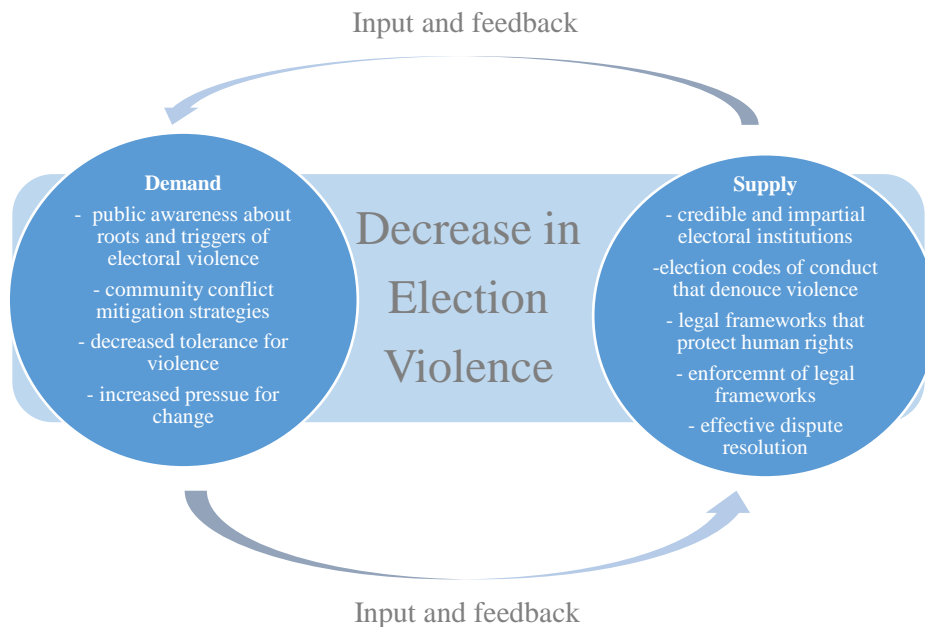
PAVE participants in the Chittagong Hill Tracts advocate for violence-free

with the skills to understand election violence, engage in cross-party collaboration on conflict-related issues, and implement peacebuilding that creates public demand for peaceful and violence-free elections. Such public demand pressures governments to implement systems and structures to mitigate and reduce violence, and political parties to reject the use of violence.

IFES has worked in over 137 countries to date on the government or “supply” side of secure and violence-free elections through Election Management Bodies

(EMBs). PAVE focuses on the civil society or “demand” side to raise awareness among local leaders and party-affiliated influencers to understand key concepts around violence in elections, learn to mitigate violence in their communities and advocate for supply side change.

The graphic below illustrates this supply and demand:



## PAVE Training Curriculum

In order to reduce electoral and political violence, IFES has developed a training program that equips civil society influencers, including mid-level political party officials, with the skills to understand election violence, engage in cross-party and cross-group collaboration on key topics related to election violence,

and spearhead conflict mitigation activities and advocacy. IFES is teaching participants to link training on conflict and elections with opportunities for dialogue and avenues for civic advocacy in order to capitalize on the momentum and trust built during the training program. To date, the PAVE training program has been implemented in four complementary modules: PAVE Introductory Training, PAVE Engage, PAVE Lead and PAVE Harmony. All four modules make use of adult participatory learning techniques, and they can be adapted to different target audiences as needed. For example, handouts can be translated into minority languages, the dependence on written materials can be reduced, and the concepts can be made more tangible or explained in greater detail for audiences with less formal education.

## I. PAVE – Introductory Training

The core PAVE module is designed to help participants identify the root causes of violence, learn how to deal with conflict in society through a non-violent electoral process, foster dialogue between opposing groups, and link these efforts with tangible initiatives to mitigate electoral and political violence. The PAVE curriculum, built from IFES’ experience in Bangladesh and other countries, trains participants to analyze sources of electoral violence and understand conflict dynamics throughout the election cycle. Participants are also exposed to the concept of the electoral process as an opportunity to peacefully manage and potentially mitigate conflict. IFES’ PAVE trainings have reached over 4,000 political and civil society leaders who now have the capacity and influence to engage in community-level peacebuilding.

Specific topics addressed in the basic PAVE curriculum include:

- ***The value of diversity of opinions:*** Through interactive activities, participants are exposed to an environment where different viewpoints, experiences and thoughts are valued.
- ***Qualities of a good representative:*** Participants are encouraged to think of not only the ideal personal characteristics of a representative and/or candidate, but also the importance of recognizing and supporting strong political platforms that promote citizens’ commonly shared priorities over polarizing group-based demands.
- ***The role of an EMB:*** This session provides participants with a greater understanding of the role and responsibilities of the EMB, and the need for an impartial election commission that consistently applies the rule of law.



Participants discuss a group exercise during a PAVE introductory training.

- ***Differentiation between conflict and violence:*** Participants are exposed to the concept of conflict as natural and inevitable, and that conflict can be solved in a non-violent manner. From this framework, individuals learn that they have the choice of how they want to manage conflict.
- ***Reasons people resort to violence:*** This session looks at the roots of violence. Participants are encouraged to identify some of the root causes of violence in their own communities, the impact of this violence, and potential alternatives to this violence.
- ***Requirements for peaceful elections:*** This session connects rights-based legal frameworks and the implementation of free/fair elections to conflict resolution. Participants gain understanding of what a secure political and electoral environment would look like.
- ***Security in elections:*** Participants examine points in the electoral cycle to understand where violence is most likely to occur, who is at risk, and what can be done to mitigate this violence.
- ***Role of Codes of Conduct in electoral violence:*** This session explores the value of a code of conduct in reducing or mitigating electoral violence, and identifies elements that increase the success of a code of conduct.

## II. PAVE Engage

Building on the introductory PAVE module, PAVE Engage equips PAVE alumni to reach beyond their current spheres of influence by further building their mobilization and peacebuilding skills. PAVE Engage participants are encouraged to apply these skills to assume a grassroots coordination role within and across their communities.

PAVE Engage participants gain further knowledge of the design and application of codes of conduct and conflict resolution techniques while also building practical skills, such as how to effectively develop relationships, conduct non-adversarial advocacy and outreach, facilitate difficult conversations, and organize town hall meetings and other peacebuilding events.

Examples from the implementation of PAVE Engage in Bangladesh have demonstrated how the targeted trainings effectively equip new leaders to conduct peacebuilding activities that generate public support for violence-free elections.

Specific topics addressed in the PAVE Engage module include the following:

- ***Facilitation of difficult discussions on key electoral conflict issues:*** This session provides participants with an introduction to how to facilitate discussions of controversial and potentially difficult topics. Participants are given the opportunity to practice and internalize traits of a good facilitator in order to gain confidence and experience with new facilitation tools and techniques.
- ***Strategies for engaging target groups in common activities.*** This session is designed to help participants identify various peace-building and conflict mitigation activities, and to start thinking about tailoring the right type of activity to each occasion.
- ***Creation of a safe space for exchange of ideas on electoral topics:*** This session highlights the importance of and strategies for creating a safe space for potentially controversial or difficult

conversations or events. Participants learn how to optimize chances for success through appropriate venue selection, through which attendees feel safe and respected and can talk freely.

### III. PAVE Lead

PAVE Lead is a personal leadership development course that builds on the skills and knowledge learned through the core PAVE and PAVE Engage modules. Based on IFES' experience in Bangladesh and other countries, one of the underlying causes of political violence is the absence of moral and ethical leadership in society. Encouraged by feedback from PAVE participants, IFES developed PAVE Lead to furnish the most active PAVE participants with the skills they needed to lead their communities towards more constructive and peaceful electoral engagement.

PAVE Lead focuses on providing core introductory training on effective leadership, inspiring current leadership to lead ethically with courage and conviction, and encourage people to take leadership roles.

The training is comprised of the following topics, which include personal development exercises and basic leadership tools:



A PAVE participant identifies shared leadership qualities.

- **Introduction to leadership:** While some people have inherent qualities and characteristics that result in a leadership role, leadership still remains a choice.
- **Leadership characteristics:** The session shows how highly effective leaders often share common traits—such as great charisma, persuasiveness, and tenacity—that can be used in positive or negative ways. Leaders are responsible for using the influence that comes with leadership with the guidance of ethics and ethical behavior.
- **Ethical leadership:** This session introduces participants to the concept and practice of ethical leadership, and is designed to challenge participants to take personal responsibility and realize that they want to be ethical leaders. Participants then analyze their own strengths and weaknesses as ethical leaders.
- **Creating momentum around new ideas:** Within the context of the use of violence in Bangladesh's politics, participants are given a Leader Situation Analysis tool and asked, "How will I take my people with me?" Participants learn that an effective leader defines a situation, establishes a destination, provides a road map, persuades people to adhere to a set of values, empowers them to believe they can reach that destination, and then convinces people to either follow or travel with them.



#### IV. PAVE Harmony

PAVE Harmony is a short community-based workshop module, with a focus on the topics of identity, coexistence and pluralism in Bangladesh. IFES and The Hunger Project – Bangladesh (THP-B) co-created this module drawing on THP-B’s social harmony training program and IFES’ global civic education experience in conflict and post conflict environments with strong ethnic cleavages. PAVE Harmony is based on the key principles of dignity, security and diversity, which are underscored by the constitution and the national anthem of Bangladesh.

PAVE Harmony has a simple theory of change: Participants are encouraged to reflect on their own attitudes about their community and country and consider how they are governed, their own rights, and the rights of others. This reflection will lead to the realization that the right to dignity, security, and diversity of human beings cannot be compromised. With this change in attitude, PAVE Harmony seeks to prompt behavioral change. Like all PAVE components, PAVE Harmony is designed to encourage people to take personal responsibility for coexistence, tolerance, and constructive political engagement in their community and country.

PAVE Harmony is intended to be delivered to a broader audience with potentially little formal education. Therefore, the sessions are short, introductory and principle-based. The style of presentation is a mix of participatory exercises and presentations aided by posters. Likewise, facilitators are required to modify their styles to suit the audience and time allotted.

PAVE Harmony seeks to address the following topics:

- **Diversity:** Through an “agree/disagree” exercise, participants are shown that diversity encourages richness of thought, ideas, interests and culture. This is not only good in itself but can also push us to develop as individuals and as a society. A society where everyone is the same does not exist.
- **Dignity:** Participants are asked to define the word dignity (the quality or state of being worthy, honored or esteemed), and they learn that every human being deserves and needs dignity.
- **Security:** After a definition and discussion of security, the session evolves into an exercise of conflict, the cost of violence and the benefits of social harmony.
- **Personal commitment:** After learning that change starts at the individual level, participants are asked to design a poster that illustrates one activity that will strengthen diversity, one thing that will strengthen security, and one activity that will uphold the dignity of their fellow Bangladeshis. The workshop concludes with them signing or make their mark on the poster demonstrating a personal commitment to uphold the diversity of Bangladesh and the dignity and security of all.

Third verse of the Bangladesh National Anthem *Amar Shonar Bangla* (My Golden Bengal), by Rabindranath Tagore:

*Ah what beauty, what shade,  
What affection, and what tenderness!  
What a quilt you have spread  
At the feet of banyan trees  
And along the banks of rivers!*

The quilt represents a large cloth made of various different pieces and provides a compelling image of diversity. The banyan tree is a large tree providing shelter and security. The rivers of Bangladesh provide water and food, essentially a dignified life, for its people.

## Peacebuilding Activities

IFES works with participants who have been trained through the PAVE curriculum to use a strengthened skillset and tools to implement grassroots peacebuilding activities that create opportunities to build consensus and foster dialogue between civil society, political parties and law enforcement representatives, among other electoral stakeholders. Using their respective networks and standing, participants mobilize people both within their core communities as well as across political, demographic, religious, and other lines. In Bangladesh, PAVE participants have created a network of “Peace Ambassadors” (*Shani Dut Gon*) to support each other in their community-level advocacy efforts. As a first step, each Peace Ambassador is tasked with creating a peacebuilding events plan and completing a checklist of activities that contribute to preventing and mitigating electoral and political violence. By April 2018, over 66,000 people across Bangladesh had taken part in these activities.

Examples of PAVE trainees’ peacebuilding events, which encourage citizens’ non-violent participation in the political and electoral process, include:

- Conducting meetings and assessing the local political situation;
- Forming Peace Pressure Groups with PAVE training alumni to support the Peace Ambassadors;
- Arranging citizen dialogues at the district level with representatives of political parties, elected representatives, government functionaries, media representatives and members of civil society organizations;
- Organizing peace rallies and other demonstrations of support that contribute to public demand for peaceful electoral processes;
- Implementing confidence-building activities that involve the families and friends of PAVE members and political leaders from diverse backgrounds, with the intention of creating avenues for more positive and peaceful interaction despite differences;
- Convincing political leaders in target areas to publicly commit to and sign a Code of Conduct on Diversity, Dignity and Security.

Through these peacebuilding activities, participants open opportunities for dialogue within their communities and assist in the development of avenues for civic advocacy around more peaceful elections.

## Testimonials from Bangladesh

### PAVE participant’s role in mitigating land disputes

Riverbank erosion is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh and can alter land boundaries contributing to land disputes among the riverside dwellers. When violence, rather than peaceful mediation, is used to address such disputes, it contributes to a culture of tolerating violence that can feed into the broader democratic and electoral process.

Following regular flooding of the Padma River, people living in Chandanshor Village of Charghat Upazila lost their households and agricultural lands. At the same time, river erosion led to the surfacing of new, farmable tracts of land, which led to fights over ownership rights. In October 2015, land disputes escalated to the point that over 200 people gathered with weapons in order to forcibly occupy the land, contributing to fears of escalating violence in the riverside community. A local PAVE member, viewed within the community as a resource for conflict mitigation and resolution, was called on to help resolve the impending violence.



Young PAVE members lead anti-violence rally.

Drawing on lessons learned through the PAVE trainings, the PAVE representative organized a discussion between the conflicting groups as well as local community leaders. After the discussion, feuding community members agreed to form a neutral committee to identify a community-based solution. Led by the PAVE representative, the committee determined that the land would be cultivated through an equal and cooperative partnership – a mutually beneficial solution that was agreed to by the previously conflicting parties.

The resolution of the land dispute allowed community members to better understand and experience the process of implementing peaceful solutions to local conflicts. This experience can help cultivate a more robust culture of peaceful mitigation of political disputes.

### **Political party members demonstrate improved collaboration**

The PAVE program has demonstrated the value of creating trust between parties with an evident impact on participants' attitudes and behavior. One example of this was observed during a training with participants from Sitakunda Upazila in Bangladesh. Before the training, rivalries between political party members were so bitter that training participants refused to travel in the same vehicle as members of the opposing parties. IFES and its local partner, THP-B, were forced to arrange a second bus to accommodate transportation for the two opposing parties.

Throughout the training, facilitators encouraged the opposing political party members to work together on interactive exercises and participate in discussions on the electoral process, democracy, and peace and conflict. As the training progressed, the hostility between the participants diminished. By the end of the third day, the participants chose to return home in buses according to their neighborhoods rather than political affiliation, a marked improvement from when they first arrived. Following the training, participants committed to holding a “tea meeting” for further discussion amongst the political party representatives and planning a press conference against violence in their community. Leading by example,

these PAVE participants and political party members demonstrate the value of working together to achieve the common objective of a more peaceful political process.

### First trainings for indigenous women leaders in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

The pervasive culture of political violence in Bangladesh has unique impacts on women, where intimidation, harassment, and sometimes physical violence can inhibit women's electoral and political participation. To address this issue, women themselves have a critical role to play in promoting peaceful and gender-inclusive elections.

One of the target groups of IFES' PAVE training were female *karbari* and headwomen (indigenous leaders) from the three CHT districts. IFES saw this as an opening and opportunity to 1) strengthen their skills in alternative dispute resolution (a main task for *karbari* and headwomen); 2) improve their electoral and political participation, as some of them may consider applying for more senior administrative posts or run for office in the future; and 3) engage them in mitigating electoral violence and creating conditions for peaceful electoral processes.



Women indigenous leaders during a PAVE training in CHT.

IFES has trained 155 female *karbari* and headwomen to date using the PAVE training curriculum, which was modified to accommodate semi-literate and illiterate participants who had received little to no previous training. During these trainings, tools to help indigenous leaders peacefully resolve disputes that have the potential to lead to violence were also introduced.

As a result of the trainings in 2014, the members of the Headwomen's Network, a traditional governance institution in the CHT, had become ened over time without the tacit support of

the Government of Bangladesh, reconvened with a greater impetus to focus on the following activities: raising awareness of various social issues in the CHT; involving female *karbari* and headwomen in the dispute resolution process; and convening discussions to ensure support from the Headwomen's Network as a whole when individual leaders were faced with challenges in their respective roles. Individuals trained in PAVE have also conducted advocacy work in their communities of their own accord, going door-to-door among the households in their villages to raise awareness about voting and free and fair elections and preparing to run for office.

To support the Headwomen's Network, IFES facilitated a PAVE Lead training specifically for headwomen and other key CHT women leaders, including elected representatives and government officials. On the 2018 International Day of Non-Violence, PAVE alumni organized a rally in Bandarban in the CHT, celebrating non-violent means of conflict resolution and discussing the challenges they face in advocating for peace. The rally, which involved female *karbari* and headwomen, youth, civil society organizations,



and the media, concluded with several recommendations for a peaceful future and voiced their commitment to non-violence and harmony.

### **Religious violence reduced in Laksham**

In 2016, there was tension between Hindus and Muslims in the sub-district of Laksham in Bangladesh, due to a series of provocative speeches by a religious leader. The Laksham Peace Pressure Group (PPG), spearheaded by Peace Ambassador Bikash Chandra Roy, intervened to maintain peace between the communities. Mr. Roy gave the following account of events: “There is a Hindu temple located within 100 yards of Nesaria Hafizia Madrasa in the Bau Bazar area of Jelepara. On 22 March 2016, a two-day long waj-mahfil (religious discussions of Muslims) began in the evening. At the mahfil, the speakers engaged in hate speech regarding the temples and statues of the Hindu religion. After midnight, when the mahfil ended, some madrasa students threw bricks at the temple and statue. Tensions started spreading in the area. The next day, the Hindu community came to us (Peace Ambassador and PPG members), and asked us to visit the temple along with PPGs members Nadia Nur and Masud. We then went to the police station to give our testimony. Then the people of both religious communities were called to the police station and told to uphold peace and order. The next day, the waj-mahfil started again, and the officer-in-charge of the Thana Monwar Hossain called on the speakers to deliver peaceful speeches. In this way, peace and harmony were restored in the area through mutual understanding.”

One of the key strategies adopted by the Mr. Roy and the other Peace Ambassadors was to mobilize freedom fighters and senior citizens of the community to join in the peacebuilding activities and promote cooperation and tolerance in their community, further broadening the support base for the PPG. In partnership with them, Bikash Chandra Roy conducted several courtyard meetings in different villages and followed up with similar individual meetings to engage community members on a personal level. After the successful mitigation of March 2016 violent events, Bikash Chandra Roy has developed a culture to involve religious leaders across religions to sit together and solve potential conflicts. This has since become a regular practice in this community. As a result, there has been no further religious violence in Laksham since 2016.

However, recently, with the 2018 elections approaching, the community has become politically tense and some PPG members feel unsafe, making it difficult to participate in political activities. Since PAVE peacebuilding activities are inherently political in nature, the Peace Ambassadors had difficulty making progress. Bikash Chandra Roy continues to lead his community in peaceful political activity by holding closed-door meetings with political leaders, and many of the PPG members implement peacebuilding activities in their respective villages on a smaller scale.

### **Internal Impact Assessment Findings**

In order to examine the full effects of the PAVE training on program beneficiaries, IFES conducted an internal impact assessment using post-training evaluations and a post-activity survey to gain knowledge on participants’ reactions to and lessons learned from the trainings. These surveys were supplemented by focus group discussions and in-depth personal interviews conducted at a national conference of alumni of the PAVE program, held in Dhaka. This assessment focused on PAVE trainings conducted between

March and November 2015, which included core PAVE training for 560 participants and PAVE Engage training for 83 participants.

The findings from the evaluation show that, overall, the PAVE program has had a significantly positive impact on the skills and capacities of those who went through the trainings, and in fostering a higher level of activism and engagement in the communities in which PAVE alumni operate and work. 89% of respondents said that the trainings had increased their ability to train and mentor others, and 94% reported an increase in their willingness to train and mentor others as a result of the PAVE trainings. One of the frequently cited sentiments shared by many participants was that the PAVE training program *“brings together people from different backgrounds and viewpoints to meet and interact.”* Many participants expressed the view that the PAVE program accomplished what many other initiatives had been unable to do: find commonalities and a shared dialogue amongst very diverse groups with very diverse views. An important point that one participant noted was that it *“introduced the concept of constructive discussion”* where it had not existed before - instead of simply talking *at* each other, participants felt like they were talking *with* each other.

PAVE alumni also report tangibly changing some of their behaviors to operate within this new paradigm of peaceful collaboration and dialogue. Overall, 84% said that they have already conducted an activity or project related to peacebuilding or peaceful elections following their participation in the PAVE program as of November 2015. The alumni also reported learning valuable lessons that can be applied not only for the specific objectives of the PAVE trainings (skills for peacebuilding and conflict resolution), but also to their interactions in other areas of their lives. Almost all (97%) said that following the training, they informally took part in initiatives to promote peaceful political engagement with friends, family members, and other members of their community. 89% said that they have played a role in other forms of dispute resolution in their community as a result of their involvement in PAVE.

Lastly, community members and community leaders also had overwhelmingly positive evaluations of the work of the PAVE alumni, and reported that they had started to see results in terms of greater activism and engagement among community members for peacebuilding processes. After returning to their communities, Peace Ambassadors have been actively organizing events to work on peace promotion in Bangladesh. Overall, 86% of Peace Ambassadors said that they have already conducted an activity or project in their community that is related to peacebuilding and peaceful elections as of November 2015, with an additional 82% saying that they have attended other trainings or events on election violence since the initial PAVE training. As of November 2015, Peace Ambassadors have organized and held 162 unique meetings and events on peacebuilding in their communities, in addition to formulation meetings and brainstorming sessions. The types of activities are varied, with peace rallies constituting the majority of the events (70%) that took place in communities. Other peace builders had worked to organize events such as social gatherings, roundtables, meetings with political party activists, civic education campaigns, view exchange meetings with local government members, and peaceful demonstrations.

Alumni expressed an interest in further opportunities, often requesting more time and resources for the trainings. The encouraging findings of this evaluation supported IFES' continued investments in this area.