

## Citizen Leaders Ghana - 2005

### Background

As part of its Social and Public Accountability Initiative, The Institute for Policy Initiatives in Ghana has been working with civil society organizations from around the country to assess citizen perspectives of the services they receive from government and government agencies. The resounding message the organization received from communities is that community members wanted to be involved in developing policies that affect their communities, and to be engaged in shaping the future of their communities. They did not want to be passive recipients of services. These findings prompted IPA to initiate the Citizen Leaders program.



Participants develop projects in teams

Citizen Leaders was developed by Imagine Chicago; a non-profit organization in Chicago and has been replicated in various iterations around the world. IPA launched the Citizen Leaders program in Bunkpurugu District in Northern Ghana in January 2005. The program was a collaborative effort with the Bunkpurugu District Assembly and local volunteers. The program was facilitated by Edith Njuguna, former Program Director at Imagine Chicago. She worked closely with a community development coordinator from IPA. Over a six-month period, forty youth received training, and follow-up support to implement projects that would bring positive change to their communities. They also received seed grants from IPA to implement their projects. These youth represented 13 teams from 13 distinct communities in the district.



Participants present their projects

## Results

Twelve low-cost, high-impact projects emerged from the Citizen Leaders training program in Bunkpurugu District. These included: an HIV awareness campaign, a community clean-up project, construction of a urinary pit in the market place, three dancing and drumming groups, a girl's soccer team, a football team, a volleyball team, two tree planting projects and a literacy campaign.



**Drumming and dancing team during practice**



**Girls soccer team prepares for practice**

The Citizen Leaders program had wide-reaching effects in Bunkpurugu District and has resulted in partnerships that will ensure sustainability of the projects.

- The Bunkpurugu District Assembly (DA) has commissioned the clean-up team to engage in clean-up activities in various communities on a regular basis. The DA has also committed to provide the team members with the necessary tools to help them with their clean-up activities. Several community members join the team when it performs clean up activities.
- The girls' soccer team is the first ever in their community and community members gather to watch them when they practice. The creation of the team has changed the view of some community members that girls cannot, or should not play sports. In the words of one team member "Now people in the community know that whatever boys can do, girls can also do."
- The boys' football team has had matches with teams from neighbouring Togo and has had opportunities to travel to Togo to participate in matches with the teams there.
- The team providing literacy classes has partnered with the Non-formal Education Division (NFED) which is funded by the Government of Ghana. NFED provided the team with training on how to conduct literacy classes, and supplied them with the necessary tools such as books, chalk and kerosene lamps to conduct their classes.

- The drumming and dancing groups have been invited to perform at various venues including funeral ceremonies in other communities and have received payment for their efforts. They plan to use the funds to expand their work. According to one team member – “This is something we’ve wanted to do for a long time but we were not organized and we did not have the funds to purchase the outfits and musical equipment.”
- The team that constructed the urinary pit in the market impressed the local chief so much that he gave them matching funds for their project. The urinary pit will benefit over 600 people who visit the market on a regular basis. The team also started collecting monthly dues from its members and plans to use the funds to start a mobile library.



Urinary pit in market

## Impact

The Citizen Leaders training program typically shows impact on three levels: individual, organizational and community. The Bunkpurugu training program was no exception. Evaluations from course participants indicate that they have benefited at an individual and community level. Some of the individual and community benefits cited from the course evaluations include the following:

- “We now understand the importance of working in collaboration with other organizations that are involved in the same things in the community because collaboration leads to a greater impact.”
- “I am able to transfer the skills learned in Citizen Leaders to different contexts. For example when I was appointed as secretary of my school council I used the knowledge I learned in Citizen Leaders on how to organize a meeting and get input from different people.”
- “The program has created an opportunity for youth and elders to work together. For example in the drumming and dancing teams, we asked the elders to tell stories before each event, and this helped the youth to get a better understanding of their culture.”
- “I learned how to mobilize youth in my community to do something which will make a difference.”
- “I made many new friends when I got involved in the program.”
- “Our community is much cleaner and people have a better understanding of the relationship between health and sanitation.”

On an organizational level, the program complemented the work that IPA is doing on social accountability and enabled IPA staff to add the Appreciative Inquiry methodology to their work with communities. The IPA co-trainer was a young community

development worker who learned new skills and gained confidence in providing training workshops through her participation in the program.

The program also built the capacity of the Bunkpurugu District Assembly (DA) as two of the key people involved in the program were elected officials. The Presiding Member co-facilitated training workshops and one of the local volunteers responsible for recruiting and monitoring the projects was also an elected official. These two key people planned to train other District Assembly staff on the Citizen Leadership process. They also had a goal to ensure that the program remained an important part of the DAs strategic plan for youth development.

- submitted by Edith Njuguna