

Report on



Five-day face-to-face training and study visits
for journalists and journalism students to
minority communities, under the Engaging
Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding
(EMMAP) Project

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Acknowledgement

The two-year “Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding” (EMMAP) project, has been made possible through the European Union’s (EU) funded intervention to raise public awareness of the interconnections between conflict, migration, and minority exclusion to help build and consolidate sustainable peace in Ghana, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.

EMMAP is being coordinated by Uganda-based Minority Rights Group Africa (MRGA) and implemented by three countries by partners namely: the Media Platform on Environmental and Climate Change (MPEC) in Ghana, Media Reform Coordination Group (MRCG) in Sierra Leone, and Networks for Social Justice Rights (FAHAMU) in Senegal.

Preamble

This report presents an overview of the five-day face-to-face training and study visits for journalists and journalism students to minority communities from 30th March 2023 and 4th April 2023. The event was organized by MPEC in collaboration with MRGA, MRCG and FAHAMU in the communities of Dissah in the Savannah Region and the Gambaga Witches Camp in the North East Region of Ghana.

Key Takeaways from Trip

1. Organizing the field trip was a very excellent activity afforded the journalists the opportunity to hear the primary accounts of the victims from their own mouths.
2. Issues of conflicts, minority exclusion and migration are all climate change and environmentally associated.
3. Minority issues are seriously underreported as there is no conscious and deliberate attempt/effort by the media to pay attention to minority issues. This is because most reportage are event driven.
4. Tackling conflicts and minority rights require the combine efforts of journalism and activism.
5. There is need to strategise on how to improve media work in reporting and information sharing about minority issues.
6. Conflicts rob people of their identity.
7. Saving the witches has become a socio-cultural and socio-economic industry.
8. The witches camp has been in existence all these years and yet the State apparatus is absent in contributing to their welfare.
9. Minority rights issues are linked to poverty because the victims are mostly from very poor homes and are not politically connected.
10. The issue of being labeled a witchcraft is a heavily gendered matter.

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations	In Full
EMMAP	Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding
EU	European Union
FAHAMU	Networks for Social Justice Rights
MPEC	Media Platform on Environmental and Climate Change
MRCG	Media Reform Coordination Group
MRG	Minority Rights Group
MRGA	Minority Rights Group Africa
NADMO	National Disaster Management Organisation
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
UK	United Kingdom

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What was it all about???

Thanks to EMMAP, selected Ghanaian, Sierra Leonian and Senegalese journalists had the opportunity for the first time in their professional lives, to come face to face with the daily realities of the lives of some minority communities in Ghana. First, they toured Dissah, a community, which overnight became desolate following a midnight attack from a dominant community, without any provocation on the part of the people. Then, secondly, they visited Gambaga Witches Camp – a refuge for women escaping the brutal repercussions of being accused of practicing witchcraft on others. Hitherto, due to lack of funding, these journalists would not have been able to travel to such remote areas to purposely investigate and report on issues.

The Context

Apart from lacking journalistic education of ethical standards (as most media studies do not include this topic into their curriculum) and professional upgrading; research indicates that the media in Ghana, Senegal and Sierra Leone, also lack an understanding of minority issues and connections with conflicts, representation of minorities in the workforce, training on safety and security issues and conflict sensitive reporting, ideas on how to report effectively without costly equipment and software as well as journalism mentorship schemes. In Ghana and Senegal, media is relatively free. For example, in Ghana out of 428 radio and 164 television stations, only four media are state-owned. The coverage of issues is sometimes driven by political partisanship and exposed to corruption, but generally, all seem to view social issues as worthy of coverage.

However, conflicts are reported when incidences occur, and not because of careful assessment and investigation, and TV contents are rather poor, mainly relying on content from foreign television stations. Tribalisation of issues become pronounced during elections and political appointments, making people uncooperative with authorities and state issues, contributing to destabilisation. Similarly, the hostility and violence against minorities that leads to conflict, originates and/or is fuelled by unethical reporting and unprofessional media coverage. In Sierra Leone, a 2020 study on the state of safety policies and practices among media houses published by MRCG-SL identifies that media houses and practitioners regularly face at least one of the following violations:

intimidation, harassment, humiliation, arrest, detention, and physical attacks. These events spawn negative media coverage internationally and smeared Sierra Leone's democratic credentials especially in the World Press Freedom Index (ranking 85th out of 180 countries).

It is worthy of note, that all the world's longest running conflicts are fueled and fought over ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural issues, and all of these concern minority groups. Obviously, a disregard for minority issues lies at the heart of these conflicts, so, minority rights have been marginalized even in international conflict prevention. Too many conflicts that have minority rights at their centre are not being understood as such, which results in the flare up of conflicts that could have been prevented if warnings of minority rights violations were heeded. Too often, separating groups along ethnic, religious, or linguistic lines has been a way of upholding minority rights and keeping peace between groups. While such solutions might be an easy option in the immediate aftermath of conflicts, in the long term these divisions can entrench old hatreds and wounds. Therefore, an understanding of minority rights is essential for anyone dealing with conflict prevention and resolution.

MRG has been working on minority issues for over 50 years in all parts of the world. Raising awareness about roots of conflicts, the consequences, the situation of minority groups, migrants and IDPs, based on MRG's experience, is a key element of peace building. Using media to do that, gives a wider reach.

The question is if media in target countries fully understand the causes of conflicts in their regions and the dynamics between media work and deeper understanding of the situation. Consultations undertaken by MRG, identified a low capacity of media to report sensitively on development issues, development aid and conflicts. In line with this, the five-day Face to Face Trip was organised to develop/enhance the capacity of selected journalists from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal, to appreciatively and sensitively report on related issues.

Relevance of EMMAP for enhanced media capacity on conflicts and minority reporting

The goal of the "Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding" (EMMAP) project, is to raise public awareness of the interconnections between minority issues, community tensions and conflict to help build and consolidate sustainable peace in Ghana, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. To do so, the project implementation team has maximised media's potential as a peacebuilding actor, by strengthening the capacity of journalism actors through non-formal education opportunities to report sensitively on conflict, contributing to mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation.

The five-day Face to Face Trip, was one of the key activities to facilitate the needed strengthening of the media in the three EMMAP implementing countries. It was an informal training session that enabled participants to visit and interact with some identified minority communities and groups in

Ghana, to witness at first hand and better understand everyday lifestyle, condition and welfare of minority groups.

Objectives of the Face-to-Face Trip

The overall objective was to strengthen the capacity of journalism actors to sensitively investigate and report about issues concerning conflict and peace building, addressing minorities and migration issues.

The specific objectives were to i.) enhance journalism actors' understanding of minority issues and connections with conflicts; and ii.) train journalists on how to report effectively without costly equipment and software.

Expected Outputs

It was expected that at the end of the five-day field trip participating journalists would better understand minority issues and the connections with conflicts; they would be equipped to report effectively on minority issues without costly equipment and software; and acquire knowledge and skills for engaging with minority groups and their issues.

Key Preparatory Activity

To kick-start the implementation of the EMMAP project, MRG/MRGA in collaboration with the implementing partners organized a six-week online course to strengthen the capacity of journalists in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal on the theme: "reporting sensitively on minority and indigenous issues, development, and conflict." It was facilitated by two external resource persons. The active and successful participation in and completion of the on-line training was the foremost pre-requisite for journalists and activities to participate in other EMMAP activities such as the Face-to-Face Trip.

A total of 10 journalists and journalism students were selected as follows: three from Sierra Leone, three from Senegal and four from Ghana (being the host country) to participate in the trip. The selection was a joint effort by the two tutors and EMMAP's Communication Officer, Zoubida Barade to ensure that the criteria for selecting beneficiaries for subsequent activities were adhered to.

Destinations of the Face-to-Face Trip

The Gambaga Witches Camp in the North East Region and the Dissah Community in the Savannah Region in Ghana, were selected as the destinations of the Face-to-Face Trip.

Dissah is a small farming community within the Wisepe Traditional Area that is predominantly Gonja with Daboya as the Paramount seat. But the people of Dissah speaks their own dialect - Tampilma. One fateful night in January 2018, the community was attacked and totally destroyed by a band of men from Daboya. The incident, was a major setback from which the Dissah

community is yet to fully recover. However, the resilience of the community members in rebuilding and moving on with their lives, following the attack is admirable.

The Gambaga Witches Camp as the name implies, is a refuge community for mostly women and very few men accused of being witches and therefore ostracized by their communities. That is, if they are fortunate enough not to have been killed “to purge society of the menace of their existence.” The camp is believed to have been started many years ago as a safe haven for such women by one Islamic Cleric.

The two communities were selected by MPEC in consultation with the EMMAP Project Coordinator at MRGA, Geoffrey Sibitti and the Media Officer at the MRG, Anna Albort. The selection was based on the general definition of a minority being the carrier of challenges not always faced by the majority. As a result of these challenges, minorities may have difficulty assimilating into the dominant culture or become targets of discrimination based on their minority traits within their communities. The challenges include discrimination and exclusion, restricted social mobility, lack of identity and security, limited access to community services, and greater incidence of poverty.

The two communities were also considered in the light of MRG’s definition of minority concerns as “disadvantaged ethnic, national, religious, linguistic or cultural groups, which are fewer in number than the rest of the population and which may wish to maintain and develop their identity.” Thus, MRG, understands how discrimination based on age, class, gender and disability can have multiple impacts on disadvantaged minorities and indigenous peoples.

The trip took place from Friday 31st March to Monday, 3rd April, 2023. Aside the 10 journalists, EMMAP’s country coordinators for Ghana and Sierra Leone as well as EMMAP’s Project Coordinator, MRG’s Media Officer and a French translator participated in the trip.

The Pre-Departure Briefing Session



Abdul-Latif Bavug, Dissah community contact person at pre-departure briefing session with the team of journalists, EMMAP Coordinators and MRG staff.

The trip commenced with a pre-departure briefing session on the morning of Friday 31st March, 2023 in Accra to prepare participants on what posture to assume and how to conduct themselves in interacting with the inmates of the camp and the Dissah community members. This was necessary to guard against any form of verbal misconduct in particular, with the potential of generating unnecessary tensions among the people.

The contact person for the Dissah Community was Abdul-Latif Bavug. He briefed the group about how the peace-loving farming community of Dissah was reduced to nothing following a communal attack by a band of men from Daboya on the night of Saturday January 13th to the early morning of Sunday January 14th, 2018. About two people died, but all others managed to flee into the bush. But on their return some few days after the incident, there was nothing left to sustain them. The community members did receive some assistance from the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) and very minimal media coverage. The survival of the community members, sustenance and resilience had been due to the significant support of Latif, who mobilized help from a handful of individual philanthropies and some institutions to restock the community members. They had to be totally replenished from cooking utensils, food items, clothing, footwear, blankets to roofing sheets.

Latif said five years on, life has returned to an uneasy calm among the two communities. “But this uneasy peace could easily degenerate into a clash, because of an unwise statement from a journalist,” he stated. Therefore, he advised the journalists to be circumspect in their questioning and proposed that the team should first visit Daboya before going to Dissah, so the team’s mission would not be misconstrued.

The group had the opportunity to also watch a television news story on the Gambaga Witches Camp by Peggy Ama Donkor of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation. Even though, the story did not capture the voices of the inmates, the clip presented an overview of how the camp functioned.

Tour of Dissah and Daboya

Interactions with Dissah Community members

On Sunday April 2nd, 2023, the team went to Dissah via Daboya. However, the elders were not available at that time and so the team departed to Dissah, which is less than 10 kilometers away from Daboya. The community members had already been informed and prepared by contact persons assigned by Latif. The meeting ground was under a locally constructed shade. The chief of Dissah was represented by Elder Asafo Bavug Salifu. His account of what happened that fateful night is as follows:

“The very night the incident happened; it was about midnight when we heard the sound motorcycles passing through our community. After some time, they returned, begun shooting randomly and set our community ablaze. So, we fled into the bush and returned after three days. When we got back all our properties had been destroyed by the fire and life has been very tough since. It was later we learnt the reason why we were attacked – One of the attackers fell off the motorcycle he was riding on as the rider negotiated a bend. When they others returned to look for him, but couldn’t find him, they vented their anger on Dissah, thinking that some of our people had kidnapped him. But we didn’t know anything about that. We’re still recovering. After five years, we are calm, we are farming and doing business with the people of Daboya, and our relationship is fine. You see patience is necessary to make it in life and so now we can laugh.”

“This is our home, we have nowhere else to go. We are not fighting with them. But the memory of that attack without provocation will forever be with us. The pain of losing our motorbikes, laptops, solar panels and television sets is etched in our minds. This one is very difficult to forget, especially the destruction of our bikes, without which going to our farms has become more tedious. We want peace to prevail and we want our area to develop.” (Comment from another Dissah community member)

Ibrahim from Daboya who accompanied the team to Dissah and acted as interpreter stated: “The whole incident was an unfortunate situation and a miscommunication. Dissah people are peace loving people.”

What the team gathered from the meeting was that Dissah was not the target that night, but rather the nearby Saleligu community. They had installed a chief to the disrespect of the Wasipewura and were even taking tributes from the Fulanis who had settled around the area. This, the Daboya people saw as gross insubordination and therefore, had to discipline them. Subsequently, some people took the matter into their own hands and ended up attacking Dissah without any provocation.

Scenes from the aftermath of the attacks on Dissah



Help did come thanks to the mobilization efforts of Latif



They were well self-motivated to rebuild their community and everybody – men, women and youth all played a role.



Meeting with the Elders of Daboya



The team’s interaction with the elders of Daboya, was brief as they were all in a sober mood. Elder Mambolwura, a brother to the chief was the spokesperson of the of elders. He reiterated that “the destruction of Dissah was a very unfortunate and regrettable incident,” adding that “we are happy that life is back to normal and our relationship is restored.”

Key Observations from Dissah

1. Immediate cause of the Dissah attack

Dissah was attacked by armed men from Daboya who were going to deal with the people of the nearby Saleligu community. On the way as they passed through Dissah, one of them fell off the motorbike he was riding on unknown to the others. His colleagues realized the incident later and returned to look for him. When they failed to find him, they attacked and destroyed Dissah on the pretext that the community members were in league with the Saleligu community.

2. Underlying cause for the attack

The people had alluded to a chieftaincy issue at Saleligu to which Dissah had been linked by the men of Daboya. Related to this, was the Fulani matter, which had to with the payment of tribute. The Fulanis who had settled in the area had been paying tribute to the Wasipe-Wura, the overlord of the Wasipe Traditional Area with Daboya as the

Paramountcy. Therefore, all the communities in the area pay tribute to him. Then, Saleligu community installed a chief who happened to be an indigene of Dissah, resident at Saleligu. Somehow, he also began taking tribute from the Fulanis, a development, which the Daboya people were unhappy about and resolved to deal with it.

3. Implication of the above development

This tribute – the traditional tax system in the area is an ancient practice and remained the main and the deep cause of the attack. Historically, the tax was a form of indirect rule, with the Gonjas ruling over the people of Dissah. During those times, they were obliged to pay tax. Somehow, Dissah managed to stop paying the tax and therefore, became a minority, in the area. But the Fulanis who travel around with their cattle, respected this ancient practice and became part of the majority group. And the Gonjas, remained committed to enforcing the practice of paying taxes. Therefore, an indigene of Dissah had no business becoming a tax collector over the Fulanis.

This was a big issue that became the underlying cause of the conflict between the major ethnic group – the Gonjas and the minority ethnic group, that is the people of Dissah – the Tampilmas.

Interactions with inmates of the Gambaga Witches Camp

The visit to the Gambaga Witches Camp took place on Tuesday, April 3rd, 2023. It was an eventful but sober interaction for all members of the group. They were met and escorted to the North East Regional Head Pastor of the Presbyterian Church Reverend, Michael Gumah by the Coordinator of the Camp, Samson Laar. The church is fully responsible for the care of the over 93 women ranging from about 45 to 80 years. These are individuals who hitherto were enjoying stable family lives with their husbands and children. But within a twinkle of an eye their lives are forever altered by the accusation of others. Also at the camp are four men driven away from their communities because they are said to be wizards. The camp is also host to 26 children some of whom are there to assist their grandmothers. The children are enrolled in the public school in the area. Three of the children, according to Samson, have been accused of being witches.

Reverend Gumah and Samson led the group first to the Palace of the Gambaga Chief. His attendants interacted with the group and informed members that the “Chief is the Protector of all inmates in the camp and once a victim gets there, that individual cannot be touched.” Interestingly, the camp is strategically situated almost next to the Chief’s Palace, so their protection is obviously guaranteed.

Next, Reverend Gumah and Samson led the group to the camp’s meeting hall, which was already packed with the inmates dressed in their best clothes, awaiting the team’s arrival. The inmates welcomed the team with songs and dances. Samson then, briefed the team on the functioning of the camp and its governing structure to ensure that peace and order prevails among the inmates.

“There is the Chief Magajia (Leader of the women) appointed by the Gambaga Chief to oversee the affairs of the inmates, with the help of leaders of the various ethnic groups: such as Konkonbas, Mamprusis, and Dagombas. When they first come here, we counsel and examine them for any signs of mental illnesses and also educate them on menopausal issues, which at times make some women act strangely and end up being labeled as witches. We care for and show them love as much as possible with support from some benevolent organisations. To supplement the rations, we give them for their sustenance, some of the women earn income serving as farm hands, and gathering and selling fuelwood. Others who have been taught bead and soap making, are earning some money from that. There is harmony in the camp and the women relate to each other very well.

Within the Gambaga environs, we engage in community advocacy on diseases and illnesses that affect the behaviour of women in particular, who are then accused of being witches.

We also have the integration programme, where over 120 women have been sent back to their homes. There is a Micro Credit Scheme through which support is given to the released women in any enterprise they want to undertake back home.”

Stories of some individual inmates

- *Wuni Gumah from Boaguri*

“When I was driven away from home, I lost contact with my children and don’t what become of them or even where they are. But after being here for a while, I’m now an important person so one of my children has contacted me. We have gone through a lot. I urge you women to support us to have a better life. We sing the praises of the Gambaganaa (Chief of Gambaga) who has given us life.”

- *Kologo Tindana from Zaratenga*

“Some of us come from very dangerous communities. I used to be a prosperous trader and I was accused of being a witch because someone dreamt of seeing me in her dream. I went to report to the Police and the women’s leader in the community. The Police went to arrest the “dreamer,” but were stopped by her family. Subsequently, I was beaten up by this dreamer’s brother with a bicycle locker. I had to flee from the community to this place.”

- *Gideon Salifu from Nelerigu*

“I used to be the husband of four wives with many children and a royal the royal family. Life was good until I was accused of bewitching someone with sickness and brought to this camp by my children. But my younger wife’s children were stigmatized. So, I their mother to take them to her parents’ community. Now these children have stopped schooling. Things are not easy here, but at least we are protected. I believe I will go back one day, but not immediately. But now it is too risky to even go back. It’s almost a year since I came here. I am about 50 years old.”

Samson said some of the women came to the camp with terrible wounds. For instance, Dinwaak Laar Konbiuk, came to the camp blinded as a result of severe beatings by her son who accused of

her of bewitching him. In the case of Wunagi Laadi, her accusers threw her into a river after several failed attempts to end her life. She survived and managed to wade through the river and trekked to the camp.

According to Samson, the issue of stigmatization does not affect only the inmates. “Even the stigma on us staff is huge,” he noted.

After the briefing sessions, the team presented bags of maize and rice to the camp.

Scenes from the Gambaga Witches Camp



Key Observations from the Gambaga Witches Camp

1. Witchcraft practice accusations is deeply embedded in the culture and traditions of the people.
2. Even though in times past, the camp was exclusively for women, now men are joining them as well as children
3. Women between the ages of 40 – 50 years are the main victims.
4. The practice of accusing women of being witches is such that no woman in northern Ghana is actually safe. One could easily become a victim.
5. All it takes to become a victim is for the accuser to testify of seeing one in a dream.
6. The Gambaga Naa (Chief of Gambaga) plays a key role in the survival of the inmates and their reintegration into their community.
7. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, which now is the sole funder for the camp is obviously overwhelmed.
8. The sustenance of the inmates as well as the staff/caregivers is also dependent of the benevolence of individuals and organisations who visit from time to time.

Significance of the Trip

The Five-Day Face-to-Face Trip, set the tone for the Regional High-profile Roundtable on Inclusive Journalism for Senior Media Professionals and Editors from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Senegal. This one-day event took place on Wednesday 5th April, 2023 in Accra. The deliberations focused on how an understanding of minority rights is essential towards conflict prevention and resolution as well as how the media can serve as a catalyst for peace building and not for engendering conflicts.

The trip provided evidence to back the assumption that media blackout fosters hearsays, which breeds conflicts. The Dissah attack was covered by just two or three not very popular media houses. The issue for discussion then was why media blackout?

The trip further provided evidence to support the definition of minority group as a fluid state, that lacks constancy and therefore could happen to anybody at anytime under certain prevailing circumstances as proven by both the Dissah and Witches Camp issues.

It additionally, enlightened the journalists about the scope of minority issues and the implications for the wellbeing of the people and for development.