

## Chadian Youth Fight Drug Abuse in their Communities

Young people in the Sahel face critical economic and social challenges, which constitute potential sources of conflict, as youth frustrations risk being diverted towards destructive social behavior. Peace through Development (PDEVII) aims to instead channel youth energies into constructive action in their communities. Across Chad, Burkina Faso, and Niger, PDEVII has worked with young men and women to strengthen their capacities to analyze and deal with conflict and other themes related to violent extremism, through collaborative social action.

Nokou is a small village in northwestern Chad, in the Kanem region. Its harsh Sahara environment limits economic and social opportunities for young people. Some sought a better life in Libya but were forced to return with the revolution. Narcotics have made their way into the region by way of neighboring Niger and many young people have turned to trafficking or using drugs to fill the social void. In nearby Mao, PDEVII youth-led participatory theater performances in schools had been credited with a reduction in fights and the carrying of weapons. Hoping to have similar success, youth trained by PDEVII in leadership and conflict management took the initiative to organize a sensitization campaign in Nokou to address drug abuse. Working through a local youth association to leverage social networks, they put together an engaging program of debates, participatory theater performances, and community contests and games. The various events provided both formal and informal settings for people to discuss the sensitive issue of drug abuse in their community in an open and constructive environment. During the opening ceremony, 22-year old Howoi Mahamat was moved to speak about the causes and consequences of drug abuse among youth, including adverse effects on health and social relations. She pleaded with her peers to support and actively participate in the sensitization campaign and positively change their behavior.

The campaign was not only an opportunity to tackle an important social challenge in Nokou, but also a chance to strengthen youth-led engagement in civil society. It demonstrated effectively that, with the support and training received through PDEVII, young people are assuming their collective responsibility to act as agents of positive social change in their communities.

***"Thank you PDEVII for support-ing our youth association to sensitize our peers on drug use, which can be considered a public danger today. I call on my fellow young men and women to follow this campaign and change their behavior!"***

***– Female audience member during youth-led anti-drug campaign***



*A young participant speaks out against drug abuse among youth in Nokou, Chad*

