

THE SOUTHERN KADUNA HUMANITARIAN AID INTERVENTION



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1. INTRODUCTION

The multi ethnic and multi religious diversities in Nigeria coincide with the North and south divide, where Muslims and Christians dominate each part respectively, has created geo-religious identities, a situation where religion, ethnicity and their concomitant tension enthroned a threat to peace and security of the country. These two (2) identities (Ethnicity and Religion) have played a more divisive role in recent times and have threatened the foundation of Nigeria's corporate existence as an entity. The rise of Boko Haram insurgency has heightened the tension. The North Eastern Part of Nigeria, has known no peace since the Boko Haram insurgency started its operations in the country. Among other agendas, the group has called for the institution of the Sharia Law and an Islamic government. The group has also launched war on Christians and Muslims considered as traitors. Apart from the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northern states of Nigeria, other conflicts include, Ethno-religious conflicts and the farmers and herdsman conflicts. The activities of these groups and conflicts have led to loss of lives, properties, attacks on churches and mosques, killing of foreign nationals and religious leaders, increased insecurity, collapse of social cohesion, growing suspicions, poverty, and increased numbers of internally displaced persons, among others.

PROCMURA has three (3) Area committees in Nigeria; Nigeria: West, East and North, There have been a number of interventions focusing in the Northern part especially Kaduna state because of its vulnerability to violent conflicts. Northern Kaduna is largely Muslim and Hausa-Fulani, while southern Kaduna is predominantly Christian and home to about 30 ethnic groups. Relations between Hausa-Fulani and communities in southern Kaduna have long been tense, stemming predominantly from competition over resources, including land, and political control. These tensions have often led to deadly ethnic, religious and sectarian violence.

Since the early 1970s, Kaduna State has experienced various forms of conflicts, most of which have religious colourings. In 1992, Zangon Kataf was twice engulfed in violent clashes where indigenous Christians of Atyap community were attacked by Muslims residents over the relocation and opening of the market on the outskirts of the town. In 2016, violent conflict in Kaduna state, where Christians (mostly farmers) were attacked by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsman, with devastating effects. Recently in July 2020, an unknown terror group attacked and killed more than forty three (43) people, mostly Christians in southern Kaduna. This attack led to serious humanitarian crisis, which caught the attention of PROCMURA and her partners.

The effects of the unending cycle of violence in Kaduna state and government's failure to provide lasting solutions, has led to cries of marginalization and social exclusion (on the part of victims). Mutual distrust between communities and religious groups has grown so much that people place sectarian division over and above the common interest. Military deployment to contain and transform the conflict has yielded little or no results. Religious leaders have employed various strategies to unite the two communities; Kaduna South and Kaduna North but faced with reescalation of the conflicts.

2. THE INTERVENTION

In early 2020, PROCMURA in Consultation with The Methodist Church in Britain noting the failure and unwillingness of those in authority to intervene in the situation, begun to earnestly look for humanitarian aid and assistance to help victims who had been affected by the continuous violence. We sought to give humanitarian assistance with the principles of humanity and neutrality and within the International Humanitarian Law. As we followed and observed the violence and mass killings in the southern part of Kaduna where things were getting worse. Our aim was to save lives and to help the people redeem their livelihoods despite the conflict around.

A decision was made to commission the Area Adviser Venerable Joshua Mallam an Anglican Priest who is in charge of the PROCMURA Area committee and Rev John Shettima the Associate Area Adviser (Now Bishop) in the Methodist church in Zonkwo worked as a team and mobilised the Area committee to visit the affected victims and began identifying what their needs were.

Using the PROCMURA philosophy and mission of Christian witness in an interfaith environment of Christians and Muslims together for peace and peaceful coexistence, they reached out to all those in the community where there were both Christians and Muslims as they had all been affected by the violence. PROCMURA being very familiar with the geographical location having worked in these areas over the past years and been involved in building Christian-Muslim relations in Kaduna state in order that Christians and Muslims can co-exist peacefully and also find peaceful means of settling disputes or disagreements.

The reoccurrences of violent conflicts in Kaduna states remains a challenge to PROCMURA's work in this Area. However, PROCMURA is committed to continuously intervene in the situation, putting forward various strategies or mechanism in bit to ensure peace in the area, especially peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims who form the majority inhabitants of the Kaduna state. Having identified the needs, The Methodist Church in Britain, provided the grants to provide aid and some assistance to those identified. In September 2020 while marking the international week of peace under the theme, THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN PEACE BUILDING, began the intervention calling on the community to work tirelessly and ensure that violence is reduced by sowing seeds of peace at the community level even among the victims imploring them not to be revengeful but forgiving. The team took high risk by going into different areas including volatile villages such as Gwantu, Boto, Kurmin Nasara, Kataf among others, giving humanitarian assistance to both Christians and Muslims. They invited a cross section of religious leaders from the affected communities and together they visited and prayed in different villages and camps that had been affected. They donated food items, bags of cement to help reinforce the temporal huts the displaced persons live in. Medical attention was given to sick persons and those traumatised by the violence. Psychosocial support was given to those psychologically affected, and some of them expressed negative feelings about life and living in such conditions. Some of the areas visited included Zonkwa the capital of Zango Kataf local government, Zikpa village, kajuru orphanage, and a children camp at Mararaban kajuru.

3. CHALLENGES AND LESSON LEARNT

- The intervention process was a risky venture due to the volatile nature of the environment which has also created fear. The Area committee was able to overcome this fear by making sure that, both Christian and Muslim influential and respected religious leaders were integrated in the implementation;
- The above challenge and the mechanism put in place to overcome the challenge, has proven and reassured PROCMURA of the people's reliance and allegiance to their religious leaders for direction and solutions to their problems;
- We learnt that though religious leaders have been working towards peace building, there are deep seated issues, and therefore a trigger event will immediately led to violent conflict;
- Although religious leaders have been involved in conflict prevention, management and peace building, they lack understanding of the "conventional" conflict prevention and peace building module. This limitation hinders them from a proper understanding of the conflict as well as the root causes, which is necessary to help determine the kind of intervention needed at a particular time;
- We also learnt that, although PROCMURA has not major into humanitarian work in terms of donating items and providing relief, humanitarian aid contributes a lot in conflict management and

peace building. PROCMURA therefore needs to expand its humanitarian programme especially to those affected by conflict;

4. IMMEDIATE OUTCOME OF THE INTERVENTION

- Awakened the sense of community and togetherness: Although the victims in southern Kaduna are mostly Christians, as a result of this intervention, the few affected Muslims came together with the Christians as people of the community facing the same challenge under a common enemy.
- Temporal structures were reinforced: Affected victims who lost their homes, were given bags of cements to help reinforce their temporal structures. This according to PROCMURA has contributed to the human dignity of the people, because the intervention addressed the human rights of shelter. More to this, when the basic rights of shelter, food and life are threatened then, there is no peace. This justifies the reason why we look at humanitarian aid to victims of violence as a strategy for conflict management and peace building;
- Strengthened relationships: as a result of this intervention, relationship between PROCMURA Area Committee and the communities has been established. The community expressed their trust toward PROCMURA and requested the Area committee to come more often to train them. They even offered to come to more safer grounds for trainings whenever they are requested to do so by PROCMURA;
- Change mind set and negative perceptions: the affected Muslims, who are the minority in southern Kaduna were overwhelmed by this intervention being that, it was coming from a Christian organisation, which has not discriminated Muslims even when the perpetrators are considered to be Muslims.

This change of mind-set was noticed when the Muslim victims expressed their feelings, and moved on to note that interfaith relations is a good thing and has nothing to do with conversion into Christianity, as some of the Muslim imams indicated. More to this, it was interesting to see Muslims availing themselves for counselling and psychosocial support under the leadership of Christian experts and church leaders;

- Awareness on religious tolerance. The intervention did not only provide relief to the people in the communities, internally displaced person and children in the orphanages, but also showcased an element of religious tolerance. When the children in the orphanages saw both Christian and Muslim religious leaders bringing relief to them, painted an indelible picture in the mind of this little children. Although they might be aware of the fact that one of the reasons for them becoming orphans is as a result of fighting between Christians and Muslims, seeing the same Christians and Muslim religious leaders attending to their needs, changes the understanding of the narrative altogether and promotes a spirit of mutual religious tolerance.

5. WAY FORWARD

- As earlier mentioned this intervention has laid a good foundation in terms of trust and relationship between the Area committee and the villages visited in Southern Kaduna. PROCMURA will like to take advantage of this achievement and build on it.
- Some of the lessons learnt have also provided green lights on the way forward. The people still look up to the religious leaders for solutions. In addition, though religious leaders have been involved in conflict prevention, there is frequent reescalation of conflict, meaning we need a different approach. More to this, religious leaders lack understanding of the “conventional” conflict prevention and peace building strategies. This makes it difficult for them to apply the right intervention at different stages. For example, when to ask people to pray and reconcile, when to identify early warning signs and respond early enough;
- As a result of the above lessons learnt, PROCMURA is seeking to continue engaging the

Southern Kaduna community, bringing in different approaches and mechanism:

- ✦ We want to build the skills and knowledge of the religious leaders in two important areas: religious peace building and on the conventional conflict prevention and analysis strategies;

- ✦ We want to build their skills on how to merge both the religious peace building approach and the conventional approach;

- ✦ In the TOT trainings, participants will be exposed to diapraxis activities, where Christian and Muslim religious leaders, women and youth will practically interact in manners that will be contagious and will continue as they move back and interact with the community.

- Our hope is that when all this is completed, religious leaders will have a comprehensive knowledge and skills in handling conflict related issues, community cohesion will increase, community resilience against factors that influence violent conflict will be visible. We are looking forward to establishing interreligious community peace networks. This will then provide PROCMURA with good basis to extend its intervention to the Northern part of Kaduna and see how in future, the interreligious networks can collaborate.

CONCLUSION

PROCMURA would like to find more ways in which it can intervene in situations of this nature by building bridges of peace and encouraging religious leaders to be on the fore front of reaching out. Special appreciation goes to the Methodist Church in Britain for partnering with us and supporting the Nigeria intervention.

PHOTO GALLERY







