

**AN ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES OF SELECTED FAITH-BASED
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN BENUE
STATE**

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ABSTRACT

In Benue State, there are three religious institutions (Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion) that play certain roles in the management of disasters, but the roles played by these religious bodies have been largely unexamined. This study examines the roles of selected religious institutions in disaster management in Benue State. In doing so, the study examines how these three religious bodies namely, Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion organize care-oriented management and mitigation-oriented management approaches. The methodology adopted for this paper is basically descriptive. This is a qualitative approach. Data for the study was obtained from primary sources which include discussions and interview reports from the sample which was drawn from donors, agency staff, government personnel, local community leaders, elders, health officers and teachers, and also from secondary sources such as journal articles, textbooks, lecture notes, newspapers and academic research projects. The contents of numerous data gathered are analysed descriptively. Policy measures have been suggested for ultimate disaster management performance. The paper suggests among others that Benue State government need to incorporate religious institutions and their policies in disaster management effort in the state in order to enhance qualitative and comprehensive care services.

Keywords: Religious Institutions, Disaster, Disaster Management, Policy Measures, Benue State.

INTRODUCTION

Ogundele et al. in their paper titled “Evaluating the Operations of Emergencies and Disaster” argued that the whole of Nigeria has, and will continue to witness series of disasters and emergency situations that are largely anthropogenic from youth militancy, communal clashes, religious conflicts, fire outbreaks, road accidents, kidnapping and robbery activities (133). Disaster, according to World Health Organization is a sudden ecological phenomenon of sufficient magnitude that may require external assistance or support. A disaster can also be operationally defined as any event that causes destruction and distress resulting in demands that exceed the response capacity of the affected community (4). This means Benue State also is not spared from disaster and emergency situation. The state is prone to various disasters of which ethnic clashes, activities of herdsmen, and flooding are the most devastating occurrences. For instance, the flooding in Makurdi, Guma, Katsina-Ala and other Local Government Areas in 2010 and 2012 wreaked havoc in some farm settlements. In the incidence, many houses were damaged, hundreds of people displaced, while farm products and household valuables were completely washed away by heavy downpour. The 2010/2012 disasters situation are just a tip of the iceberg, considering the number of disasters ridding the state.

Human and economic losses from disasters remain a menace to the social and economic life of Benue people. The damage caused by disasters is unquantifiable and varies with the geographical location, climate and the type of earth surface or degrees of vulnerability. This influences the mental, socio-economic, political and cultural state of people in the affected areas, thus leading to economic imbalance and instability of the state at large (Ovosi 2-14). Yet, government only plans when there is

disaster; refutes preparedness and preventive mechanisms. These disasters have continued to derail socio socio-economic progress and put millions of people into dire poverty or make the poor even poorer.

The economic and environmental loss to disasters and emergencies necessitated the establishment of the State Emergency Management Agency, which was established by the Act of the Benue State House of Assembly in 2002. However, since inception, the State has been plagued with disasters but adequate response was either lacking or not available. In order to address disaster and emergency situations, it has become imperative to call for partnership with governmental and non-governmental organizations especially, faith-based non-governmental organizations (FBNGO's) also referred in this study as religious institutions. In order words, these are described as organizations that are formed by people who share the same faith or set of duties. They employ persons who share the same religious tenets and work to serve primarily persons who share and belong to the same group ("Religious Institutions" www.mirrorofjustice.blogspot.com).

According to George, O., most families claimed that government had failed to live up to its responsibilities in respect to caring for victims of disaster and emergency situations. This ineptitude on the part of the government is seen as a reflection of the inadequacies on the part of the Agencies responsible for disaster and emergency management. The challenges therefore are to understand what the problems are as regards preparedness and prompt response to disaster cases (George "Ikeja Bomb Blast").

In an oral interview with the Executive Secretary of State Emergency Management Agency in Benue State reveals that, its activities are facing a lot of challenges, which has hampered its effectiveness. The most serious challenges militating against efficient and effective disaster management in Benue State is stakeholder apathy and the lack of adequate capacity culminating into un-holistic disaster management which is described as the systematic process that integrates risk identification, mitigation and transfer, as well as disaster preparedness, emergency response and rehabilitation or reconstruction to lessen the impacts of hazards on victims (Coopola 520). There should therefore be a plan aimed at achieving a holistic, effective and efficient approach to disaster response in the country (Emmanuel Shior "Oral Interview").

SOME FBNGO'S IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN BENUE STATE

According to Chaves and Tsistsos, religious institutions, also refers to as faith-based groups provided social services on a regular basis to their surrounding community. The most common social services provided by these groups included provision of clothing, food, and shelter. Faith-based groups used vast resources such as volunteers to provide these established social services (666). These types of social services suggest that congregations tend to participate primarily in the short term needs of the community. However, other studies conducted also suggest the provision relief efforts such as rehabilitation and reconstruction provided by religious groups following disastrous events (Cain and Barthelemy 29-42). This section takes a look at some religious institutions in Benue State and their roles towards disaster management and this is discussed under the following sub-headings: Christian Religious Institutions and Disaster Management; Islamic Religious Institutions and Disaster Management; and African Traditional Religion in Disaster Management.

A. Christian Religious Institutions

NKST Rehabilitation Centre: N.K.S.T. stands for the *Nongu u Kristu u i Ser u sha Tar*, translated "Universal Reformed Christian Church," a Christian Reformed church based in Nigeria. NKST envisions, by the grace of God, to be a multiethnic Christian community drawn from all nations and cultures of the world and united in the doctrine of Jesus Christ and purpose so as to offer holistic service with available resources to reach the unreached (Gyangyang 3).

On the management of disasters, the church has been offering practical teachings that will enhance environmental friendliness and sustainability. Consequently, following herdsmen attacks alongside with floods and other environmental issues that resulted into disasters, the church through her rehabilitation centre, have been providing relief materials, offering free medical assistance to victims

and reconstruction of churches in devastated areas like NKST Church Anumve in Taraba State. There is also a renewed call by the church to the federal government to approve the establishment of Benue State relief levy to be collected from everyone carrying out economic activity in the state to help rehabilitate victims of violence (Abah “Nigeria: Government Urged to Establish Relief Levy in Benue”). The church on her part has approved the collection of what it called a relief levy to help rehabilitate displaced persons. President of the church popularly known as NKST, Rev. Ayohol Ate, said at a press briefing in Gboko that the call was necessary, considering the loss suffered by the people during the recent crisis (Abah “Nigeria: Government Urged to Establish Relief Levy in Benue”).

Mobile Harvesters (Deeper Christian Life Ministry): One of the faith-based non-governmental institutions that is actively collaborating with other agencies in the management of disasters in Benue State is the Mobile Harvesters, a religious institution that is being managed by the Deeper Christian Life Ministry, Makurdi Region Founded in 2018 with their office situated on the church premises, opposite IBB Square, High-Level, Makurdi, Benue State and branches spreading across the twenty-three local government areas of the state.

Under the leadership of Pastor Mathew Okama, the organization has been providing emergency-related services such as shelter, food, financial assistance, and clothing. Other services provided by this organization also include medical services which is being carried out in partnership with Doctors Without Borders. Other activities include personal hygiene (laundry and showers), mental health and spiritual support, physical reconstruction (debris removal, home repair), logistics management (distribution of supplies), transportation (evacuees and volunteers), children’s services (child care and education), and case management (information, referrals).

Following herdsmen attacks in Benue State which resulted into massive killings, destruction of foods and properties as well as displacement of people, the state government has established camps for the displaced. Among these camps, the organization has visited Abaagena, Old NEPA Quarters, Daudu I, II and III camps as well as the camp situated at Gbajimba with material and financial support. Accompanying them with the Gospel of Salvation which give hope and comfort to the victims. In addition, psychosocial counselling is being provided, and general health education on water and sanitation hygiene to help prevent the spread of disease. Mobile Harvesters are working with other civil society organisations and media to put pressure on the government to respond adequately to the crisis.

Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC): As part of her evangelistic activities, conflict management and Peace building Fellowship, the Roman Catholic Church under Pope Paul in 1967 set up a Catholic Welfare Commission which became an organ through which the church attends to issues related to peace, justice, development and human rights. Consequently, it was this development that saw to the establishment of Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) by Nigeria’s Catholics Bishops in 1976 (JDPC “Brief History” www.jdpciyebuode.org).

Following the creation of Abuja province, which is made up of Benue, Nasarawa, Kogi States and the Federal Capital Territory, the organization was formally inaugurated in 2002 with a mandate of expansion and implementation of human development programs aimed at improving the lives of the economically disadvantaged, the structurally deprived, the unjustly punished, and those under threat and violence. Alimigbe, who has been with JDPC for the past sixteen years, is responsible for coordinating JDPC’s development programs throughout Abuja Province by filling in the capacity gaps of the provincial Bishops and ensuring quality intervention through monitoring and evaluation, and carrying out advocacy on behalf of the provincial Bishops.

With their office located at Bishop House, Catholic Diocese of Makurdi and under the current leadership of Fr. Asogo, is still continuing with the Peacebuilding Project which was commissioned in partnership with other organizations in 2004. The purpose of this project is to monitor crises and to link up with the authorities to prevent these crises from escalating. In this programme, each of the four dioceses in the state (Makurdi, Gboko, Katsina-Ala and Otukpo) has a peace officer with a five-man support team called the Core Peace Team, representing various interests extending beyond the Catholic Church. Core Peace Team members are drawn from both genders and both religious communities. Additionally, each diocese has a Peace Team of twenty-five members that feeds information back to the Core Peace Team.

Consequently, Justice Development and Peace Commission efforts are not seen as purely Catholic, but rather as inclusive. Generally, our Peacebuilding Project team members have good relations with the local government and police. In some cases, the security services actually come to the dioceses' offices to ask where they should focus their efforts to prevent and mitigate conflict. The security advisor to the governor of Benue State even goes for frequent conflict briefings with our teams.

Following herdsmen attacks in Benue that has left many people taking refuge in camps, the organization, through the resource mobilization efforts, household items including clothing were secured for the internally displaced persons in dire need. Damaged camp booths of victims were repaired as well as provision of food and other relief materials such as laundry kits, mosquito nets, plastic buckets among other items were distributed in four main camps: Daudu, Abagena, Gbajimba and Logo.

Christian Aid: Founded in 1945, Christian Aid is the official relief and development agency of forty-one Protestants and Orthodox churches in the UK and Ireland, and work to support sustainable development, stop poverty, support civil society and provide disaster relief in South America, Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and the Middle East (Christian Aid "Aims and Values"). Christian Aid is a member of the ACT Alliance, a global coalition of more than 130 churches and church-related organisations that work together in humanitarian assistance, advocacy and health services. Presently, Christian Aid works in some of the world's poorest communities in around fifty countries at any one time. They act where there is great need, regardless of religion, helping people to live a full life, free from poverty. They provide urgent, practical and effective assistance in tackling the root causes of poverty as well as its effects.

Benue State is also one of Christian Aid Nigeria's focal states, and the crisis has affected communities where it runs health projects, putting them at higher risk. From a rapid emergency needs assessment of the situation following farmers and herdsmen attacks, Christian Aid observed that IDPs were living in inhumane conditions, including poor access to quality drinking water and hunger. These and other threats to health and wellbeing particularly faced women and children. With all of this in mind, Christian Aid initiated the project *Emergency Humanitarian Relief Assistance project* to deliver immediate humanitarian emergency relief to IDPs in Benue State (Christian Aid "Humanitarian Assistance Benue").

The overall aim of this project was to restore hope to the IDPs by providing immediate, lifesaving humanitarian relief. Christian Aid set out to achieve this using a participatory approach to relief distribution and the provision of psychosocial support involving partners, government agencies, host communities and the IDPs themselves. The further objectives of the project were: for Christian Aid partners to provide a direct and immediate response to the humanitarian crisis by supporting ongoing efforts by individuals and some cooperative bodies at household level in IDP locations in Benue state. Secondly, to strengthen the capacity of two Christian Aid partners, Jireh Doo Foundation (JDF) and Anglican Diocesan Development Services (ADDS) Makurdi were involved in delivering emergency humanitarian assistance in crisis situations (Christian Aid "Humanitarian Assistance Benue").

The response was based on the provision of food supplies, non-food items, WASH and psychosocial kits to 1,848 households – 806 in four locations across Makurdi and Tarka LGAs and 1,042 in four camps in Ukum LGA. To ensure the efficiency of the project, and as its partners were not experienced in carrying out humanitarian work, Christian Aid ran capacity building training on emergency response in a crisis situation. It was attended by Christian Aid Nigeria and partner staff, B-SEMA and some IDPs. From this training, partners developed a clearer understanding of strategies and methodologies used when delivering projects to meet emergency needs in Benue State. It also enhanced partners' skills to carry out household registration of IDPs and use the information gathered to provide relief materials (Christian Aid "Humanitarian Assistance Benue").

Almost nine thousand IDPs were reached with humanitarian relief materials, including health, nutrition, non-food items, clothing, water and sanitation, and psychosocial services. The psychosocial support included the distribution of footballs to men and male youths, games and cards for women and female youths, and building bricks and other toys for children. Football matches were organised among

the youths, and the women and other female youths participated in dancing and other games (Christian Aid “Humanitarian Assistance Benue”).

Tearfund Nigeria: Funded by George and other members of the Evangelical Alliance Relief Fund Committee on 29th May 1968 with the vision of marrying Christian passion with practical action (Andrew Saman “Nigeria Tearfund”). In 1973, Tearfund became a registered charity organization by embarking on long term developmental projects, demonstrating the love of Jesus for the poor especially in disaster prone areas with the aim of reducing people’s risk.

In Nigeria, having established their head office in Jos, Tearfund has engaged herself in promoting peace in volatile areas to displaced people that are hit by herdsmen in most parts of Benue State through the provision of social amenities and materials to victims as well as counseling the youths to adhere to societal norms. In such circumstances, it was observed that the attitudes of young people change thus, this young people who would otherwise risk being drawn into violence, were counseled by the institution with very many of the youths trained to go out and become peace ambassadors in their communities (Andrew Saman “Nigeria Tearfund”).

The Lutherans Disaster Response: It is an organization formed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and remains one of the largest Christian denomination in USA. The organization which is for not profit making, brings God’s hope, healing and renewal to people whose lives have been disrupted by disasters, by staying to provide ongoing assistance and support to those in need (Lutheran Church “Programs”).

In Nigeria for instance, amidst of continued attacks that are believed to be the activities of Boko Haram on the Lutheran church of Christ Nigeria (LCCN) on 10th Nov, 2014 and other attacks, it was observed that the neighboring states including Benue State, were filled with IDP’S. Working through Lutheran Church of Christ, the Lutheran disaster response is assisting the internally displaced persons in Yola, Adamawa State by providing them with food packages, clothing, mattresses, blankets, mosquito nets and also educating the people to imbibe peace (Lutheran Church “Programs”).

Catholic Relief Service: Established by the Roman Catholic Bishops of the United States to help war-torn Europe to recover from the great conflict that engulfs them. They formally started their operations in 1943 during the World War II, focusing mainly on resettlement of war refugees in Europe (CRS, “CRS in Nigeria”). This organization has kept its tradition of providing relief in emergency situation. For instance, in 1990’s the presence of this organization in the after-math of the natural disasters like Hurricane Mitch in Central American was greatly felt (CRS, “CRS in Nigeria”).

In Nigeria, the organization was introduced in 1960 to provide humanitarian services in collaboration with the Catholic Church. In 2001, the organization launched a response to HIV and AIDS. Today, programmatic areas in Nigeria including Benue have been expanded to include peace building, governance, health, capacity building amongst others. In 2012, catholic Relief Service helped house-holds recover from the effects of flooding in the state (CRS, “Benue”).

B. Islamic Religious Institutions

Islamic Charity Society of Nigeria: One of the most influential Islamic religious institutions that has been playing significant role in the management of disasters, in terms of relief rehabilitation and reconstruction in Benue State is the Islamic Charity Society of Nigeria. Founded in 1995 with the sole aim of alleviating the heavy burden that has been placed on the family after a disaster by assisting them with financial assistance to restore their lives, reconstruct their damaged home and or provide temporary shelter (Aminu Ali “Oral Interview”).

With their head office locate at No.43, Niger Crescent, Ankpa Ward, Makurdi, Benue State, the organization has been providing social services on a regular basis to their surrounding community whenever there is a disaster. The most common social services provided by these groups included provision of clothing, food, and shelter. The groups used vast resources such as volunteers to provide these established social services. Volunteers may engage in cooking and serving meals to the community or participate in repair and reconstruction of homes using materials provided by the religious group. The social services provided are all immediate and basic needs that could be met by

different congregations. These types of social services suggest that congregations tend to participate primarily in the short term needs of the community (Aminu Ali “Oral Interview”).

With the recent fire disaster in Wadata Market Makurdi, the groups have donated amount of money to cushion the effects such damage might have had on the traders especially, the Muslim community of traders. This is beside the partial reconstruction of some shops belonging to their members that were also engulfed in the inferno (Iliya Faruk “Oral Interview”). Similarly, it is also on record that with the recent crisis in Benue that has displaced many people, the group has visited and donated relief materials to those living in both Daudu and Anyiin Camps (Iliya Faruk “Oral Interview”).

Islamic Aids and Relief Foundation of Nigeria: This is an organization that is formed, funded and controlled by Muslims in Nigeria. The organization is created to provide aid to disaster victims and people living in poverty. They are dedicated to working and providing humanitarian services to people in need irrespective of their religious affiliations, race, ethnicity and gender (Shaibu Sule “Oral Interview”).

The aims of this organization are; building of homes for the homeless, provision of medical facilities and service to disaster victims and other person, building of mosques across the country, helping the disabled to improve on their lives, providing food and clothing as well as water. For instance, on the 14th Feb, 2014, members of the group visited a primary health center in Makurdi, Benue State, donating maternity supplies, drugs and other equipment needed by the hospital for the poor people who cannot afford the things required by the centre for delivery. This gesture also includes victims of disaster (Shaibu Sule “Oral Interview”).

The International Islamic Relief Organization: The organization, also known as the International Islamic Organization of Saudi Arabia is a charity established by the Muslim world league in 1978 (IIRO “History”). With Headquarters in Jeddah, the organization collects donations, *Zakat* and *Sadaqah* in other to provide relief and development assistance to Muslims in war-torn and disaster affected areas. Its major programs cover areas such as social welfare, relief, education, provision of medical health care and other societal developmental projects. For example, in 2005, the organization provided assistance to victims of earthquake in the affective areas of Pakistan (IIRO “History”).

In Nigeria, the organization has equally made her impact, for instance on the 5th January, 2014; the organization has undertaken successful eye operations for 1000 blind and visually impaired children, women and men in Benue, Gombe, Nasarawa and Zamfara States. This event was equally accompanied with distributions of relief materials to the less privileged in the society as well as counseling the youths against all forms of violence and terrorism.

A GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF FBNGO’S AND MANAGING DISASTERS IN BENUE STATE

Observing the level of involvement and participation of religious institutions in managing disasters in Benue State, the research finds that groups of individuals, mostly volunteers, who may or may not know each other, oftentimes organize themselves to fill perceived but unmet needs of the internally displaced persons. Equally, organizations who already have volunteer networks, equipment, or space also spontaneously volunteer to fill unmet needs. Sometimes these spontaneous organizations work well with government agencies and existing disaster relief organizations, whereas other times, the new organizations are turned away (Tierney, 2009). This understanding is drawn from the ‘the Community Development Theory’ which is focused on explaining emergent collective behavior in an emergency situation and the reasons for the mass convergence phenomenon, which includes the convergence at the disaster site of individuals and organizations to offer assistance. Drawing on sociological, psychological, and political frameworks, researchers study and classify the reasons and motivations behind the collective behavior of volunteers and emergent groups of volunteers during a crisis.

Studying these religious institutions and disaster management in Benue State, it was also observed that, these organizations by mission are found and designed to meet basic human needs and are therefore well positioned to participate in disaster relief efforts. At the same time, we still maintain the view of De Vita that these organizations sometime may not be prepared to respond or coordinate

with formal response efforts, a situation that could cause potential confusion and duplication of services (De Vita, 2007). Drawing on these frameworks of assessment from disaster management and religious institutions now lead us to examine some of the potential strengths and weaknesses of religious institutions in disaster management activities in Benue State.

Major Strengths

In observing activities of religious institutions in disaster management in Benue State, the study discovered a high level of motivation and commitment from volunteers to carry out these tasks because serving people in need is in line with their moral and religious values and beliefs. Consequently, they (volunteers) have experience serving vulnerable populations such as low-income, elderly, and immigrant populations, groups that are likely going to need specialized assistance in planning and responses.

Another strength is that they (religious institutions) are embedded in the community served and have local knowledge, established trust, and geographic proximity. To this end, they (religious institutions) can draw on extensive networks of volunteers for service delivery and fundraising as most religious institutions specifically have the facilities and service experience to provide “pop-up” shelters and food assistance, emergency services targeting basic needs, religious/spiritual relief and guidance, and educational programs. They (religious institutions) have the flexibility to identify unmet needs as they emerge and fill in service.

Weaknesses

Insufficient Training and Facilities: Some religious institutions’ staff and volunteers lack sufficient training, and their facilities are often inadequate. For instance, facilities, if not pre-certified, may not meet minimum performance standards; therefore, there are concerns about safety and liability and insurance.

Closeness to Disaster Site: Due to close geographic proximity to vulnerable populations and disaster sites, religious institutions have limited capacity due to damage to local facilities or not enough staff or volunteers that remain behind to cover response participation.

Poor Knowledge: Religious Institutions may have limited knowledge of, or connection with other networks to coordinate response activities. Equally, this may lead to limited tracking infrastructure to monitor clients and services provided during a response effort can limit the extent of their reimbursement.

Un-coordination: there is a general low coordination of activities of Religious Institutions in disaster management in Benue State. Without coordination, there may be service duplication or confusion about service delivery.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following measures are recommended to resolve environmental issues in order to safeguard human lives and also to boost agricultural productivity in the area to enable Benue State to be secured and still claim the Food basket of the nation as it used to be.

1. Benue State government needs to incorporate religious institutions and their policies in disaster management effort in the state in order to enhance qualitative and comprehensive care services.
2. Seventy percent (70%) of Benue State funds allocated to the State Emergency Management Agency for the management of disasters and disaster victims should be given to religious institutions for effective and efficient utilization.
3. Government should provide public enlightenment campaigns, seminars and symposia to sensitize the farmers and herdsmen on the divesting impacts of conflict which oftentimes lead to disaster.
4. Conflict control strategies such as regular meetings and dialogue should be encourage among the farmers and herdsmen by the community leaders to avert conflict.
5. There should be a joint peace and conflict resolution committee made up of the farm communities and herder's constituted by the Government to be reporting the activities of the groups to Government.

Conclusion

Religion plays certain roles in the management of disasters, but the roles played by these religious bodies have been largely unexamined especially in Benue State. This study examines the roles of selected religious institutions in disaster management in Benue State. In doing so, the study examines how these three religious bodies namely, Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions organize care-oriented management and mitigation-oriented management approaches. We have seen the negative impact these disasters have created on people and the environment especially, the agricultural sector in the area which used to be the food basket of the nation. The above recommendations should be taken seriously in order to the damage usually caused by disasters.

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