

POLICY BRIEFING

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Community education for violence prevention, Kaduna

Executive Summary

From May 2008 to November 2009, TFDC in partnership with the University of East Anglia's School of International Development, was involved in designing and implementing a project intended to address some of the most crucial issues of community-level violence in Kaduna, focusing particularly on the relationship of gender identities, religion and violence. The project aimed to support the development of cognitive tools that would help young people reason through future calls to violence and support their peers in doing the same so as to allow them to consider the ramifications of any such call, the advantages and disadvantages to themselves and their communities.*

This was an experimental project incorporating youngsters of both sexes mainly from the Kabala West and Ungwaru Mu'azu neighbourhoods of Kaduna, in a long-term learning process around the most challenging issues they themselves identified in their communities and lives. Additional project participants included adult women from Kabala West and Tudun Wada. For a period varying from six months to a year, weekly educational sessions were carried out in these communities with the support of trained facilitators. As a result, the participants were able to advance considerably in the development of critical thinking and overall life skills. The project culminated in the public performance of a drama in the communities of Kabala West and Ungwaru Mu'azu elaborated by a group of Muslim and Christian youth dealing with some of the crucial issues identified by them in their communities. In each community a formal youth group has now been registered through which the youngsters plan on continuing the project.

The strengths of this project were to allow the youngsters to focus on important social and political issues, including exclusion, sectarianism, parochialism, and related violence. The project employed what has been termed experiential learning – whereby participants learn via a process of (self) discovery (Harris 2007). This is what we attempted to introduce in our education sessions, using methodology developed over many years by Harris and Abah.

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Key results from our research

1. Young people are not the cause of violence but its victims, when they end up as the tools of conflict promoters, *i.e.* elites.
2. Reducing levels of youth engagement in violence demands an analysis of the processes that incorporated them into it, necessitating a multi-pronged approach to tackling the issue. Supporting the development of tools for critical reflection is a vital element in this. Merely finding ways of keeping them occupied is insufficient.
3. The development of such tools is a long-term project within an overall process of building life skills. This is far more valuable for individual youths, their families and communities than simply providing basic vocational training.
4. We need to take into consideration the implications of the fact that the youths engaged in direct violence are almost always male in any project to support peace.

Background

Since the end of military rule in Nigeria in 1999, a number of episodes of rioting have taken place, most in the form of sectarian violence and resulting in high mortality and property destruction levels. Incidents have occurred in a large number of states, including Abia (2003), Adamawa (2003), Akwa-Ikom (2003), Anambra (2007), Bauchi (2009), Benue (2001, 2003), Borno (2009), Gombe (2007), Imo (2003), Jigawa (2003), Kaduna (2000, 2002), Kano (2001, 2004), Katsina (2003, 2007, 2009), Kogi (2003), Oyo (2007), Plateau (2001, 2004, 2008, 2009), Rivers (2003, 2006, 2007), Sokoto (2006), and Taraba (2003). All in all, over 11,000 people are said to have died in Nigeria as a result of communal-level violence in the ten years since the country returned to democratic rule (HRW 2007).

One important contributory factor is the issue of indigeneity. This peculiarly Nigerian institution, whereby the constitution entrenches discrimination against federal citizens designated as non-indigenes of a particular state, deprives Nigerians of a significant number of rights applied at state level, thus producing a two-tiered citizenship.

Historical divides between the Muslim-dominated north and the largely Christian southern regions of the country, as a result of colonial-period organisation and differential treatment, have not been tackled in the post-colonial era, leading to considerable conflict. An unfortunate result is that the main political divisions have centred around patrimonialism rather than political ideas. Sectarian as well as ethnic differences have played a significant role in the violence, which very often breaks down along religious/ethnic lines. The introduction of *sharia* law into the legal/administrative system in the north over the last decade has been responsible for exacerbating violence, especially that of February 2000 in Kaduna. Further outbreaks of sectarian violence occurred in Kaduna in May 2000, and in 2002 (the latter purportedly over the planned holding of the Miss World pageant in Nigeria).

Suggestions have been made that the vast majority of these outbreaks of violence has occurred not spontaneously but rather as a

consequence of deliberate manipulation of already tense situations by elites – mainly political and religious leaders (Astill 2002; HRW 2005; Omeje 2004). The elites themselves have, naturally, never personally participated in the violence. Rather they have encouraged some of the most excluded and disaffected youth to carry out the fighting for them, and to bring in others, using the tactic of pressures towards supporting one's own in the face of resentments that have built up between religious communities. It would appear that the goal of the elite is to foment violence and thus divide the population and focus attention on sectarian and/or ethnic difference rather than on injustices arising from the gulf between rich and poor and the ongoing lack of provision for ordinary citizens.

Despite this, the emphasis in respect of the prevention of violence has been on the young perpetrators, rather than the elite inciters. Therefore, over the last few years, a great deal of attention has been paid both by government and by international entities to ways of discouraging youth from participation in communal violence.

The perpetrators

Most violence in Nigeria is carried out by youths; it is said that these are either unemployed or school dropouts. Something that seems to be taken for granted is that they are almost always male. There have been virtually no cases noted of women or girls actively participating in such violence, even if they may give logistical support or support their menfolk's fighting. Several points arise from this:

- If those caught up in the violence are almost all unemployed, why do women not go out to fight, because more women are unemployed than men?
- Why do women enrol and fight in the Nigerian army but hardly engage in this sort of communal conflict?
- There is a general belief that women are naturally peaceful, while men are by nature aggressive. However, the fact that some women do fight and many men are peaceful, suggests this is a learned rather than 'natural' condition.

One reason for this may be that male youth neither employed nor in education have less to occupy them than any other sector of the community. The gender division of labour suggests that men's duties fall outside the home and that therefore they should not engage in domestic duties. It is considered demeaning for them to do housework or even to spend too much time at home. Women, on the other hand, are expected to dedicate themselves largely to domestic duties, so they both have little direct exposure to political rhetoric and are too busy to pay much attention to it. They can fulfil their assigned roles in the community merely by carrying out their domestic and reproductive roles.

With men, however, it is a very different issue. In virtually all Nigerian cultural groups, men are conceptualised in two important ways that support their insertion into violence. The first is as breadwinners, economic supporters of their families and the second is as protectors of families and communities, with bravery forming a significant part of their identity.

Many young men are unable to live up to the first one, something that effectively prevents their marrying and starting a family and thereby progressing to full adulthood. It also makes it difficult for them to find partners, since women prefer older men who can support them financially.

Young men's economic problems are closely connected with education and employment opportunities. For the majority of young men in the poorer families in Kaduna, the gaining of an education in the first place is difficult. For a large number it will never be possible even to complete high school, let alone proceed to tertiary education. Moreover, even those in possession of a bachelor's degree today may well be unable to find employment commensurate with their qualifications. This is particularly true for those who have studied the less immediately practical subjects. Thus, both skilled and unskilled young men may find themselves unemployed or under-employed, and therefore unable to meet social expectations of providing for a family.

It is more frustrating for a young man to be unemployed than a young woman of the same age and education level, simply because the

latter will not have the same weight of expectations on her. As a result, the possibility of gaining approbation through their household-related labour puts women in a situation where while perhaps personally frustrated at their lack of employment opportunities and suffering from financial problems, they are unlikely to be socially derided for their inability to earn money. This is very different for men, who are expected to hold a job commensurate with their social position and qualifications. Failure to do this increases their vulnerability to pressures to live up to the second aspects of manhood mentioned above - showing bravery and an ability to protect their own. Even when faced with a minor incident, such as a traffic accident, such men may find it especially difficult to ignore calls to support their own community/sect/tribe through violence.

There are widespread rumours in Nigeria that riots are started by elites paying certain young men, generally gang members, small amounts of cash and/or drugs to initiate violence and incite others into joining in. The easiest way to do this is through pressures relating to the manly traits of bravery and protection. This is especially so for conflicts on the grounds of religion or ethnicity, since these are ascribed groups to which people owe their identities and thus their primary loyalty. In such a situation men who refuse to fight virtually negate such identities, and such a refusal is likely to be met with accusations of cowardice that could result in social or even physical death. Once more, women's place is at home, not on the battlefield, so such pressures will not be brought to bear on them, even though they may be expected to give emotional support to their menfolk's participation in violence.

While it is widely held that the majority of rioters are social outcasts, no research has been done to discover if this is indeed the case. It has been suggested that more educated young men unable to find appropriate employment also resort to violence or even to drugs. It seems to be even more dispiriting, even more a loss of status, for a man with a university education to be unable to find employment at the level for which he is qualified than for someone who did not complete high school and who struggles to earn a little money through menial labour and carrying out odd jobs. Special attention, therefore, needs to be paid to the links between

education, employment and violence.

It is also crucial also to examine further the relationship of manhood to violence in order to be able to move beyond the current situation to explore avenues for change. This means in the first place that it is necessary to accept that gender divisions are not innate but socio-politically constructed. In other words, it is not nature but nurture that keeps women in the home and men in the streets, and insists that men bear the sole financial responsibility for their families, while women are solely responsible for household labour and childrearing. Neither is it nature that makes young men engage so easily in fighting and aggression. This suggests it should be possible to tackle this issue through producing changes in male gender identities that would support a reduction in such types of behaviour.

Vocational training

The major solution currently proposed both by the government and by international agencies has been to try to get the young men off the streets, generally by giving them some form of basic vocational training. The idea is that this will give them a trade, which will then allow them to spend their time productively earning a living. In theory this sounds like an excellent solution. However, this raises a number of questions:

- Is the training offered adequate for the youngsters to be immediately employable?
- Are sufficient distinct kinds of trades taught so these youngsters will not all be competing with one another in only a couple of areas?
- Has a carefully researched study of market opportunities been carried out to ensure that the skills the youngsters learn will fill a real need and not end up competing with the Asian imports that have flooded Nigeria?
- Beyond vocational skills, do these schools help young people overcome the limitations of their lack of connections to find them employment or alternatively provide capital and commercial skills so they can start their own businesses?
- What about participants who already have a university degree but who find that the number of graduates now far

outstrips available employment opportunities and/or that their university course has not prepared them for the current job market?

In other words, no meaningful reduction in the numbers of unemployed young men can be expected without a well-thought out strategy. One solution would be to provide incentives to elites to develop more enterprises in which both the skilled and the unskilled could find jobs.



Experiential learning

Our project tried a different approach to reducing the potential for youth violence. We aimed less to equip our participants with instrumental skills than to support the development of cognitive tools that would help them reason through future calls to violence of any kind and also to support their peers in doing the same so as to allow them to consider the ramifications of any such call, the advantages and disadvantages to themselves and their communities.

In particular, we hoped to help the young men understand the dangers of succumbing to appeals to participate in violence couched in terms of pressures around their manhood. We wanted to allow them to rethink notions of manhood such that they would accept that resisting calls to violence was far braver than fighting. Eventually, the idea was to see how to move beyond the small group of some 40 youths who had worked directly with the project to influence others in their neighbourhoods to participate in the overall project of violence reduction. It was clear that only by incorporating the largest possible numbers could the youth collectively learn to resist the kinds of pressures brought to bear at times of serious episodes of violence.

The project activities consisted of weekly educational sessions carried out on the basis of curricula drawn up by the youth themselves and with the support of trained facilitators. These sessions aimed at advancing the critical thinking and overall life skills of the participants. Among the issues raised were questions of why the poor should work for the benefit of the elite with no or minimal wages. It was said that this was what had happened during the riots of 2000 and 2002, when the poor had played a major role in the destruction of their own people and communities, with the chief winners being members of the elite, including those whose building firms received lucrative reconstruction contracts as well those who obtained political goods.



It was collectively decided that the most efficacious way of spreading the project's influence beyond the direct participants to others in the community was through the public performance of drama. To this end over a period of several months in mid 2009 the youth groups performed street theatre in their own communities of Kabala West and Ungwaru Mu'azu. The dramas were developed by the youngsters themselves and dealt with some of the most crucial social issues identified by them as affecting their communities. After each performance the audiences were included as active participants in discussing the issues raised and working through possible solutions.



Project achievements

Since this project is about producing social change through learning new ways of reflecting about the world, it will inevitably take time to produce its full impact. However, some results are already visible:

1. The young people are now engaged on the task of improving their own lives and have also decided to help fellow community members unable to participate directly in the project.
2. This work has expanded beyond the youth groups with whom we worked to reach into their communities in several ways:
 - 2.1. Through the dramas discussed above, which represented types of violence occurring in the communities and other major social issues that often lead to violence.
 - 2.2. By embedding the dramas in a process of community development using techniques associated with *Theatre for development* work. This approach, elaborated by the late Augusto Boal in his work the *Theatre of the Oppressed*, was based on the well-known teaching principles of his friend and colleague, Paulo Freire, as laid out in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Boal's work has formed the basis of theatre for development ever since. It provides a number of techniques that can be used to incorporate audiences into theatrical experiences so that community discussions based on dramas they have watched can help develop new insights into how to tackle the issues presented in their own lives.
3. With the support of the project and the Theatre for Development Centre (TFDC), the young people have formed their own officially registered civic organisations through which they intend to continue with development activities for themselves and into which they will incorporate other young people from their communities.
4. The education sessions have now brought together young men, who hitherto considered themselves enemies, from neighbouring Christian and Muslim communities, and helped them establish camaraderie, if not actual friendship. The elders of their communities are supportive of these initiatives and TFDC will continue their contact with them after the project ends.

Conclusion and recommendations

Scaling up this kind of intervention to more sites in Kaduna City, State and elsewhere in Nigeria could be a useful step in the reduction of episodes of violence that regularly plague the country. TFDC is a useful resource organization that could offer training to other organisations in developing similar interventions and/or to collaborate in implementing them. We also suggest that it would help to train school teachers in the use of experiential learning techniques to help more youngsters gain critical reflection skills.

It is clear that this is only one part of what is needed in order to stop future occurrences of rioting and killing. Other issues need to be addressed through the political process such as entrenching a democratic system of governance that would make greater efforts to create meaningful employment opportunities not dependent on patronage. While Kaduna State has taken steps in the right direction by issuing a White Paper outlining some of these issues as causes of the violence and has since instituted peace making mechanisms, such as Muslim-Christian dialogues (OMCT 2002: 135ff), considerably more still needs to be done in this respect.

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Further information

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For further information on the Kaduna research project visit <http://www.uea.ac.uk/dev/kaduna>