

4

Conflict Escalation and the Effects of Conflict: The Case of Mikang Local Government Area, Plateau State

LUKA DINSHAK

The period between 2002 and 2004 will go down in the history of the southern zone of Plateau State as a time when a most vicious assault was unleashed on the hitherto simmering cauldron that had become of the area called The Lowlands, leaving in its trail charred bodies, burnt houses, deserted settlements and chasm in relationships between communities and individual that will take effort, time and resources to mend.

Before 2004, there had been attacks and counter-attacks between Christians and Muslims in Langtang North and Langtang South from 2002 to 2003 which appeared to have been limited mainly to the Taroh who are generally Christians and the Hausa-Fulani who are generally Muslims. Ownership of Wase and cattle rustling by both sides seem to have seen the dominant factors. Religion did not appear to be at the root of the conflict at the time. Nevertheless, it manifested as soon as the conflict started. This is not surprising as almost any issue in Nigeria and especially in the

northern parts of the country can turn religious because of the role it plays in mobilising and galvanising its adherents to prosecute any cause that can be linked whether to the defence of its precepts against attacks (within the same religion or without) or the advancement of its interests. It has been pointed out that this role of religion has become the bait that politicians use to garner support for their selfish ambitions even if it results in the destruction of lives and property.¹

Although these earlier conflicts did not attract any widespread response in the zone by either party, it nevertheless sent ripples across the area that latter metamorphosed into waves of violence by 2004, when the prominence of religion had become quite evident by the way and manner in which they were carried out: members of the same ethnic identity in the same community and even families turned against one another under the banner of their religions. A community leader in Mikang Local Government Area puts it this way:

We initially thought that it was just an affair of the Taroh people and the Hausa/Fulani which did not interest us not knowing that these people (Muslims) wanted to finish us.

This turn in perception of the conflict came about through a series of attacks in the Yelwa town of Shendam Local Government beginning on 24 February 2004. The particular incident that sent signals to the Christians in the zone and beyond happened when a group of armed Muslims attacked and killed over 70 Christians who had gathered for morning prayers in a church.² This attack itself may not be unconnected with an earlier incident way back in 2002 when a PDP ward congress ended in a fracas because the two candidates and their supporters pitched their tents on the basis of religion. When the Christian camp saw that the Muslim candidate would likely win as the vote counting proceeded, they disrupted the process, making the outcome inconclusive. Many people lost their lives in the event. This did not go down well with the Muslims and the animosity between them built up until it became manifest in the February 24 attack.

Between 24 February and 2 May, there were sporadic attacks both in Yelwa and other settlements in the southern zone that further defined the differences between the faithful of the two religions, increasing the tension in the area and affecting all facets of human endeavour. There were very low economic activities because many markets were closed for some time, civil servants hardly went to work because it was not safe to move about.

Some schools closed for weeks and even months, like the Plateau State College of Agriculture, Garkawa. Agriculture suffered serious setbacks as farmers could not go to the fields. This trend continued until the end of May 2004 when there was an attack on Yelwa which was unprecedented both in the number of militias involved and the casualties. Yelwa was sacked. The main target of the attackers were the Muslims and there are claims of about 660 Muslims killed.² Following this, virtually every other settlement that had a mixed Christian and Muslim population such as Zomo and Pyapung in Mikang Local Government Area were affected as the Muslims fled to neighbouring towns like Lafia, Nasarawa, Bauchi and faraway Kano. Their choice of these places underscore the religious tone in the conflict as they considered that they were safer in predominantly Muslim settlements than any of the towns in Plateau State, widening further the boundaries of the conflict which soon echoed in reprisal attacks in Kano on 11-12 May 2004 when over 200 Christians were killed and 24 churches were burnt according to the claims of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Kano.³

An additional dimension to the May 2004 attack in Yelwa was the abduction of hundreds of women and children by militias who took them to different locations in the zone and subjected them to various forms of abuse, ranging from forced labour, child labour, torture and rape leaving their victims deeply traumatised especially that there were widows and fatherless children among them who had actually seen their husbands and parents brutally killed.

It is obvious from the foregoing that political, economic and social considerations were at the root of these conflicts, which found expression in religion giving it such potency that made waste many settlements in the zone with deep and far-reaching implications on men, and especially women and children. More men were killed than women and children, yet, these last two bore the brunt of the conflict being the weak and vulnerable in all wars.

In November 2005, another crisis was added to the conflict scene in the southern zone when the Goemai and Pan people in Quan Pan Local Government Area were locked in a duel over the ownership of Namu which continued to April 2006. This spilled over to the neighbouring Shendam Local Government Area with implications on the other Local Government Areas and beyond as displaced persons of various origins relocated to their home towns or other places as IDPs such as those that camped in Tunkus Headquarters of Mikang Local Government Area.⁴

Objectives of the Chapter

This chapter will focus on Mikang Local Government and will answer the following questions:

- (a) What were the causes of the conflict in Mikang Local Government Area?
- (b) How did the conflict affect men and especially the women and children?
- (c) What are the effects of the conflict on the various institutions?
- (d) What were the effects of the conflict on the communities in the Local Government?
- (e) What intervention strategies can be introduced as peacebuilding mechanisms in the zone that will also empower weak and vulnerable groups in the communities?

Methodology

This research is a product of a field research conducted at Mikang LGA in January 2007. It used the following methods of data collection.

- (a) Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) for information on institutions, infrastructures and occupations.
- (b) Observation of daily events and occurrences including markets in the area under study.
- (c) Informal discussions with motorcyclists, security personnel and friends.
- (d) In-depth interviews with traditional rulers and community leaders.
- (e) Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with men, women and youths.

Profile of Mikang LGA

Mikang Local Government Area was carved out of the former Shendam Local Government Area in 1996. It has a land area of about 620 sq km and it shares boundaries with Pankshin to the North, Shendam to the south and Langtang to the west. It is one of the three Local Governments in the state that do not share a border with any neighbouring state. There are four indigenous ethnic groups in Mikang, namely Tehl, Pyapung, Youm and Koenoem with Tunkus, Lalin, Pyapung Zomo and Garkawa as the major settlements. The vegetation is guinea savannah with a tropical climate that is hot and humid in the dry season and humid in the rainy season. The economy is largely agrarian like most rural Nigerian

communities with such farm produce as rice, yam, sorghum, locust beans, groundnuts, bambara nuts and beans. They also raise cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and fowls all of which are usually sold in the local markets on their days.⁵

The Conflict Flashpoints of Mikang LGA

The conflict flashpoints in order of their extent and impact are Garkawa, Zomo, Lalin, Tunkus and Pyapung.

Garkawa

Garkawa is the largest settlement in Mikang LGA. Its market day is on Tuesdays, and it attracts more people than the other markets in the Local Government. It is the indigenous home of the Youm people whose paramount ruler is called *Moyoum*. It is accessible via a trunk A road from Langtang or Shendam. There is no available census figure for Garkawa but the number of registered voters for the 2003 general elections was 7,148.

Before the 2004 crisis, Garkawa had a large Muslim population that occupied about a quarter of the total residential area. It is difficult to say at the time of this research what the structure of the settlement was because much of it was reduced to rubbles during the conflict and the three rainy seasons that had visited it since have further made traces of the pattern of buildings difficult. In fact, some of these have been turned to farmlands. But going by the account of Mandiak Deagaen, a Youm indigene in Garkawa who took this researcher to the site, they lived in a cluster with households having an average of about 10 persons. There is also a considerable population of the Taroh in Zimakwe on the outskirts of Garkawa towards Zamko in Langtang Local Government Area where they actually have a *Sarkin Yergam* (Chief of Taroh) appointed on their request by the Moyoum. They are also in Garkawa Central along with other ethnic groups such as Mwaghavul, Gaemai, Yoruba, Igbo, just to mention a few. The Fulani people had their dwellings outside the town. The Youm, the Hausa and the Taroh are the major actors in the conflict in Garkawa.

It will be necessary to pay more attention to Garkawa because it was the scene of the most destructive conflict. It was ironically the one that made the most effort toward dialogue to avoid a violent outbreak of the conflict and also the one that has made post-conflict moves towards peacebuilding.

Garkawa has 10 primary schools (one of which has been turned into a child friendly school as a result of an intervention by the Japanese Government, which constructed and equipped 2 classroom blocks and toilets in 2006) ³ and 2 secondary schools. The Plateau State College of Agriculture is also located in Garkawa. It also has a primary health-care clinic and access to the nearby Jos University Teaching Hospital Comprehensive Health Centre in Zamko. It has five (5) boreholes located in various places, four (4) of which are functional.

Garkawa Town has very poor means of communication and access to information because television signals are not available there. Network services can be connected only at some few locations and newspapers do not reach the town such that knowledge of things happening outside their immediate environment and the ability to communicate with others is limited. The source of electricity is the national grid which supplies electric power on an average of about 2 hours daily. This researcher can testify to this.

According to the Moyoum, the indigenous name for Garkawa is Hilyoum, but the Hausa people who came later gave it the name Garkuwa because they were not able to conquer it to find access to Shendam. In latter years, Garkuwa somehow began to be called Garkawa which is its present name.⁷

Before the conflict, Muslims and Christians were living together and conducting business with one another peacefully. The Youm people's main occupation is farming while the Muslims dominated the commerce and the transport sector. However, some of the Muslims cultivate the fadama area. Of the six (6) rice mills in the town, one belongs to an Igboman, two (2) to a Youm, and three (3) were owned by a Hausaman, who also had a tractor, a tipper truck, two (2) MAN trucks, a Peugeot car and a Mercedes Benz car.

The Muslim Hausa women generally engaged in petty household work while others made kulikuli (groundnut cake) and groundnut oil, kosai (beans cake) and the like. The Youm women however did much of the labour of this work for a fee. The children of the Youm also went to the houses of the Muslim Hausa to work for them in exchange for food and money.

The Beginning and the Dynamics of the Conflict in Garkawa

Not much of the cause of the crisis in Garkawa can be explained within

Garkawa itself. The basics of the conflict must be linked to the general conflict situation in the southern zone at that time.

Garkawa no doubt had its own conflicts as may be deduced in the economic disparities mentioned earlier, which also had social implications on the indigenous Youm people, especially as the women and children played more or less the roles of servants to the Hausa women resulting in low self-esteem, while the men smack under what was to them a yoke they looked forward to be free from. Although these resentments were there, the situation might not have led to a communal violence of the scale that was witnessed in 2004 or even if it did, it would have taken a longer time to come.

As noted earlier, the attacks and counter-attacks between the Taroh and Hausa-Fulani in Langtang and Wase were initially considered by the other ethnic groups in the zone as an issue that did not concern them. When the Taroh had been expelled from Wase and the Hausa-Fulani sent packing from Langtang with the attendant deepening of acrimonies as the demonisation of both sides increased, the Taroh felt threatened by the presence of the Hausa-Fulani in the neighbouring communities including Garkawa. Speaking of the Taroh a prominent Youm elder and leader said that:

They continued to accuse us of harbouring their enemies. They put pressure on us to expel them but we did not succumb. We went to the Ponzhi Taroh a number of times on this matter assuring him that nothing would happen.

According to the elder, there was an allegation by the Taroh that there were fifteen (15) mercenaries from Niger Republic in Garkawa. A search team of the youths and the police could not substantiate this but because of the pressure, the *Moyoum* called the Fulani and Hausa leaders and assured them that his people would not harm them. Nevertheless they should leave Garkawa to safer places outside the state and come back when peace had returned. The Fulani complied but the Hausa people refused, insisting that Garkawa was their home. The *Moyoum* went to the Izala mosque during one of their morning prayers on this count but it yielded no positive results.

As news of these dialogues diffused in the community, the Youm youths began to be agitated. Within this period, there were attacks on villages in neighbouring Langtang South LGA and on the Yelwa end, increasing the tide in tension between Christians and Muslims.

There was a strong suspicion at the time that some of the Muslim Hausa were using Garkawa as a base: that they would leave the town occasionally to join their kith and kin to fight against Christians in such campaigns. There was also a very strong suspicion that the Muslims in Garkawa were preparing for an attack on the indigenous Christians. It was rumoured that a prominent Garkawa indigenous Muslim had been ordained in Wase, a key muslim emirate centre in the Southern zone, as *Moyoum* of Garkawa to replace the present *Moyoum* who is a Christian when they might have overran the town.

There was also the rumour that this attack was going to be on Sunday, 22 February 2004 by 10.00 a.m. when the Christians would have gone to church. On the strength of this, church services were held earlier than usual so that by 10.00 a.m. that day Christians had returned to their houses. As this was going on, according to a Youm youth, the youths went to the *Moyoum* three times requesting him for permission to attack the "Bakwa" (meaning Muslim Hausa) but he refused.

On Tuesday 24 February 2004 the *Moyoum* sent for the *Sarkin Hausawa* (leader of the Hausa) and told him to persuade his people to temporarily leave the town to avoid any ugly incident. According to the *Moyoum*:

He (the *Sarkin Hausawa*) left and came back and told me that, *Ran kashi dade sun ki* (meaning your highness they refused) saying that they would rather die in Garkawa because they had nowhere else to go to and he departed leaving no room for further dialogue.¹⁰

That same day Muslims attacked and killed over 70 people in a church in Yelwa and the news spread.¹¹ Again, there was a rumour that Christians in Garkawa would be attacked the following Sunday.

On Wednesday, 25, houses of Muslims in Tunkus (the Mikang Local Government Headquarters) and Lalin were set ablaze while the Muslims fled and a number of them were killed. News of these reached Garkawa and by 6.00 a.m. on Thursday 26, gun shots began to ring in the air. While Muslims claim that it was Christians that first began to shoot, Christians accuse the Muslims. A Muslim witness said that:

Early in the morning, they set fire to our sugarcane farms, then they started shooting and killing our people and burning our houses.¹¹

A Christian witness on the other hand said that:

In the morning, they started shooting in the air thinking they would scare us away but we did not go anywhere. I saw the man who was

shooting and I know him. He continued shooting intermittently until midday, but our people did not shoot. But when Muslim youths began to burn the houses of our people that were close to their houses, then we began to respond.¹²

Immediately violence broke out, the *Moyoum* said that he went to the police station and told them to go to Yelwa and report so that security forces would be sent but they said they had no car. He then offered his car but they said they had no driver. At that point he said he decided to drive to Yelwa by himself before two policemen joined him. However, by the time he returned with soldiers, the houses of all the Muslims and a few of the Christians had been burnt and many Muslims killed.¹¹

One Muslim witness claimed that from their investigation after the violence, over 300 people mostly men were killed. One Christian witness said he saw five(5) dead bodies. Another one said that the Muslims' claim of 300 may be correct. This researcher could not obtain exact figures of the casualty but it was much higher than the number of all the dead put together in the other four settlements in Mikang which were not more than 17 for Tunkus Lalin and Pyapung and between 31 and 37 dead for Zomo. Very few Muslim men in Garkawa escaped the violence. This researcher was told that even those who ran to churches and claimed that they wanted to become Christians were killed. This was unlike in Tunkus where five(5) Muslims that decided to be Christians were spared.

Women and children were not the target of attack. They were allowed safe passage to the police station although one Muslim witness claimed that he was at the police station on that day, having escaped with a gunshot on his buttock when he saw two women shot dead. The *Moyoum* however said that the only female dead he heard of was that of a woman whose husband was about to be killed and she would not let him alone so that both of them were killed.

One witness said that two Muslim men Mallam Danjuma an Arabic teacher and Mallam Saadu a local manicurist were killed by the police and their bodies burnt by the roadside near the police station. When asked whether he saw this happen he said he was told but that he only saw the burnt bodies. The witness that testified to seeing two women killed at the police station by militias denied seeing policemen shooting anyone but that he also heard the story. The credibility of this account is therefore questionable.

When asked whether there was any special care rendered to the elderly, a Youm youth responded that there was no difference shown to any man

apart from women and children.

During a Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with 5 Christian women, one of them confirmed that she supported the men by mobilising women to prepare food for the men that were fighting because many of them were from outside Garkawa. This researcher confirmed the participation of other people outside from other sources. The Christians also claimed that many of those killed were not people living in Garkawa. All Christians interviewed said that not a single Christian was killed. The outgoing pastor of COCIN Rev. Monday Maqwin confirmed this and attributed it to divine intervention as he believed that *"It was God that fought for His people."*¹³

Others claimed that the Muslims had large ammunition but they did not know how to use them and that was why they were overpowered by the Christians. A youth leader at the time however said that although the Christians in Garkawa were poorly armed, militants that came from outside and join forces with them had kalashnikovs, Mag 4 and a machine gun stationed at a strategic location.

An isolated but significant incident occurred on the day of the "pogrom" when a veterinary doctor with the College of Agriculture, Garkawa Dr. Hamza was rescued from his assailants by Sylvanus Umaru a tractor driver who was a Christian from Mangu Local Government and kept him in his house until the soldiers arrived. When asked why he took such a risk, Sylvanus said that

We have been together since in Lafia and Dr. Hamza has been relating very well with us. He never showed any difference in relating to us on the basis of his religion or position.¹⁴

In an interview with Dr. Hamza, this researcher got the impression that he was a man of deep religious convictions, but he nevertheless related very well with those around him without compromising his faith. Dr. Hamza believed in dialogue as he attributed the resort to violence as a consequence of polarisation in the leadership of the two religions leading to the failure of the peace process earlier embarked upon by the *Moyoum*.

From the above incidence it is clear that building good interpersonal relationships can transcend even differences between and among people of diverse value systems so that they can co-exist peacefully. But it will take enlightenment campaigns and training in peacebuilding techniques to achieve a success in this.

As earlier stated, the courses and dynamics of the conflict in Garkawa were both internal and external, yet in the end it was the failure within

that opened the door to outside forces, which ushered in the catastrophe that earned it a place of dishonour on the conflict map of Plateau State. Before delving further into the impact of the conflict, it will be necessary to highlight the conflict in the other flashpoints in Mikang.

Tunkus Flashpoint

Tunkus is the headquarters of Mikang Local Government Area. It is the bigger of the two settlements of the Montol or Tehl people, the other being Lalin. The *Long Tehl* is the paramount ruler and also the chairman of the local government Traditional Council. Tunkus is linked to Langtang and Shendam through an untarred road. The road which was under construction by the Federal Government was abandoned because of lack of funds according to the *Long Tehl*. There is no electricity supply in Tunkus and the major source of water are wells. There are 4 hand-pump boreholes set up by the government but only one was functional at the time of this research. Being the local government headquarters, there is a divisional police office in Tunkus and a chief magistrate court. The SSS office is also located there.

The resentment that the Garkawa people had for the Muslim Hausa due to a perceived contempt was similar throughout Mikang. Tunkus therefore had this at the background but not in the degree obtained in Garkawa. The Muslim Hausa also had control over commerce while the indigenes are mainly farmers. Much of the havoc done in Tunkus was the work of militias from outside that invaded the town with the collaboration of a few people within in the wake of the killing of Christians in Yelwa on Tuesday, 24 February 2004. Wednesday 25 was market day in Tunkus and people came to the market but there was an air of uneasiness because of the news of the previous day. Tension began to build up and the market was deserted earlier than usual. Those who came from outside Tunkus travelled back with their wares.

Between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m., the houses of the Muslims were torched as they fled the town. An opinion leader and politician in Tunkus, one Ponkap Daniel described the invaders as looters because he observed that they were only using religion and ethnicity as a guise for robbery. He narrated how he stood by his friend's house, a Muslim who had fled and defended it against the marauders even though it was later burnt after he had left. When asked how many people were killed in the incident he denied knowledge of any killings. But one Hamza Bello, a 25-year old man testified

that four (4) Muslims were killed including his father Bako Ahmadu who was the *Sarkin Hausawa* (Leader of Hausa people). The other three were Mai Shaiyi, Dan Bala and one Ayuba.

Hamza Bala estimated that the Muslims in Tunkus before the crisis comprised about 50 households. To prove the point that the Muslim and Christians in Tunkus did not have such antagonistic relationship that could have led to the incident of Wednesday, 25 February, Ponkat said that he visited his friend in the camp in Bauchi and stayed with him for 2 days without fear of molestation.

Lalin Flashpoint

Lalin which is the second Montol settlement is about 6 km from Tunkus on the same untarred road. It has no electricity supply but there are two hand-pump boreholes for their water supply besides a nearby stream.

On Wednesday, 25 February 2004 at about 8.00 p.m., the houses of Muslims were torched as they fled Lalin. This was barely 2 hours after the conflict in nearby Tunkus. The trigger according to an elder and member of the ruling family of Lalin, was the arrival of those that had escaped the onslaught in Yelwa in addition to the tension around. It seems to this researcher that the return of those that came from Yelwa could not alone have caused an immediate response but the fact that Tunkus was on fire was the impetus for the attack.

In a discussion with 2 Muslim men who returned, they claimed that a total of 7 men were killed in the attack. When asked whether there had been any problem between the indigenes and the Hausa, the Montol elder simply answered "*Akwai raini*" in Hausa, implying that they were held in contempt by the Hausa people. He said further:

There is a slaughter slap and they will not allow anybody to slaughter animals there except themselves. This is why after they had gone, our people slaughtered not only cows and goats there but also pigs and dogs.¹⁵

He also said that because they did not have money, the Muslim Hausa controlled the market, which did not go down well with the people.

Zomo Flashpoint

The violence that rocked Garkawa, Tunkus and Latin which was related to the February attack on Yelwa spared Zomo and Pyapung to the extent that these settlements were not attacked. But according to a Fulani leader

Chindo Madaki, their cattle were being stolen and when they reported to the police, they told them they could not help them because they were poorly armed. Based on this, they left Zomo to places like Bauchi, Lafia and Yelwa for safety. About that time too, some Hausa people decided to go to these same places, but the rest of them remained.

Zomo is a small settlement a few kilometres from Shendam on the road to Jos. The Khoenoem ethnic group are the indigenes of the area. The ward head of Zomo Balwai J. Longkam while narrating how they were caught up in the conflict stated that they were living together peacefully when in the aftermath of the attack on Yelwa on May 1 and 2, 2004 news came to them in the afternoon of May 2 that armed militias had been sighted coming from the direction of Yelwa and heading towards Zomo. This immediately gave rise to tension as everyone was apprehensive. By 10.00 p.m., shots were heard in the vicinity and both Christians and Muslims began to flee because it was not immediately clear whether it was Christians/non-Muslims or Muslim militias. But the invaders set only Muslims houses ablaze making it clear that they were not Muslims and either some of them were from Zomo or they met people that cooperated with them in identifying the houses and members of the two religions.

Apart from burning of houses, Muslim witnesses claimed that between 30 and 37 Muslims were killed in Zomo. Those who escaped ended up as IDPs in Bauchi and Lafia.

Pyapung Flashpoint

Pyapung is both the name and ethnic group so called. They are the most disadvantaged in terms of access by road. It is worse during the raining season. They also do not have connection to electricity. However, they have 2 boreholes and wells.

When Yelwa was attacked on 24 February 2004 with the attendant backlash in Garkawa, Tunkus and Lalin, the Muslim population in Pyapung attempted to leave but the *Long Pyapung* (traditional ruler of Pyapung) persuaded them not to. Some went ahead and left but others remained. Like Zomo, the Muslims, most of those who were indigenes of Pyapung had lived together with the Christians and traditional worshippers in peace for years.

According to the Secretary of the Pyapung Development Association Daniel Tenbwet, after the attack on Yelwa on 1 and 2 May 2004, Pyapung was suddenly attacked and the few Muslims that were left fled the town and their houses were burnt. Tenbwet said that the citizens of Pyapung

did not know which group was attacking so both Christians and Muslims fled including his family. When asked how the Christians who fled eventually knew that they were not the targets of the militias, he said:

We heard the sound of "Dodo" (masquerades) and we knew that the attackers were not Muslims so we returned to our houses.¹⁶

Of the houses of Muslims, only about 2 were not burnt as observed by this researcher on a guided tour of Pyapung; but they were vandalised. From the narrative, it would appear that the group that attacked Zomo was the same that proceeded to Pyapung and wreaked the havoc. Mohammed Sani Myenbal, the Imam of the few Muslims that have returned, said the number of Muslims killed were six.

Abductions

Following the attack on Yelwa on 1 and 2 May 2004, there were claims by the Muslim community in Yelwa of abduction of women and children by the militias. The militias which were said to have come from various places including Mikang were said to have carried the abductees to their homes. This researcher asked the *Moyoum* of Garkawa whether there were any such cases in his domain and he answered in the affirmative:

Some women and children were brought to Garkawa at that time. I was able to secure the release of over 30 women found among those dwelling in the outskirts of Garkawa, but in Garkawa town, we found only 2 women. I arranged for their transportation back to Yelwa. 4 boys were also sent to me whom I handed over to a DSP (Deputy Superintendent of Police) who came with a councilor from Yelwa. An officer of the soldier sent to Garkawa also found a boy alone in Garkawa crying who was brought to me and I as well sent him to Yelwa.¹⁷

When this researcher asked the *Long Tehl*, chairman of the Traditional Council of Mikang Local Government and the Chief of the Montol ethnic community, he admitted that there were a few cases of women brought to his domain but added:

Not all those that were categorized as abductees were so because some of those women or children followed the people who carried them for their own safety which are things that usually happen in war time.¹⁸

IDPs in Tunkus

There were violent conflicts in Namu, a town in Qua'an Pan Local

Government of Plateau State between November 2005 and May 2006. The conflict which was mainly ethnic was between the Pan and Goemai ethnic groups. The Pan sacked the Goemai whose principal settlement is Shendam. There were reprisal attacks on the Pan residents in Shendam and those of them who dwelt in villages that were on the boundary with Mikang fled into Tunkus. These were mostly women and children. They were over 100 and they were received by the Local Government and camped for 2 weeks. Arrangement was made by the local government and they were transported back to Quan Pan, their local government of origin. Although local government officials claimed that they just decided to convey them to their home local government, another source told this researcher that they did so as a result of a threat from the Goemai that if they continued to harbour their enemies, they were doing so at their own risk.

Security Personnel and the Conflict

The military and the Mobile Police came into Mikang in the wake of the conflicts in February 2004 and have remained up to the time of the research. They are presently only in Garkawa at both ends of the town and they are not more than six personnel at any particular time. This researcher could not get the number of securitymen engaged at the beginning except that they were all over the conflict points in the local government.

The *Moyoum* was impressed with their service in Garkawa and about the time that a larger number of them were to be redeployed, he slaughtered a cow for them as a mark of appreciation in addition to the goats that he used to give them from time to time.

An information officer at the local government headquarters said that the soldiers were particularly ruthless at the beginning but became more accommodating as the conflict tempo slowed down. He said also that the present complaint is from motorists and motorcyclists who charge them with extortion of money at checkpoints, a complaint which this researcher also confirmed from a motorist and is himself a witness.

The relationship between the security personnel and the female gender is negative and positive. This researcher was told from the local government Information Officer that in 2004 in Tunkus, a soldier killed himself and his colleague over a girl. Other sources confirmed this incident. In Zomo, a soldier impregnated a girl but since she was known to be wayward, it did not become a case. But a mobile policeman and a soldier formally took wives with full parental consent during their service in the

period of the crisis, according to the Ward Head Mr. Balwai Longham.

Understanding the Concept of Human Rights

Respondents generally demonstrated their ignorance of the concept of human rights. Altine Bakoji in Garkawa simply understood human rights in terms of peaceful co-existence. As long as people were living together in peace everybody has his rights. Hamza Bello of Tunkus saw human rights only in terms of access to medical facilities when he is not well. When this researcher asked him further whether he knew he had a right to his life and to reside in any part of the country and practise any religion of his choice, he answered in the affirmative. This shows that there is ignorance and lack of a proper and adequate realisation of issues of human rights. This is not on the part of one group only but both Muslim/settlers and the non-Muslim/indigenes. The present situation is one where the non-Muslim indigenes feel that they are the owners of the land, giving the impression that they have special rights in it. This is unhealthy.

First, such an attitude will induce apathy in those that are returning which will inhibit their potentials as individuals and as a group for full development. Secondly, it will lead to apathy on the part of the non-indigenes for communal responsibilities since they do not appear to have any real stake in the community. This will place serious limitations on their contributions to the development of the community. Thirdly, such a relationship weakens community cohesion due to poor interpersonal and group interaction, creating a polarity that can become a faultline whenever there is tension which can easily lead to conflict.

Efforts Made Towards Peace

At the peak of the crisis in the southern zone of Plateau state and especially when there were reprisal attacks following the killing of mainly Muslims in Yelwa in May, President Olusegun Obasanjo declared a State of Emergency in the state and appointed Major-General Chris Ali as Administrator.

The immediate result of this act was the retardation of the conflict and the process of peace began. This was so because the Administrator was seen as a neutral umpire unlike the civilian Governor who was seen as partisan. But before the declaration of the State Emergency, the Governor went on a tour of neighbouring states like Bauchi, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Kano to thank the government and people for accommodating the

displaced persons in their states assuring them that everything would be done to see to their return and rehabilitation. This was also to stem further acts of revenge from such quarters. On his entourage were senior government officials and traditional rulers.

On assumption of office, Major -General Alli set up a peace and reconciliation commission towards restoring peace in the conflict areas. At the local government level, delegates were sent to the IDPs to commiserate with them and encourage them to return in accordance with the declaration by the administrator to that effect. In Mikang local government area, the Moyoum of Garkawa said:

The local government peace committee met with representative of the displaced persons and the areas affected beginning from Zomo to Pyapung, Tunku sand Lalin ending up in Garkawa. We also talked to the people to be prepared to receive those who were returning and live peacefully with them.¹⁹

A member of the security committee of the local government and who is the Provost of the College of Agriculture, Garkawa, Oliver Ndam said that during the period, what topped the agenda of the security committee was how to assure returnees that all was well. In his capacity as Provost Ndam made personal efforts toward this. He said he went to the Emir of Wase and asked him to persuade his students to return. A woman activist in Garkawa, Mrs Rita Sunday also has this to say of the local government committee:

The committee held a meeting with representatives of the Muslims who were 50 in number. The delegates from the local government were made up of 17 people including the chief of which I was the only woman. One week after that, representatives of the Muslims who fled Garkawa came for a meeting in the house of the Moyoum. From that time some of them used to come to his house and eat and go back.²⁰

Mrs Sunday also said that the *Moyoum* mobilised the community to rebuild about 4 of the houses that had been destroyed as a way of encouraging them to return. One observer pointed out that this was done during the 2006 Census as a way of wooing those who had left the town to return so as to boost the low population. But that the indigenes would have them to return and live there cannot be dismissed.

Present Situation Report

In all the settlements of Mikang Local Government where there were

violent conflicts, the Muslims that fled have begun to return gradually. Almost all those that have returned so far are men. In a group discussion with four returnees in Pyapung (Mohammed Sani, Danjuma Dongsuwang, Abdulganiyu Bwefwan and Muazu Rabi.), they said that their houses were in ruins and those of them that have returned are merely squatting and they have no money to rebuild their houses. Their present engagement is to be able to get money and we build the houses before they can bring their families.

Dr. Hamza of the College of Agriculture whose family used to be in Garkawa now live in Wase from where he comes to work everyday in Garkawa. He explains his own reason for not returning with his family now.

The psychological effect of what my family and I went through is very deep. It will take time for us to recover and to consider coming back to reside in Garkawa.²¹

According to Chindo Madaki, a Fulani leader in Zomo:

Some of our people cannot return because they have nothing to return to. Their houses have been destroyed and many of the cattle died of diseases because of change of environment.

When asked how their cattle could have died because of change in environment since they were nomadic, Chindo Madaki said that they are "Fulanin gida" (home Fulani) so they were not used to the long trek, therefore the high mortality.

The *Sarkin Pawa* (Chief butcher) of Garkawa, Alhaji Musa Dambodigal who returned in November 2006 in Garkawa has this to say:

People are ready to return because *inda ka saba ya fi inda kana jin dadi* ('where you are used to is better than where you are enjoying'). The only problem is that of housing. As soon as I finish my house, I will go and bring my family.

The only woman that has returned with her family in Garkawa is Altine Ibrahim Bakoji whose two sons were killed in the conflict. Altine has this to say of the chief and the people:

The chief has received us very well and he has not hesitated to help us in every area of need since we returned and nobody has molested us in any way, we are living in peace with the people.

This researcher observed that there is a semblance of normalcy in the communities, but it will take time for a complete healing and restoration

of confidence in the shattered relationships.

The absence of the Muslims who used to be in control of the market created a vacuum that the indigenes have taken up in a measure. Their return has met a condition where they have become displaced and their attempt to recover such position is meeting with resistance, as one opinion leader puts it:

They used to be in the control of the market and insisting on farm produce passing through their hands and thereby determining the price. Now that they are returning to find the indigenes in place, they want a share in the control of the market but the people are saying that it is their own time to lead now, let them (the Muslim) follow.²²

The *Sarkin Pawa* (Chief of the Butchers) in Zomo came back to find that a Christian had taken over his position and he was offered the role of an assistant to him. When asked how he felt about it he said: *"I have no problem with the position, I am perfectly alright"*.

This researcher, however, sees that the acceptance of such arrangements at the present may be because they can do nothing about it, especially when they lack both money and the numerical strength to contest it. With time, it might become an issue of conflict.

Mobile policemen and soldiers still guard the two ends of Garkawa. When asked why this is still the case since peace has returned, a security officer with the SSS in Tunkus said *"There is peace but it might be necessary for them to remain necessary for them to remain until the elections are over."* The Long Tehl put it this way:

Their presence is no longer needful but since we are not the people that put them there, the necessary authorities will redeploy them when they are satisfied.²³

The general situation is that of calmness as the returnees come in. It is not certain what the situation will be like as their numbers increase and especially when and if they return in full. It will be necessary to put in place a strategy of educating the people that things cannot be the way they were either before or now, but that they must live together peacefully all the same.

Impact of the Conflict

The conflicts that ravaged the southern zone in general and Mikang Local Government in particular have altered the physical appearance, social relationships, and political arrangements of individuals, groups and

institutions in the affected communities. Nothing will remain the same anymore. Men, women and children have passed through harrowing experiences that have left them in varying degrees of trauma.

In all the conflict settlements visited, one cannot miss the hollowness that has been created by the destruction of so many houses. This is more graphical in Garkawa where the violence was worse and more so that the Muslim settlement was at the centre of the town.

Social relationships have become negatively affected as people who used to live and relate together in the same community are now apart. Mutual distrust has set in, making true relationships difficult.

The near-absence of Muslims also means that the politics of those areas will be dominated by Christians or African Traditional religionists. The few Muslims that are there now cannot influence policy that will affect them as long as the condition remains the same.

There is a demographic imbalance in male-female populations with all its implications on the men, the women and the children in the areas where many of the men were killed and the women and children spared as was in the case of Garkawa. When asked about the condition of those women who have been widowed by the crisis, Alhaji Musa Danbodigal of Garkawa has this to say:

Almost all the women whose husbands were killed and who are there in the camp in Bauchi have been married to the men from among us that survived except for the very elderly among them.

Traditionally, it is not unusual for Muslims to have more than a wife, but this happened as a result of the condition they found themselves in. The men now have to exert themselves because of sudden added responsibilities.

Musa said of the women in the camp in Bauchi that they are engaged in making groundnut cakes, bean cakes and the like, which was their trade in Garkawa, but that the business environment is not conducive for them because it is an unfamiliar terrain.

As for the education of the children, he says:

The children are schooling in the camp, not in the formal setting of a classroom but in the house. The teachers that fled from here to Bauchi are the ones teaching them. The governor of Bauchi wanted to join them with the children in the primary school nearby but we did not want it because we are looking forward to coming back.

But the story is not true for the Fulani in Zomo who fled to Bauchi and Nassarawa States. According to Chindo Madaki, their children have to be

out of nomadic school for the period they were away. It is only those of them that have returned with their families that the children have started school again. He says:

Our women suffered greatly because they left all their belongings behind. Many of the women that were pregnant suffered spontaneous abortion. There were also cases of ill health because of poor living conditions and many of them had diarrhoea.

The implication for the women and children of those that fled and took refuge in camps away from the places where they have lived all their lives, is negative in all ramifications. However, for the women who are indigenes, it is a different story. The days following the departure of the Muslim women, the Christian women whose income was derived from working for the Muslim women suffered want. But thereafter they began to take up the challenges of engaging in the trade of their erstwhile mistresses which as earlier mentioned is the making of bean cakes, groundnut cakes, groundnut oil, petty trading, and so on. Some of them took up farming. This now means that their economic level suddenly changed. Magnus Mathew, 25, says that:

Though my mother used to make groundnut cakes and oil, it was on a very small scale and even then, our own people would hardly patronize her because they preferred buying from the Muslim women. But now she does it on a large scale and even the Muslims buy from her.

Magnus observes further that:

The economic power that the women now have has made them to become aggressive. They now disdain their husbands because they have become self sufficient.

This has generated another kind of conflict at the home front. There is a need for educating the women on managing the empowerment they have attained for greater challenges. Their new status has given them a high self-esteem from that of house-helpers to managers of their own business. It can position them for positions of responsibility in their communities.

The conflict has affected the children in a way that will negatively affect their upbringing in a plural society. Habila Data, a lecturer at the College of Agriculture said that not long after the conflict, he observed children under 10 years forming 2 camps designating one as Muslims and the other Christians and they used sticks to make toy guns with which they mocked a religious fight.

Daniel Tenbwet, a secondary schoolteacher in Pyapung has observed similar cases and said that they have had to be taking time during morning assemblies to address this issue in order to discourage the children from imbibing bigotry. It might be necessary to design a programme specifically for the schools in the areas affected to give them a different orientation to disabuse their minds from the negative things they have already learnt and inculcate in them positive values.

Emerging Conflict: The Taroh in Mikang Local Government Area

There is an emerging conflict in Mikang local government area that needs to be addressed: it is the same indigene-settler conflict that has plagued this zone. This has come about by the Taroh agitation for political space and position in the affairs of Mikang LGA.

The Taroh are the indigenes of Langtang North and Langtang South Local Governments of Plateau State. They used to be found in large numbers in Wase before the conflict. They also have a significant presence in the Montol settlements of Tunkus and Lalin where their interest in contesting for councillor is generating controversy. According to one of the candidates, Mr. Ponkap Daniel:

I was born here in Tunkus. This place has become my home. I speak more Montol than Taroh. There is no where else I can go to as my home than this place. Yet I have not been given indigeneship certificate.

He claimed to have contested for councillor in 1997 and 1999, but due to the manipulation of the election process, he was edged out but he has determined not to give up. A source in the local government told this researcher that when a former Local Government Chairman appointed a Taroh as a Supervisory Councillor, the indigenes protested, saying that it was not in their interest until the decision was rescinded and he was given the position of Adviser to the Chairman. This is akin to protests usually staged by indigenes in Jos North LGA against the appointment of non-indigenes to political positions.

A Montol elder in Lalin said that, they would not like to give a political position to the Taroh because they would use whatsoever resource they acquire to develop their hometowns. He said that they hardly undertake any reasonable developments outside their hometowns. He claimed that they prefer to take even the grains they harvest in Montol land to Langtang for sale.

A politician in Tunkus also said that the Taroh have contributed to the political development of Mikang, but that it will not be possible to give them a leadership position because every community has certain things that they would like to discuss only among themselves at the leadership level and it will not be possible to have a stranger in their midst. He concluded that “*Did they come to look for food or for political position?*” The position of the *Long Tehl* on this is that:

The Taroh should not strive for political space in Mikang because they have their own local government. But we are in a democratic dispensation and where the Taroh constitutes a majority and they can contest and win an election, there is nothing wrong with that.²⁴

This researcher has not sufficiently investigated these issues in Garkawa due to time constraints. However, the Taroh people’s major dwelling is in Zimakwe in the northeastern ward of Garkawa. They are contesting for councillor in that settlement where they also have a *Sarkin Yergam* (Chief of the Taroh) ordained for them by the *Moyoum*.

There are sufficient early warning signals on the ground for an intervention before the two sides dig in their positions and it will cost much effort to resolve at that level. The problems that can arise from this conflict might be more difficult to contend with because they are neighbours and they will continue to live together since there is nowhere any of them will go to unlike the Hausa-Fulani people.

All the conflicts discussed so far between the Hausa-Fulani and the ethnic groups in the southern zone, the Taroh-Youm and Montol (which has not yet manifested violently) in Mikang and the Pan-Goemai which resulted in IDPs in Tunkus are all related to the issue of citizenship.

Conclusion

This research work has uncovered the current state of the post-conflict peacebuilding process in the southern zone of Plateau State and Mikang Local Government Area in particular. It has also revealed an emerging problem which has been dormant because of the conflict that these communities were confronting together. Such may now transform into one that will not only undermine the present peacebuilding for the past conflict but bring in new actors on the stage with serious consequences to vulnerable groups like women and children who have already gone through excruciating periods in the recent past. Taking this project beyond the research phase will arrest this looming crisis, transform the situation

positively, advance democracy and accelerate the development of the southern zone of Plateau State.

Recommendations

- (1) Government's call on the IDPs to return to the places where they had left is commendable. The Peace Committees at the state and local government levels down to the communities have also done well, but as this research has revealed, very few people have returned because of housing problems. The initial supply of relief materials in the form of building materials while the conflict had not subsided were sold out to meet pressing needs. Now that the atmosphere is peaceful and the people are willing to return, government should work out a modality with the communities on how the returnees can be assisted. The communities that have indicated willingness to support in assisting them in reconstructing their houses should be encouraged. Such a move will hasten their return and heal the wounds of the past.
- (2) Workshops should be organised for community leaders and teachers at the primary and secondary school levels by the Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies (CECOMPS) of the University of Jos to be funded by the Netherlands Embassy to equip them in peacebuilding techniques in their communities and amongst their students
- (3) The Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies of the University of Jos should plan an intervention strategy for the brewing conflict in Mikang between the Taroh and the host communities of Montol and Youm to be funded by the Netherlands Embassy.
- (4) The Netherlands Embassy may consider a physical intervention plan for the women that are returning to empower them to start small businesses. This could be done in form of grants to be administered by a private agency skilled in such works to be monitored by CECOMPS and the Embassy.
- (5) Furthermore, special programmes on human rights education and security awareness need to be planned for the security personnel along with other stakeholders like the communities, vulnerable groups like women and youths, etc.
- (6) A special rehabilitation programme should be planned for the children of the returnees who have suffered serious setbacks in their

social, psychological and educational development. This should include make-up classes. The Social Services Department and the Education Department of the Local Government should collaborate with the affected communities toward this with the aid of the Netherlands Embassy and to be facilitated by CECOMPS. This will reduce the gap between them and their peers and reintegrate them into a normal life in the society.

- (7) The non-indigenes are a vulnerable group subject to insecurity with all the attendant negative effects. There is the need for an enlightenment programme in the form of public lectures, the use of posters and workshops for community leaders on human rights to show the mutual profit of the full exercise of the rights of every member of the community.

References

1. Yusufu Bala Usman (1987). *"The Manipulation of Religion in Nigeria"*. Vanguard Printers and Publishers, 1979 Kaduna: Nigeria.
2. Human Rights Watch: "Revenge in the Name of Religion: The Cycle of Violence in Plateau and Kano State. Human Rights Report, May 2005 Vo. 17, No. 8(A).
3. Ibid.
4. Source: Mikang Local Government Information Department
5. Ibid.
6. Source: INEC Office Tunkus.
7. Interview with *Moyoum* in Garkawa on 19 January 2007.
8. Interview with Noma Barde in Garkawa on 16 January 2007.
9. Source withheld.
10. Interview with *Moyoum* in Garkawa on 19 January 2007.
11. Source withheld.
12. Ibid.
13. Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with COCIN Reverends in Garkawa
14. Interview with Dr Hamza on 17 January 2007.
15. Source withheld.
16. Interview with Daniel Tenbwet in Tunkus on 18 January 2007.
17. Interview with *Moyoum* in Garkawa on 19 January 2007.
18. Interview with Long Tehl in Tunkus on 22 January 2007.
19. Interview with *Moyoum* in Garkawa on 19 January 2007.
20. Interview with Mrs Rita Sunday on 17 January 2007.
21. Interview with Dr Hamza on 17 January 2007.
22. Source withheld.
23. Interview with Long Tehl in Tunkus on 22 January 2007.
24. Ibid.