



Religions and Development Research Programme

Faith-based organizations in development in Nigeria: a preliminary mapping

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The nature, scale and activities of faith-based organizations (FBOs) remain poorly understood and documented in African countries. This paper reports on a preliminary 'mapping' of FBOs in development in Nigeria carried out as part of a larger research programme on Religions and Development.

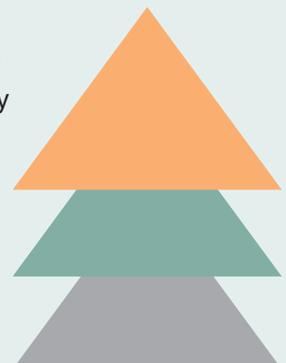
The emergence, aims and activities of organizations associated with Christianity and Islam is linked to the history, expansionist goals, geographical spread, political aspirations and organizational characteristics of the two faith traditions that are dominant in the country. A review of the available secondary material shows that

- Some organizations associated with Islam emerged in pre-colonial times, mostly for the purpose of converting people to the religion and teaching Muslims about their faith, while Christian FBOs were associated with missionary activities in the 19th century and combined efforts to convert non-Christians with social welfare activities.
- As a result, most Muslim organizations are based (and strongest) in the north of the country and most Christian organizations in the south, although neither are confined to these geographical regions.
- Because religion and politics are inseparable in Islam and Muslim states were established long ago in northern Nigeria, many Muslim organizations have a political agenda and are close to the state, whereas the missionaries had an ambivalent relationship with the British colonial authorities and contemporary Christian churches were neither close to political power holders nor spoke with a single voice in the period after independence; their closeness to politics has, however, increased in reaction to the assertiveness of Muslims and the Muslim-majority northern States.
- Neither religious tradition is homogeneous, but Islam was traditionally linked to strongly developed state structures with associated sources of religious authority, while Christianity is characterized by competition

between denominations and most of the mainline churches have a bureaucratic hierarchical organization. The different ways in which the faith traditions are organized has implications for the organization, autonomy and funding arrangements of FBOs.

In the absence of complete and up-to-date directories or other sources, the mapping of contemporary FBOs engaged in development was based primarily on semi-structured interviews with representatives of a range of FBOs with more than a local reach. The work was conducted in 2007/8 in Lagos and the Federal Capital Territory, where it was assumed that many FBOs would have their headquarters, and also in states selected to represent the main religio-geographical zones of the country: Kano in the north, Plateau in the Middle Belt, and Oyo, Anambra and Enugu in the south. Brief descriptive profiles of a range of FBOs throw light on their legal status, organizational structure, membership strength, sources of funds, main activities, and relationships with other FBOs and the government. Together these provide an overview of their activities and characteristics. The survey revealed that

- Active FBOs can be found in almost all the States of the Federation, although not all are registered and not all those that are registered are very active
- A large proportion of religious organizations provide some social services, in particular education and health; fewer are engaged in activities such as community development,
- Most of the FBOs mobilize and rely on volunteers rather than paid staff, enabling them to expand their activities at relatively low cost
- FBOs assert that one of their main comparative advantages is their location in communities underserved by government, especially in the rural areas. In addition, their influence is





greater than secular NGOs because through their religious and educational activities, they influence values and social rules governing, for example, family life and sexual activity. Furthermore, there is evidence that they command more respect and trust than either government or NGOs.

- A relatively small proportion of FBOs are primarily socio-political and advocacy organizations; many more are engaged in missionary activities.
- Little evidence is available on the scale and outcomes of FBO activities, but even in their own eyes their ability to sustain and expand their programmes is, for many, limited by their dependence on donations from adherents, their limited management capacity, competition with each other and lack of government support.

This initial mapping of FBOs engaged in development, socio-political and missionary activities indicates that development actors in Nigeria must

- develop an understanding not only of the aims, activities, organizational characteristics and funding base of FBOs but also of their deep historical roots and political links

- recognize that the characteristics of FBOs vary between and within faith traditions and develop better ways of identifying the types of organization that are active in particular locations

Further research is needed to

- increase the coverage and representativeness of this mapping of FBOs in Nigeria, particularly to include international development FBOs, organizations with significant or innovative local roles, and development activities undertaken by congregations rather than separate organizations
- evaluate the scale and outcomes of FBO activities and compare them to secular NGOs and government, in order to assess whether they have distinctive characteristics.

Based on Odumosu, O., Olaniyi, R. and Alonge, S. (2009) *Mapping the Activities of Faith-based Organizations in Development in Nigeria*, Birmingham: Religions and Development Working Paper 38.

<http://www.rad.bham.ac.uk/index.php?section=47>

