RaD

Religions and Development Research Programme

Religion, politics and governance in Nigeria
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Case studies of Kano, Anambra and Oyo States demonstrate that the relationships between the Nigerian state and religious organizations are often asymmetric and unstable: Christianity and Islam provide groups and individuals with moral frameworks on which to base their demands and critiques of the state; Christian and Muslim organizations both contribute to and challenge state institutions, such as law and education; and religious leaders are not immune from complicity in patronage politics.

Part of international comparative research on the participation of religious groups in politics and governance, this study of Nigeria draws on extensive use of secondary sources and case studies of the States of Kano, Anambra and Oyo, chosen to represent different religious and ethno-regional compositions and historical experiences. Interviews with representatives of a selection of Christian and Muslim organizations and the government in each state explored their views and expectations on state-religion relations, as well as religious views on some key development issues.

Despite Nigeria's secular constitution, religion has become increasingly important in the public sphere because of political liberalization and the degree of autonomy accorded to the State governments in a federal system. The case studies show that relationships between the state and Muslim and Christian organizations are frequently ambiguous: while both world religions provide moral frameworks for people and groups to articulate their demands and critiques of the state, they also challenge institutions provided by the state: the Muslim critique of secular law has led to the introduction of *shari'a* penal law in twelve states, while Christian demands for a re-privatization of former mission schools currently under state control might reinforce Muslim disadvantage in the educational sector.

The ability of religious organizations to participate in politics and governance is strongly related to patterns of inclusion and exclusion based on linguistic, ethnic and regional identity, as well as on intra-Nigerian struggles to limit the political participation of certain groups through the requirement of 'indigeneity' at State level. As a result, and given the close links between ethnicity and religion, religious competition is interwoven with the other rivalries that dominate Nigerian local politics and the relationships between the state and religious organizations are non-equitable: in all the States some organizations are excluded from participation in local politics while others have good access to the state. Conflicts over religious participation are closely tied up with disputes over access to material and ideological resources, from access to land to control of the State budget and local radio and television channels.

The government primarily views religious organizations as political mobilizing agents, thus state institutions often attempt to co-opt specific religious groups and FBOs for political purposes, rather than providing systematic support for their development activities. At the same time, many religious groups seek to influence government, even though they also fear its corrupting influence on themselves and others.

All the State governments work with some religious organizations, so there are spaces for interaction, but uneven relations with the state contribute to mistrust among religious groups, and the resultant fears about religious or other identity-based forms of exclusion may contribute to deepening social divisions. However, the inclusion of religious groups in the state has in some instances contributed to increased mutual understanding, while the creation of some inter-religious forums means that some religious groups have been able to enter into a dialogue with each other as well as the state.

Many concerns about the Nigerian state and visions of development that prioritize infrastructural development and service
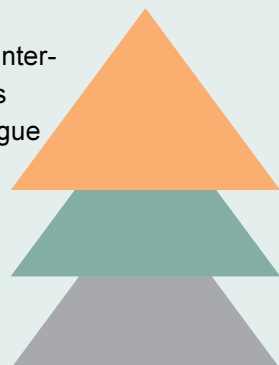
delivery are shared by representatives of different religious backgrounds. Also, all the respondents commented, almost despairingly, on Nigeria's increasing poverty. However, religious views of women's roles differed, with Christian and Muslim groups from the north emphasizing family and household duties as women's main responsibilities and Muslim and Christian groups from the south envisioning a much wider scope of action for women. This suggests that differences in world views are not necessarily determined by religious orientation, and that other factors play an important role.

The study concludes that:

- Nigerians from different parts of the country share similar views on good governance and development: these emphasize infrastructural development, education and health care and are shaped by recourse to Biblical and Qur'anic ideals of justice, equality and 'the fear of God'.
- Despite their shared critique of the Nigerian state, which often includes government failure to provide educational and health-related infrastructure, religious organizations neither act in concert nor, frequently, in the common interest of all Nigerians.
- Despite attempts by the state at various levels to co-opt religious groups in order to gain grassroots support and legitimacy, State governments do not systematically support independent development efforts by these groups.

- Encounters between the state and religious groups have included and facilitated negotiation, imitation and dialogue, but the unequal integration of religious groups and FBOs into politics often has the effect of giving priority to 'indigeneity' and locality; as a result it also creates and intensifies religious rivalry.

Some implications include:

- Religious groups' critique of the failure of the Nigerian state to deliver welfare to its citizens unites them and suggests that they could be important participants in a national dialogue about the country's future.
- Attempts to reduce religious conflict must address concerns over equal treatment and the fear of marginalization felt by many religious organizations, often arising from favourable treatment for indigenous groups.
- Some of the new public institutional spaces that provide opportunities for creative engagement between both the state and religious groups and different religious groups may increase Muslim-Christian understanding and have the potential for wider use.

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