

POLICY BRIEF

Responses of Plateau State Government
to violent conflicts in the state

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This Policy Brief reviews the responses of the Plateau State Government (PLSG) to the recurrent bouts of conflict that the state has suffered over the past two decades.

These responses have included Commissions of Enquiry, attempts to improve the diversity of government, the establishment of programmes to address unemployment and poverty, and a State Emergency Management Authority, as well as collaborative initiatives with neighbouring states, civil society and international development partners. The brief advocates a number of measures to build trust between communities, and improve the management of conflict and violence.

These include better co-ordination between levels of government; federal support for reconstruction; domestication of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security; provision of support for victims of violent conflicts and displaced persons; and containing cattle rustling through effective surveillance and patrol.

BACKGROUND

Plateau State, in Nigeria's North Central zone, has a population of some 3.5 million people and is an important mining and commercial centre. It has long been considered a melting pot because of its position between the north and south of the country and its ethnic composition.

It is home to over 60 ethnic groups. However, from 1994 onwards, Plateau has suffered recurrent bouts of violent conflict, generally along religious and ethnic lines. The years 2001, 2004, 2008, 2010 and 2011 saw extensive violence, generally pitting communities of Hausa-Fulani extraction (mostly Muslim) against the indigenous and mainly Christian Berom, Afizere and Anaguta. These ethnic and religious lines also tend to determine voting behaviour. Sectarian violence in Plateau State and the middle belt of Nigeria heightens religious tension across Nigeria.

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One important source of tension between ethno-religious groups is the question of 'indigenesness', which means that some groups have access to political power, resources, employment and education in state or local government areas (LGAs), while migrants from other areas are relatively excluded. In part this is a constitutional issue, to be addressed by the ongoing review of the constitution, though considerable local leadership will also be required to reach a resolution.

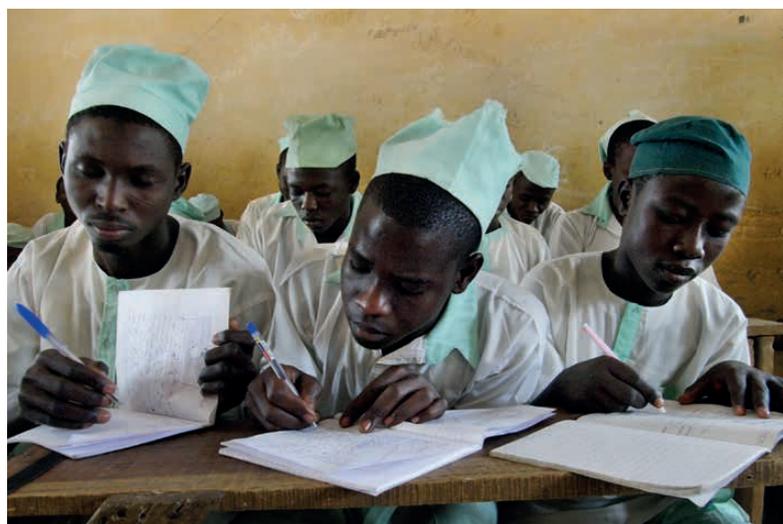
The proliferation of small arms has fed growing criminality, contributed to an upsurge in cattle rustling and increased the longstanding tensions between pastoralists and agriculturalists in the state.

All citizens have been affected by violence in one way or another, but this is especially true of vulnerable groups such as women, children and youth, who have suffered loss of life, injury, rape, assault, psychological trauma, forced displacement and a disruption of social services. Vulnerable groups are also marginalised from efforts to build peace, notwithstanding the existence of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 of 2000,

which stressed the importance of including women in peace-building efforts worldwide, and efforts of both state and non-state actors.

The military has been involved in internal security in Plateau State since 2001. Civil-military relations have been characterised by misunderstanding and mistrust, often reinforcing ethno-regional and religious faultlines. There have been allegations by some communities that the military have been reluctant to defend or protect them, and have themselves committed atrocities with impunity. Communities have reported military indiscipline and unprofessionalism, including harassment at checkpoints and the violation of their rights as citizens.

The state's response to violence is circumscribed by the fact that all security agencies are controlled from the federal level, and the state governor is obliged to channel security requests through Abuja, which can inhibit timely response to violence. In addition, although the State Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice have the power of prosecution, the power to arrest lies with the police, a federal government institution. This situation, coupled with the frequent transfer of Investigative Police Officers (IPOs), has hampered the prosecution of perpetrators of violence and weakened the criminal justice system of the state.



RESPONSES OF PLATEAU STATE GOVERNMENT

This section outlines the initiatives that have been developed and supported by the Plateau State Government in its attempt to respond to violent conflict in the state.

(i) Commissions of Enquiry

The establishment of Commissions of Enquiry or equivalent bodies to look into the outbreaks of violence and their causes has been one of the most characteristic responses of the state government to conflict. Since 1994 such bodies include:

- Justice Aribiton Fiberisima Commission of Enquiry of 1994 into the riots of 12 April 1994 in Jos metropolis.
- Justice Nikki Tobi Commission of Enquiry of 2001 into the crisis of 7 September 2001 in Jos North.
- Justice Jummai Sankey Judicial Commission of Enquiry of 2001 into communal conflicts in Wase LGA.
- Rev. Dr Pandang Yamsat High Powered Committee on Peace and Security in Plateau State set up in 2002.
- Mr Musa Izam-led Administrative Committee and the Justice Constance Momoh Judicial Commission of Enquiry into the Namu conflicts of Quanpan LGA, in 2005.
- Justice Bola Ajibola Commission of Enquiry of 2009 to look into the crisis of 28 November 2008 in Jos North LGA as a result of the local government elections.

However, the implementation of the recommendations of these commissions has always been hampered by the same political polarisation that drives the conflicts themselves. For example, the Hausa-Fulani community boycotted the Ajibola Commission, chaired by a former Attorney General of the Federation, because they believed it was biased against them. This community has expressed more faith in the bodies set up by the federal government, including the General Emmanuel Abisoye Panel of Inquiry of 2009, and the Solomon Lar Presidential Administrative Panel.

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(ii) Operation Rainbow

Operation Rainbow (OR) is a military–civil security force established in June 2010 as a joint initiative between the federal and state government. It brings together personnel from the Special Task Force (STF), Mobile Police (MOPOL), Nigeria Police, Department of State Services (DSS) and Nigerian Security and Civil Defence (NSCD). With support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),

OR has been able to set up an early warning and early response infrastructure. This system includes a situation room that relies on information from trained persons across all 17 local government areas of the state. OR's human security programme also includes skills acquisition and leadership training for women and youth, organised in conjunction with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), also known in some cases as civil society organisations (CSOs). This is why the International Crisis Group has described OR as one of the most holistic responses to the Jos crisis.

(iii) Strengthening community representation

In order to improve relations between ethnic and religious communities, in October 2012 the Plateau State Governor appointed five senior special assistants on community relations, representing respectively the Hausa, Fulani, Tiv, Igbo and Yoruba communities in the state. This move was intended to accommodate the state's diversity and build a more inclusive political system. In addition, as leader of the PDP in Plateau, Governor Jang in 2007 introduced a zoning arrangement that assured broader representation between the three senatorial zones of the state. The governor also recognised religious and ethnic diversity in the appointment of special advisers, permanent secretaries, senior special assistants, special assistants, and chairs and members of state boards and parastatals.

(iv) Establishment of the Plateau State Inter-religious Council

The Plateau State Inter-religious Council was established in 2008 by Governor Jonah Jang to improve trust and communications between the two main religious groups in the state. The council is co-chaired by the Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Emir of Wase, representing the Jama'atul Nasril Islam (JNI). Its terms of reference charge the council with the responsibility of fostering and promoting dialogue aimed at addressing the grievances of various sectors of society. On the religious front, appreciable progress



was made in engaging religious and community leaders. However, the council was not in a position to foster serious discussion of key issues such as indigenesness and citizenship, which can only be addressed through constitutional reform. Continuing uncertainty over this issue makes for volatility in the relations between protagonists.

(v) The State Emergency Management Authority

In the aftermath of the 2001 conflict, the PLSG constituted the Relief Material Management Committee, chaired by the Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development. The strategic role played by this committee, and its sub-committees on medical recovery and relief in emergency response, led to it being institutionalised in 2013 by the Plateau State House of Assembly as the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA). Currently the SEMA is chaired by the Deputy Governor, and is responsible for emergency preparedness and response, including food, water, medical care, protection against abuse and violation of rights, as well as temporary shelter and basic sanitation.

(vi) Employment generation

Several state programmes address the issues of unemployment and poverty, which is clearly linked to the propensity for violence in the state, especially among the youth. These programmes include the establishment in 2009 of Agricultural Services and Training Centres (ASTCs) in each of the three senatorial districts, as part of a ₦10 billion investment in the agricultural sector. The aim of these comprehensive modern farm centres is to increase agricultural productivity by providing diverse field services and technical training to staff and farmers, along with farm inputs such as tractors, seedlings, herbicides, soil-testing equipment, harvesters, cold storage and marketing facilities. The Youth in Agriculture programme of the ASTCs also provides direct employment for youth. The Tackling Poverty Together (TPT) programme, launched by the government in the transport sector, provided direct employment for 910 youths. The state government purchased 500 tricycles (Keke NAPEP), 400 cars and 10 buses, which are currently in use for commercial purposes. Public works in partnership with the private sector have also generated direct employment for over 1,000 people in the provision of public infrastructure.

(vii) Collaboration with neighbouring states

Many of the factors driving conflict in Plateau State are regional in nature. To address them, Plateau has built constructive partnerships with neighbouring states such as Bauchi, Kaduna and Nasarrawa. Measures include intelligence sharing and collaboration between the various state security agencies. Another inter-state issue is the immigration of young people from states outside Plateau in search of employment. Several neighbouring states have low levels of secondary school completion (e.g. Bauchi five per cent compared to Plateau's 46 per cent) and their dropouts tend to gravitate to Jos.

(viii) Partnership with civil society and international development partners

The state has sought to bridge the communication gap with civil society in the state through the establishment of the offices of a Special Adviser on Peace Building, and a Special Adviser on Civil Society Organisations/ Non-Governmental Organisations, whose roles are to co-ordinate with non-state actors. This has entailed regular meetings and dialogues, joint Salah and Christmas feasts, as well as frequent discussions with border communities. The Plateau Oneness Dialogue Forum, an initiative of Governor Jonah Jang co-ordinated by the Directorate of Research and Planning in the Governor's office, has proven to be an important platform for the exchange of ideas between government and citizens. With support from the German International Co-operation (GIZ), the forum has convened dialogue sessions on issues related to the media and conflict management, the role of academia in conflict management, youth and security, and setting benchmarks for safety.

CONCLUSIONS

Underlying the violence in Plateau State is a breakdown in trust between communities, and their polarisation along lines of ethnicity and religion, which grows with each incident of violence. This gulf is heightened by historical animosities, as well as certain administrative practices, especially those relating to 'indigenesness'. The task of rebuilding trust will require multiple measures to be taken at many levels, but most of all, reform and rebuilding will require strong and effective leadership. Such leadership has not so far been evident in the state's follow-up to the commissions of enquiry established in response to episodes of violence in the state; many of their recommendations still remain unimplemented.

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LESSONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In addition to strong leadership and continuing efforts to build an inclusive polity, this brief advocates a number of measures to further the role of the Plateau State Government in reducing and managing conflict:

1. Harmonisation and implementation of reports of Commissions of Enquiry

The non-implementation of the recommendations of the Commissions of Enquiry set up by the Plateau State Government remains a major cause of concern and source of recurrent violent conflicts in the state. This omission leads to a sense of impunity, as action is not taken against perpetrators of violence. Implementation of enquiry recommendations will also require strong collaboration between the state and federal governments, for reasons already outlined.

2. Strengthening inter-governmental relations

Better federal–state co-ordination is needed, especially between the centrally controlled Nigerian Police Force and the State Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice in the areas of criminal arrests and prosecution.

3. Grant-in-aid from the federal government

Plateau State Government bears an enormous burden in providing logistical support and allowances for security agencies. Federal financial support in the form of a grant-in-aid to finance reconstruction, compensation and victim support should be provided to offset this. The private sector and international donors could also be engaged in such a plan, which could consider taking as a model the Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Reintegration (RRR) strategy implemented after the Nigerian civil war in 1970.

4. Implement the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP)

Nigeria launched a NAP in 2013 to mitigate the impact of violent conflict on women and girls, and harness their knowledge and experience to build peace. This will transform the lives of women and girls *and* improve prospects for peace and security. Plateau State Government should

domesticate the NAP through consultation and passage of bills in the House of Assembly and, through its Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, develop an implementation plan bringing together relevant line ministries. It should also support women and girls to become mediators and negotiators in state conflict by training and championing legal support clinics, shelters and psycho-social care for women and girls who have experienced violence.

5. Provision of support for victims of violent conflicts and displaced persons

Displaced persons are often psychologically traumatised by the violence they have seen and suffered and, in addition to the provision of temporary shelter and other material assistance, the provision of appropriate professional support in cases of post-traumatic stress disorder or related syndromes is essential.

6. Containing cattle rustling through effective surveillance and patrol

Addressing cattle rustling will require the effective patrol and surveillance of cattle, including through the use of digital technology, aerial surveillance by the Nigeria Air Force, community engagement and the involvement of OR and the STF. Community vigilantes have contributed to the security of both the people and cattle, though their activities need to be regulated and supervised to ensure that they remain forces for peace.

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