

Interview mit Hajiya Amina Kazaure von Interfaith Council Women in Nigeria

Jorim Gerrard: Can you please introduce yourself and tell us about the work of the Women's Interfaith Council?

Hajiya Amina Kazaure: My name is Amina Kazaure, and I am the general coordinator of the Interfaith Council Women (WIC). Interfaith Council was formed from 2006, the organization was established with the coordination by Sister Kathleen McGarvey who developed a book on Muslim and Christian Women in Dialogue in Nigeria. Now, when she wrote her thesis, she made it into a book. And yes, after doing all the research, she published it as a book. She came to Kaduna for the launching of the book. That time she was attached to Saint Anne's Secondary School, Kaduna. So what she did was to look at the poor Muslim and Christian women faith organizations, because the central theme of her thesis was to see that the women from the Muslim and Christian women in dialogue.

So those are the main components. She invited alongside government officials for launching of the book. Now, after the launching of the book, we as WIC realized that there is need to sit down and look at some of the issues she has raised in the book.

JG: What is the name of the book?

AK: "Muslim and Christian Women in dialogue in Nigeria"

JG: "So, could you tell us a bit more about how you got started and how the process unfolded?"

AK: So, as we went along, we decided that since we have realized our issues, why don't we form a forum that at least we can be sitting down and interacting and where issues will come up that will affect women generally since mostly the residents here are either Muslims or Christians.

So our organizations are the ones that are both representing them. Ideally, most women belong to either this organization or the other. So it is like bringing the voices of women through the organization into one forum. And that is how Women Interfaith Forum (WIC) was formed since 2007. We got registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission in 2010.

JG: What did you do since then?

AK: So since that time we have been on ground and we have been working and what we are, we have been doing is by bringing all the women together, at least in creating a platform where we can sit down and talk on most of issues identified, this is because we are very far away from each other. We don't understand each other. We don't know what the real issues are.

That is why at a distance, we saw ourselves as enemies, which truly we are not. We also realized that women's issues principally everywhere is almost the same.

It would be better if we strongly work together, when we speak with one voice. As women, it will make more impact, even if we are going to advocate for anything, either from government or from any other person.

Looking at the situation of our structures of the members of the organization, most of our members have local government and ward chapters. So, it is very easy for us to scale the impact of our work to the grassroots.

Wherever we are, we do what we can do by organizing seminars, most especially on thematic areas of needs and as they emerge.

On the aspect of engaging with our Imams and Pastors. This we do by conducting seminars to sensitize them on the need to preach in a very amicable manner following the tenets in our scriptures, and not on personal intuitions.

You know, we get to do that and then, even during the 16 days of activism that has been recognized by the United Nations which those days is commemorated. We always try and ensure that we put in place something from one of our commemoration days. Other areas during such international days on Women Peace and Security, we also formed a cooperative group for the women.

We implement workshops for each group by coming up with what they want. And the idea came that we should try and, build their capacity by empowering them with skills, and then subsequently create a cooperative for them so that they can get support and even from their own end, and then we can look for further funding for them to enhance their trades.

So, we have a cooperative right now. And then after the crisis within some locations in the State in the last two years.

You know, we realized that a lot of women were displaced, mostly during the crisis. The women are the most affected with the burden of the crisis. So, we invited women from cosmopolitan on interfaith basis for both Muslims and Christians. We came to the office here, and we agreed that we are going to teach them some skills, some soft making, beet-making, bag making, and other things.

JG: "You said that many women were displaced during the crisis. Could you tell us more about how you responded to that situation?"

AK: We also train them and we source for support from UN women. You know, at the end of the training, we bought the equipment's for them and we gave it out to them. We didn't give them money directly, because we know what women can do with money due to the difficult and hard situation of hit poverty, it will just dissolve into something else.

So what we did is to train them on how to manage their businesses, we bought them materials and start up capital for them. Other members of the group now are in constant communication with the women to find out how they are doing.

And, whenever, like I said, there are issues we do right with genders. I know after the corona crisis, when the government set up a Mediation Committee of 60 men, we

intervened to say that it is not fair that only men in the group, whereas those that bear the burden of the crisis are mostly women.

It will not be easy for a woman to come and sit down in front of 60 men and talk, and ideally, it is not even fair. There is no rationality behind that gender discrimination.

JG: "How did you advocate against this kind of discrimination?"

We advocated to the government by requesting that women should be included in the committee, which really helped, because at least some women can be able to meet a woman like them and tell her what their experiences and what their problems and challenges they face.

JG: "What other topics or initiatives are you working on?"

We spoke about the importance of the International Day for peace, you and on climate change effect.

We held a seminar where we educated ourselves on issues. We got a Professor from the Kaduna State University to do that, which afterwards, we thought that it would be good if we can also extend it to the younger ones. So we visited some schools. We talked to them about most of the issues on climate change and how it affects us.

We even distributed some waste bins for them so that they can start cleaning their environment and collecting these bins. We labeled the bins, while the papers and other waste plastics was recycled. So we were able to identify and engage some schools, and I think they are really happy about that. And we are trying to see how they can create also an interfaith forum within the school so that they can be talking and addressing issues, among themselves.

We have activities with the Kaduna State Peace Commission, they normally invite us because they know that when we talk to our women, it gets easier to the women. The communication gets done better from an NGO initiative than from a government perspective.

We also have a youth wing within the organization with Youth Interfaith Council within the week. We also conduct activities for the youth. They conducted some activities on football match around this area, that are very vulnerable.

We presented a film show and they are planning another one in another hot spot community to show the youth the implication and the consequences of involvement in crisis.

On the periphery, I think these are part of principles of what we do by looking at some thematic areas of empowerment and then followed by environmental sanitation.

JG: "What did you learn from this?"

We need to partner with each other in addressing issues on where we need to partner. Whenever we are going to have our activities we will work collaboratively and not in silos.

We need to preach and practice religious tolerance. You know, we ensure that whenever there is Ramadan, we call people, we break our fast together. And then at Christmas, during Christmas, we organize a Christmas carol.

We invite people, they do the singing and we eat together. You know by doing this, it has ensured that we have this and it has become an avenue where women can bring issues up, you know, either through their own faith based groups where they cannot address.

We bring it to the forum and we see how we can tackle them, whether they are individual problems or issues that affect the society. We held one particular program for our women, the mother's group, I think originally from Germany. And by the time we do that, you know, to sensitize women on their roles first on who they are, knowing who they are, their roles in the community, their roles in the society, how they can give psychosocial support, how they can train their children and things like that.

A lot of issues came up were a lot of people, women that felt that they don't have anything to do with other women within the society. You know, we are able to address some minor issues that affect neighbors, especially in their relationship with the children that are trying to go wayward due to drug addiction and things like that, you know? It really helped and really fashioned our women to know that they have a great role to play in building up the society.

JG: "Thank you so much for your time!"