Muslim Humanitarian Actors and Philanthropy During COVID-19: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

This article examines the various activities that Muslim humanitarian actors (MUHAs) embarked on in Nigeria during tumultuous times with specific reference to the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and especially during the lockdown period. Due to total lockdown and enforcement of several COVID-19 protection protocols, there were impositions of stringent public health measures in almost every country, including border closures. Drawing on qualitative data from Nigeria (2020–2022), this research conducted a total of 23 interviews—13 key informant interviews (KIIs) with leaders of some MUHAs and 10 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with humanitarian service recipients across the nation. It analyzed the various activities of some Muslim actors in Nigeria, bringing out the actors' motivations, sources of funds, categories of beneficiaries, networks and partnerships, problems, and prospects. It also teases out the challenges that the COVID-19 lockdown posed as well as the opportunities that it presented vis-à-vis Muslim humanitarian activism in the Global South. Among the services the MUSAs offered were the distribution of both raw and cooked food, face masks, hand sanitizer, sanitary pads, detergent, soap, tissue paper, and mosquito nets, among other daily essentials. They also sponsored enlightenment campaigns; distributed pamphlets, fliers, billboards, and hand bills; and paid advocacy visits to stakeholders. Finally, the article provides policy recommendations on how to address the problems hampering the Muslim humanitarian actors from effective service delivery. We recommend, among others, the need for MUHAs in Nigeria to pay attention to capacity building, especially grant-writing workshops to meet international donors' requirements, professionalization training, and networking. Also, the United Nations should establish an Interfaith Dialogue Platform that to bring together faith leaders from diverse backgrounds for knowledge sharing as well as common goals and challenges.

This can help build trust and foster cooperation among different faith communities, especially in Nigeria where religious crises often happen.

Keywords: *Muslim humanitarianism, actors, development, COVID-19, lockdown, Nigeria*

Introduction

Muslim humanitarian activism has historically existed in Muslim societies as well as in Islamicate societies such as Nigeria. In essence, there existed Muslim humanitarian actors (MUHAs), and therefore they are not new (Benthal & Bellion-Jourdan, 2003; Barnet & Stein, 2012). Perhaps the recognition of these actors and their services suffers a setback due to its non-inclusion or non-recognition and integration of their activities into the mainstream secular humanitarian fields. This is mostly attributed to the Muslim Humanitarian Actors' non-institutionalization and non-professionalization (Fauzia, 2013; Peterson, 2016; Bourchgrevink, 2017). Due to the above, a gap exists in the literature on Muslim humanitarian actors' agentive actions. Attached to that is a huge oversight on the gendered component of Muslim humanitarian actors' activities.

One of the negative consequences of bracketing or silencing the voices of Muslim women in humanitarian aid is a further reinforcement of the existing stereotype labeled against them—viewed as doormats that are supportive of religious groups that seem designed to perpetuate their subordination. Recent studies across Muslim societies, including in Nigeria, proved that Muslim women are active in all fronts (Badawi, 1995; Shaheed, 1998; Mernissi, 1992; Mahmood, 2005; Maikudi, 2010, 2013; Ahmed, 2012; Boyd & Mack, 1997, 2013; Kurfi, 2018). This includes in peace and during crises or during tumultuous times such as war, flood, migration, fire outbreak, insurgency and internal displacement, collapse of buildings, earthquakes, drought, and COVID-19 lockdown.

COVID-19 is a contagious infectious virus that causes illnesses, including severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). It manifests with symptoms such as a sore throat, cough, runny nose, lost sense of perception or inability to perceive smell, body aches, wheezing, and difficulty breathing. This comes to manifest between two to four days upon contamination or exposure (WHO, 2019). On January 2, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued a global alert on the epidemic and subsequently declared it a global pandemic in March 2020, as the virus quickly spread around the globe (WHO, 2020). The pandemic declaration brought great transformation in the world, causing enormous socioeconomic, diplomatic, and academic disruptions for several months (Claessens, 2021). The pandemic was also exacerbated by the imposition of stringent public health measures in virtually every country across the world. These measures included mandatory border closures, a total lockdown, and enforcement of several COVID-19 protection protocols. Despite all these preventive measures imposed around the world, the virus spread like a wild fire, affecting millions of people, leading to deaths around the world, and the closure of businesses and schools.

In order to address the gap in the existing literature on Muslim Humanitarian Actors, conducting studies such as this is necessary. By so doing, the findings would correct the lingering misconceptions about the actors' activities, motivations, or sources of inspiration for their humanitarian aids, how they generate resources or funds that constitute their various target beneficiaries, the ways in which they establish networks and utilize partnerships, the various challenges that they encounter, as well as their prospects in the humanitarian field. Again, the findings shall highlight the uniqueness of the Muslim humanitarian actors' worldview in terms of humanitarian aids, thereby providing room for learning about the differences between the Muslim actors' practices vis-à-vis mainstream secular practices.

Methodology

This project draws on qualitative research, adopting a total of 23 interviews—13 key informants interviews (KIIs) and 10 in-depth interviews (IDIs). While the researchers conducted KIIs with leaders of some Muslim humanitarian actors across the nation, they conducted IDs with humanitarian service recipients. The reason for adopting qualitative research is because it provides a suitable framework for exploring the complexities of human experiences that are central to studying MUHAs' activities during the COVID-19 lockdown (Nickerson, 2024; McLeod, 2025). The study covered five states: Abuja, Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto, and Yobe. The justification for selecting these states lies in the fact that Abuja is the Federal Capital Territory and geographically the administrative center of the nation with the presence of mega mosques, Islamic centers, as well as the representatives of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), among others.

The researchers chose Kaduna because it was historically the capital of Northern Nigeria and the domicile of the Northern region leaders, and the majority of the state's inhabitants are Muslims. It also has the presence of many Islamic organizations, such as Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) as well as Muslim humanitarian organizations. Kano is predominantly a Muslim-dominated state with the highest number of Muslims, and therefore had many MUHA activities taking place during the COVID-19 lockdown. As for Sokoto, it is the Center of the Caliphate with the presence of many Muslim women's organizations, such as the Yantaru Movement, Muslim Sisters Organization, among others, and therefore needed to be part of the studied area. Finally, the research selected Yobe state because it had many internally displace persons' camps (IDPs), which housed thousands of vulnerable people that included the MUHAs' service recipients. Thus, the rationale behind selecting these states lies in the need to spread the study's various sources against narrowing information from one single state (Goldkuhl, 2012; Zangeneh, 2023).

The Muslim humanitarian actors' leaders that this research interviewed include Salsabil Foundation, Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO), Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Al-Furqan Mosque Foundation or Charities, Muslim Lawyers Association of Nigeria (MULAN),

Uthman bn Affan Trust, Nurud-Deen Society of Nigeria, Nasrullahi-al-Fatih Society of Nigeria (NASFAT), Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), and the International Centre for Islamic Culture and Education (ICICE) also called Masjid An-nur-Abuja. Also, the research interviewed the Advisor to the Kano state governor on SDGs, a Deputy Director of the Institute for Islamic Banking and Finance (IIBF, BUK), the Secretary of NUSAID, executives of Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), Life Helpers Initiative (LHI), Three Bedroom Mosque (3BM), Centre for Child Care and Human Development (C3HD), Action Against Hunger, Yobe, Women in Da'wah (WID), Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO), and intellectuals from law as well as sociology.

The justification for interviewing the service recipients of MUHAs, especially those in the IDP camps at Yobe, among others, is due to the fact that the research is phenomenologically informed, focusing on participants' lived experiences and the subjective meanings they ascribe to them, rather than on abstract processes or generalized theories (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Brannan, 2022). The phenomenological premise that humans derive meaning from their experiences is particularly relevant to understanding service recipients' perspectives during the COVID-19 lockdown, and the concept of "intentionality" highlights the purposeful and conscious nature of participants' experiences (Reeves et al., 2008).

Additionally, in some instances, the study draws on written materials made available by the organizations under study and on information from their websites, coupled with observations from visits to the organizations' offices, activities, and project sites. The team of researchers has also interviewed a few volunteers of some of these associations. All the interviews revolved around MUHAs' ideas about humanitarian aids and activities generally and specifically about their activities during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Nigeria. They inquired about the organizations' philosophies, aims and objectives, relationship to other actors, sources of resources, as well as how the COVID-19 pandemic altered the ways in which the organizations were operating during the pandemic. That created an avenue for the research to gain insights into the worldview of the organizations (MUHAs) and why they engaged in providing the humanitarian services that they provided, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Cudjoe, 2023). Phenomenology guided the depth and focus of data collection, emphasizing situated and subjective knowledge (Manen, 2016).

The researchers recorded all the interviews with the express consent of the respondents. Also, the research team was taking notes to back up the recording device and to observe areas of emphasis for integration during the data analyses stage. This was to ensure that everything was captured and every important detail would be identified and incorporated in the analyses (Charmaz, 1996). In terms of data analysis, this study employed thematic analysis (TA), guided by Braun and Clarke's (2023) approach. It followed Braun and Clarke's steps as follows: (a) familiarization, (b) coding, (c) initial theme generation, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and

finally (f) producing the report or writing the findings. The process was iterative and reflexive, with ongoing theme refinement. The researchers also used NVivo software to support data management and organization. It also enabled the generation of a codebook based on analytical activity that functioned as a reflexive aid to support transparency and analytic thinking. It therefore ensured a framework for coding reliability, clear procedural steps, enhanced transparency, and rigor (Ahmed et al., 2025).

An Overview of Humanitarian Actors and Philanthropists in Nigeria

The studied Muslim humanitarian actors were chiefly premised on the necessity for responding to Allah's call for the need to provide humanitarian intervention. Secondly, the data gathered indicated that, in addition to responding to Allah's call toward assisting the needy, there is a human face to the services that they render (Bompani & Frahm-Arp, 2010; Petersen, 2016). During disasters such as floods, fires, insurgencies, the collapse of buildings, earthquakes, droughts, and so on, one would be tempted to render helping hands to fellow human victims, who are distressed, regardless of their affiliations to religion, race, class, or other variables.

A major point worth notinh at this juncture is that, regardless of the cluster of service provider,: individual philanthropists, mosque foundations and trusts, gender-based associations, as well as international agencies such as the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) all provide services to the general public regardless of faith affiliation. Although, this does not mean there are no exclusively faith-based services, including Ramadan feeding programs and humanitarian services provided during calamities such as COVID-19. Another example is how the IsDB provides its services to all the states or communities that fulfill the bank's requirements. For instance, in Nigeria, there are states that are not primarily Muslim, yet, they are beneficiaries of the bank's services.

In terms of the aims and objectives of the studied Muslim humanitarian actors, they vary based on the kinds of services they offer and perhaps why they were established (Jeavons, 1998). The data gathered from this study indicate that the studied MUHAs have a cluster of objectives that are classified broadly into educational, social, economic, psychological, as well as spiritual. The data show that the overwhelming majority of the MUHAs' activities were both spiritual and educational. Thus, the main objectives of their establishment were to provide educational and evangelical services. The remaining 35% is split across social, economic, and psychological services. They provide an array of services, including teaching vocational skills, empowerment services, family counseling, and lots more.

An important point worthy to note is that despite the fact that one organization is providing mainly economic empowerment services, especially to needy members such as internally displaced persons, that does not mean it is not providing other services such as *Da'wah*, educational, and social services. What happens is that the situation dictates the necessity for the provision of services. The following corroborates this point, as explained by the Secretary of NUSAID, Kano:

> When NUSAID was established, our objective was to intervene in Boko Haram, aiming at bringing in the *ulama* (clerics) to play a role in addressing the problem.… We assumed that the insurgents were people in need of guidance and that they had a genuine concern that can be tapped into. After some time, we realized they were simply monsters looking for people to kill.… In 2016, I led a team of visitors to Borno state in the North East to understand the situation and see what the needs are.… After seeing the gravity and magnitude of the problem, we realized it is something that needs collective efforts and collaboration. We noticed that there were no coordinated local efforts.… There were no standby emergency plans.… (KII with the Secretary of NUSA'ID, January, 2022).

The above is one out of the numerous instances that speak to how the aims and objectives of the studied MUHAs vary and how they may change, depending on emerging needs. During tumultuous times such as COVID-19, the organizations are dictated by the condition to focus or shift to the necessity at hand. In essence, expediency demands immediacy.

Activities of the Muslim Humanitarian Actors during the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown

Findings of this research revealed that all the organizations and foundations interviewed in this study were established to address particular concerns of the Muslim *Ummah* especially and the public in general. Overall, the organizations were set up to deal with problems of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, homelessness, and various forms of injustice. Conversely, these organizations aim to improve the well-being of the people. For instance, while the Islamic Development Bank is a multilateral development finance institution whose aim is specifically to provide Islamic finance for infrastructural development, FOMWAN, on the other hand, being an umbrella association for Nigerian Muslim women, aims at, among other things, propagating the religion of Islam in Nigeria through *da'wah* (propagation), establishment of educational institutions, and to improve the socioeconomic status of the populace, especially women, youth, and children through training, the provision of quality education, health and humanitarian services, micro-enterprise schemes, and advocacy.

It is important to note is that these organizations are not purely male-dominated. Rather, they are a combination of male-dominated (such as the JNI, Salsabil Foundation, Masjid An-nur, Uthman bn Affan Trust, Al-Furqan Foundation, and 3BM) and gender-mixed organizations (such as the NSN, NASFAT, C3HD, AAH, and MULAN). There are also purely women-based organizations, including FOMWAN, MSO, and WID. The gender-dimension of these organizations is critical because it speaks volumes about how women have created a space for themselves, agency, and because they are often the worst hit due to their vulnerability, especially considering the fact that poverty itself has a women's face, known as the "feminization of poverty" (Kurfi & Maikudi, 2015). In realization of this fact, and in response to it, almost all the

interviewed organizations have specific programs for women, especially widows, divorcees, emotionally disturbed women, those who are economically disadvantaged, orphaned girls, and so on.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the studied organizations engaged in the provision of various services. These were in different aspects of human endeavors, including in the health sector, such as distributing face masks, hand sanitizer, sanitary pads, detergent, soap, tissue paper, etc.; sponsoring enlightenment campaigns in conventional and social media, drama, and jingles; and so on. They also engaged in the publication and distribution of pamphlets, fliers, billboards, hand bills as well as paying advocacy visits to stakeholders. More so, the associations were distributing raw and cooked food, among other daily essentials like soaps, detergent, and mosquito nets. The cooked food was basically wrapped in a package (in a take away form) and distributed to people at designated places, notably in a door-to-door style.

Special categories of people in need were given preference. These include at hospitals (in-patients), prisoners, pregnant women, widows, orphans, senior citizens, asthmatic and epileptic patients, vulnerable children, intellectually disabled persons, the physically challenged, and lots more. In addition to the above, many of the studied MUHAs equally distributed clothes, shoes, blankets, and other needed materials such as mosquito nets. An important act that stands out is how, despite the challenges that the COVID-19 lockdown posed, it also opened up new opportunities (Claessens, 2021). These include forcing humanitarian actors to create more avenues of engaging people online to be entrepreneurs through learning certain skills in addition to educational activities. The following presents a picture of such activities:

> Before the COVID-19, we had programs in the areas of vocational training in agriculture and food production. We also had a workshop attended by 175 participants who were trained in snake farming, mushroom farming and rabbitry. With the coming of the pandemic, we continued to do that online via live talks and videos. A beneficiary told me that he used to sell 100 crates of eggs despite the lockdown…. We also did have the women's forum, which was formed to address women's issues including challenges affecting widow, orphans, divorcees, vulnerable women and importantly women in drugs…. Marriage counselling was very active during the COVID -19 lockdown… (KII with Program Coordinator of International Center for Islamic Culture and Education, Masjid An-nur, Abuja, February, 2022)

From another angle, a respondent adds:

> Some of our volunteers are professional and counselors, certified psychologists, medical doctors, and so on…. We have a WhatsApp group that we effectively utilized during the COVID-19. We also have another group called The International Center for Islamic Culture and Education Hope Group which comprises more young people…. These are those who assist in the distribution of food items and other essential commodities during the COVID-19. They were like the foot soldiers that went to villages, shanties and remote areas to distribute food items. (KII

with the Deputy Chairman of the International Center for Islamic Culture and Education [Masjid An-nur, Abuja], February, 2022)

The above points to the diversification of services that the Muslim humanitarian actors provide but also how the aims and objectives may vary yet change to follow the needs of the time in question, such as the COVID-19 lockdown. Again, the CVOVID-19 pandemic brought in new demands and challenges to humanitarian activism but also gave more opportunities to reach out to the teeming population of the needy, most especially through online platforms.

A Comparison between Muslim, Christian, and Secular Humanitarian Actors' Activities vis-à-vis COVID-19 Lockdown

Although the focus of this research is exclusively Muslim humanitarian actors during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, this section briefly compares the activities of major Christian organizations and secular Nigerian NGOs during the same period. The empirical findings of Abubakar et al. (2021) among two Pentecostal Churches (Christ Embassy and Living Faith) revealed, like their Muslim counterparts, that these Christian organizations interpreted the pandemic in spiritual rather than medical terms. Also, they rejected the very existence of the coronavirus but believed that the pandemic was a Western conspiracy designed to stop Muslim and Christian religious activities. Nevertheless, these major religious organizations provided similar humanitarian services during the COVID-19 lockdown, including providing cooked and raw food aid, especially to vulnerable people, ensuring access to nutrition, providing essential community-based health care, outreach, promoting hygiene practices, providing public hand hygiene stations, obligatory hand hygiene in public and private buildings, and sponsoring public enlightenment campaigns to curtail the spread of the pandemic.

Equally, another body of literature revealed that both the major religious and secular NGOs provided mental health support services, marriage counseling, in addition to teaching some entrepreneurial skills in farming, cooking, bakery, and tailoring, among others (Adegboye et al., 2020; Ajibo, 2020; Alabi et al, 2020). It is important to note that the virtual space replaced one-on-one interactions that had traditionally been utilized prior to the spread of the pandemic and the imposition of its containment protocols. Social media became one of the most effective communication means to reach out to people, especially younger generations. Viewing this through a comparative lens, the Muslim humanitarian actors under study offered similar activities with their Christian counterparts during the COVID-19 lockdown, as confirmed by the qualitative findings of Abubakar et al. (2021). The case of Nigerian Muslim humanitarian actors during the COVID-19 lockdown proves that religion is very much present and that it has come to stay (Warner, 1993; Gorski & Altinordu, 2008; Burchardt, 2013).

Motivations of Muslim Humanitarian Actors

The data gathered from this study revealed that all the organizations have a central motivation based on Islamic injunction, which is to assist people in need. Most of the organizations cite the Qur'anic verses that talk about the

necessity to provide assistance/humanitarian support to those who are distressed or in dire need. For instance, the Qur'an says:

> "Those who believed and who did charitable works…" (Qur'an 2:277)
>
> "Verily man is at a loss except those who have faith and do charitable works…" (Qur'an 103:2-3)
>
> "For those who believe and do charitable work, it is every blessing and a beautiful place of final return…" (Qur'an 13:29)
>
> "Help one another in acts of piety and righteousness. Also, do not assist each other in acts of sinfulness and transgression. And be aware of Allah. Variety Allah is severe in punishment (Qur'an 5:2)
>
> "Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives zakat; [those who] fulfill their promise when they promise; and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle." (Qur'an 2:177)
>
> "Spend (in charity) out of the sustenance that We have bestowed on you before that time when death will come to someone, and he shall say: 'O my Lord! If only you would grant me reprieve for a little while, then I would give in charity, and be among the righteous…'" (Qur'an 63:10)
>
> "They ask you (O Muhammad) what they should spend on charity. Say: 'Whatever you spend with a good heart, give it to parents, relatives, orphans, the helpless, and travelers in need. Whatever good you do, God is aware of it.'" (Qur'an 2:215)

The above are the most frequently cited verses of the Qur'an, being the fundamental basis on which humanitarian actors base or build their inspiration or serve as their major motivation. Additionally, the respondents frequently cited other authorities, such as the *aḥadīth* (sayings or actions of Prophet Muhammad). Below are some of them:

> "Every act of goodness is a form of charity." (Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 496)
>
> The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "Shall I guide you to the best (form of) charity? It is to provide for your daughter when she (returns) to you (because of divorce or other circumstances) and has no one but you to provide for her." (Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith no. 1296)
>
> The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is reported to have said: "Save yourself from hellfire by giving even half a date-fruit in charity." (Sahih Al-Bukhari, vol. 2, Hadith 498)

Another reason often cited by the respondents that motivated them to engage in providing humanitarian aid or services was not rooted in religious or theological foundations. It is the human face, which is a source of motivation and inspiration to render humanitarian services. This implies that the actors, in addition to a religious motivation, are motivated by the desire or dire need to help people in need. This means even among nonreligious people or those that

are not motivated by religious injunctions, services that are humanitarian in nature are rendered. More so, such services have no face, i.e., they are not rendered exclusively on religious, racial, ethic, sentimental, or other affiliations. This is what is observed or unstressed during the COVID-19 lockdown when Muslim humanitarian actors go out distributing food items (cooked or uncooked). Conclusively, despite the fact that the studied MUHAs are motivated by human nature, the desire to render humanitarian service to the needy, especially, they are motivated by religious injunctions. Notwithstanding, in items of target groups, they claim not to discriminate based on any affiliation, notably religious or ideological.

The Muslim humanitarian actors studies mainly relied on contributions from the Muslim Ummah in order to distribute support items during the COVID-19 pandemic. This depends on the size of the organization. For instance, strong and seemingly well-connected ones such as the International Center for Islamic Culture and Education (Masjid An-nur, Abuja), Muslim Sisters Organization (MSO)-Sokoto, Federal of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), the Nasrul-Lahi al-Fatih (NASFAT, Kano), Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI)-Yobe, Women in Da'wah (WID), as well as the Al-Furqan Mosque Foundation, Kano, did not have to wait for congregants to give their donations before raising funds for buying and distributing humanitarian commodities or services. They are already buoyant enough to utilize their saved resources or, best still, utilize their networks and social capital to get resources for disbursement during the COVID-19 lockdown and for the provision of other services. It is not uncommon for faith-related agencies to utilize their social capital for the advancement of human social needs (Eso, 2003; Swidler, 1986; Schutz, 2010; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Adler & Kwon, 2002; Schneider, 2006).

Other smaller and not-too-strong Muslim humanitarian actors, especially ward mosques, foundations, and other smaller organizations, had to rely on members' contributions during the pandemic for distribution or intervention. Such organizations in this research include NUSA'ID (Kano), Life Helpers Initiatives (LHI, Yobe), Center for Child Care and Human Development (C3HD, Damaturu), Three Bedroom Mosque (3BM)-Damaturu, Salsabil Foundation-Kaduna, and Uthman bn Affan Mosque Foundation Kano. Below is a testimony:

> Actually, during the COVID-19 lockdown, it affected us. As you know, the Friday congregational prayers were suspended for almost a year. The mosque was completely locked up and because of that, people who come from far places to attend both the prayer and lessons were unable to come.… So, the lockdown negatively affected our activities (KII with one of the Imams and a Board member of the Uthman bn Affan Mosque. Foundation, Kano, February 2022)

The above also reflects the position of another humanitarian association, albeit with a difference:

> The COVID-19 lockdown really affected our activities because the government introduced a lot of restrictions. During the lockdown, there

> were no activities in our mosques. As for the welfare aspects, we were given permission to use our buses to reach out to people who are in need. So, we bought a lot of foodstuff and distributed it to the needy in their various houses. We already have the addresses of most of our beneficiaries, so we located them easily. (Ansaru-al-Deen Muslim Society, Kano branch, February, 2022)

In addition to the above, there are a handful of the studied organizations that had major sources of funds and resources from international donor agencies and from the government. Most of these are smaller organizations were located in Yobe, one of the worst hit states by the Boko Haram insurgency. Below is the response that we captured from a respondent:

> Virtually all the support comes from international donor agencies such as the Department for International Development (DFID), Fund for Peace (FFP) from the USA, Global Affairs Canada (GAC), UNICEF, and many others. These donors send aid only after they are satisfied with the proposal submitted for the intervention or project to be carried out. They also have a monitoring team that advises them to extend the duration of a project if they are satisfied with its progress. (Director of Life Helpers Initiative [LHI], Yobe state, March 2022)

The above association registered as a secular organization headed by predominantly Muslims. As such, it was a lot easier for the international donor agencies to accept them and approve their grant applications compared to an organization that was registered as a Muslim humanitarian NGO. Thus, the skepticism between the Western secular international donor agencies and the Muslim humanitarian actors sets in. This may not be unconnected with the fear for sponsoring or funding terrorism as well as the non-professionalization and non-institutionalization of such organizations, which hinder them from fulfilling the donors' requirements for funding.

Generally, the data suggested that the studied organizations' sources of funds and resources during the COVID-19 lockdown could be categorized into three areas: first donations generated from the Muslim Ummah, notably congregants through the utilization of expanded social networks and social capital; secondly, taxing members or requesting them to donate generously to intervene by reaching out to the worst hit members of the community during tumultuous times such as COVID-19 lockdown. It is important to note here that there were Muslim humanitarian actors that had to completely close down their activities, mainly because they had relied heavily on one-on-one interaction with congregants are their major source of income. Thus, as the COVID-19 lockdown was imposed, it seriously negatively affected most of the organizations' activities. Conversely, the most pragmatic ones among the MUHAs continued with their activities virtually without much hindrance. Thus, the COVID-19 lockdown posed hindrances and challenges but equally opened up some new opportunities for humanitarian actors.

The data gathered in this study indicated that the studied humanitarian actors partner at various levels in order to achieve their aims and objectives. The establishments of the networks are essentially either in terms of input or

output. This means, either the organization in question establishes networks and retains partnership for receiving resources or for distribution. For instance, while the Al-Furqan Mosque Foundation Kano is a strong and economically vibrant MUHA, it requires information from other smaller MUHAs for the allocation of resources. Conversely, such smaller organizations in the form of mosques, associations, or charity organizations would need input (being a partner organization) from Al-Furqan. This means, it is reciprocal as well as bidirectional.

The dual carriage pattern could be either in terms of resources, such as money, food stuffs, or basic commodities. On the other hand, it could be information that would be beneficial to both parties (the giver and the receiver). It's significant that communication between MUHAs is not only between stronger and smaller organizations, as in give and take. It also happens between stronger or bigger organizations. An example is how the International Center for Islamic Culture and Education (Masjid An-nur, Abuja) collaborates and partners with the Al-Furqan Mosque Foundation, among others, for information flow, exchange of ideas, and sometimes resources sharing.

Challenges Faced by Muslim Humanitarian Actors during the COVID-19 Lockdown

The data gathered in this study indicated that, despite the successes achieved by Muslim humanitarian actors as a result of their interventions, they still face some challenges. The challenges vary from one organization to another and depending on the situation, whether in peace during their normal, regular activities or during tumultuous or hard times. But for the purposes of this article, reference is specifically made to the COVID-19 lockdown time frame vis-à-vis the interventions of the Muslim humanitarian actors.

Across the board, the studied organizations complained about insufficient resources that would cater to the needs of the potentially targeted beneficiaries. This is because, the more the resources, the more people who need to be assisted. That necessitated prioritization in order to reach the most vulnerable people who deserved to be assisted first. Also, some of the organizations lamented about restrictions in terms of movement due to COVID-19 lockdown protocols. This seems to be affecting smaller organizations more than bigger ones, which had an abundance of resources, including social networks, mobility, volunteers, and other privileges. Again, some of the studied organizations complained about insufficient staff, both employed and volunteers. This is because not everyone would like to volunteer. But a major point under this challenge is that, while some organizations lament about a lack in volunteers generally, some complain about a lack of female volunteers, as captured below:

> Some of our target groups would not allow male staff and volunteers to meet their families, especially females. Unfortunately, we have very few female staff and female volunteers… (KII with a Trustee of Centre for Child Care and Human Development (C3HD), Yobe State, March 2022)

Another challenge that the lockdown protocol posed was a cut in the number of staff of some organizations, which spilled over into the post-lockdown period, as recalled by one of the respondents:

> At the height of the pandemic, a lot of our activities were forced to stop a bit because we mostly worked as a crowd of people. But we later resumed under all the COVID-19 protocols like social distancing, hand washing, and so on. Most of our monetary interventions are earmarked for specific purposes, such as staff salary, logistics and training allowances, feeding and emergency. Therefore, it was the emergency funds that were used to buy sanitizers, face masks, hand washing basins, and so on. In addition, we reduced the number of staff on worksites. For instance, for any work that may ordinarily require five staff, we used to send two or three staff to the work sites, while the remaining ones were allowed to work from home … (KII with an executive of Action Against Hunger, Yobe State, March 2022)

As noted earlier, the above circumstances, conditions, or challenges did not apply to all the studied organizations but some of them. What seems to play out here is that the stronger the humanitarian actors (the organizations), the more institutionalized and professional they are. In essence, the more professional, the higher the chances for them to be included in the mainstream Western-secular humanitarian field. Equally important is that the broader the organizations' networks and social capital, the stronger, more professional, and more institutionalized the organizations.

In terms of comparing the above challenges that the studied MUHAs faced with those experienced by Christian and secular humanitarian actors, empirical studies conducted elsewhere revealed that both Christian and secular actors equally faced similar challenges to those of Muslim humanitarian actors during the pandemic. These were mainly funding and resource challenges, weak and ineffective coordination and communication, poor road networks, especially in hard-to-reach communities, the absence of data on socioeconomic status, as well as the public's skepticism that led to noncompliance with COVID-19 protocols. A surprise finding is that there seems to be a distrust in the government because the public trusts more religious and secular humanitarian actors than the government agents due to the fear of corruption and nepotism from government officials (Amzat et al., 2020; Obi-Anu et al., 2020; Odukoya, 2020; Finn & Kobayashi, 2020; Odukoya et al. 2020; Nigerian Center for Disease Control, 2020a, 2020b; Junaidu, 2021; Obasi & Anierobi, 2021; Nwadiuto et al., 2023).

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study reveals that Muslim humanitarian actors in Nigeria are numerous, gender-mixed, and are in various forms and size: small, media, and large scale. During tumultuous times such as the COVID-19 lockdown, the MUHAs in Nigeria provided various humanitarian services especially to people in need at various locations. They ranged from educational, social, economic, psychological, as well as spiritual services. Among the services they offered were distributing both raw and cooked food; distribution of face masks, hand sanitizer, sanitary pads, detergent, soap, tissue paper, mosquito nets, and other daily essentials; sponsoring enlightenment campaigns; the publication and distribution of pamphlets, fliers, billboards, and hand bills; and advocacy visits to stakeholders. Also, the MUHAs trained people online to acquire entrepreneurial skills in addition to teaching educational activities. They also offered counseling services, especially to couples, widows, divorcees, and drugs addicts.

Findings of this study revealed that the philosophies, aims, and objectives of the studied MUHAs vary, depending on the reason for establishment. Nevertheless, during the COVID-19 lockdown, most of the studied organizations offered similar services, which were not different from their Christian and secular counterparts. The driving force for the MUHAs' activities are rooted in Islamic teachings. The sources of funds for the organizations are mainly donations from congregants, affluent members of the society, and by utilizing social capital through their existing social networks. A major challenge to effective and efficient service delivery is insufficient resources amid unlimited needs. Equally, bad road networks remain a hindrance to hard-to-reach communities. Again, inadequate staff, including volunteers, especially female ones, pose a hindrance to the studied MUHAs' activities during the COVID-19 lockdown.

While this study has limitations, including its focus primarily on Muslim humanitarian actors across five states, including the federal capital territory of Nigeria, it provides a foundation for future research. For instance, exploring the dynamic practices of Muslim, Christian, and secular humanitarian services during both peace and especially during tumultuous times such as war, flood, migration, fire, insurgency, internal displacement, collapse of buildings, earthquakes, drought, and armed robbery. The findings of this study highlight the need for policymakers to revisit how they downplay the role of faith-based humanitarian services, especially Muslim humanitarian actors, in the Global South.

Policy Recommendations

Considering the roles that Muslim humanitarian actors play during tumultuous times such as COVID-19, this research offers the following recommendations in order to address some of the challenges that hinder actors from more effective and efficient service delivery in Nigeria:

1. The MUHAs in Nigeria should liaison with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in order to learn

best practices in mobilizing humanitarian assistance to affected areas, critical information sharing, working with partners to deliver effective humanitarian responses, and raising awareness and advocating for communities affected by crises.

2. MUHAs in Nigeria should pay attention to capacity building, especially grant-writing workshops, to meet international donors' requirements, professionalization training, as well as networking. This will pave the way for knowledge, ideas, information, and access to resources such as winning grants.

3. There is a need for MUHAs in Nigeria to increase awareness, especially among the Muslim Ummah generally, in the direction of the need for self-reliance, resource mobilization, and information and resource sharing.

4. There is a need for Nigerian MUHAs to extend their services to remote rural areas, particularly hard-to-reach areas. This is because poverty is very much present in the countryside, and during tumultuous times like the COVID-19 lockdown, that aspect of humanitarian intervention is needed.

5. There is a need for the United Nations to establish a dialogue mechanism with faith-based humanitarian actors generally and especially Muslim humanitarian actors. It can be an avenue for achieving greater service delivery through establishing formal consultative forums between the United Nations, faith-based organizations (FBOs), secular NGOs, and philanthropists.

6. The UNDP Country Office in Nigeria should establish a formal liaison desk to facilitate ongoing dialogue and partnership-building between international agencies and a consortium of major MUHAs.

7. Muslim humanitarian actors should invest in professional development for staff in areas of project management, international grant compliance, and monitoring and evaluation to bridge the institutionalization gap and access larger funding pools.

8. The United Nations should establish an interfaith dialogue platform aiming at bringing together faith leaders from diverse backgrounds to cross-fertilize ideas and share common goals and challenges. This can help build trust and foster cooperation among different faith communities, especially in Nigeria where religious crises often happen.

9. There is a need for the UN to formalize partnerships with FBOs to leverage their expertise, resources, and community reach. This can involve collaborative initiatives, joint programming, and capacity-building activities.

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