

Contributions of Muslim Corpers Association (MCAN) to *Da'wah* - Islamic proselytisation in Bayelsa State between 1996 – 2015

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines an emerging and growing method of Islamic proselytisation in Bayelsa State. Just as evangelism is a familiar practice among the Christian church, the Muslims, for a long time, have been using *Da'wah* to preach and spread Islam in different parts of the world. The paper contends that unlike in the Christendom where clergies, as well as other believers, carry out evangelism; to carry out an effective *Da'wah* all Muslims are expected to practice gentleness, participate and be influential in politics, speech/understand a common language (Arabic) and be in a location. The creation of Bayelsa State in 1996 open the gate for more Muslims to migrant into the new State. Among these migrants were members of Muslims Corpers Association of Nigeria (MCAN), Federation of Muslims Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN) and National Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) who were at the vanguard of *Da'wah* in Bayelsa State. The paper reveals that, although Jihad set in motion the movement of people with its effect ricocheting areas hitherto untouched by Islam, Bayelsa, being the area under investigation took an exception to this general practice. In the area under study, Islam was introduced and propagated through persuasion and adoption process also known as *Da'wah*. The case of Bayelsa State was so peculiar in the sense that there was no record of a leader with a flag and the blessings of Uthman Dan Fodio who conquered the area but a systematic and a gradual spread through migrant Muslim traders making serious impact in the area. Despite this progress, the paper reveals that there was paucity of literature on Islam in Bayelsa State except for two works of Egodi which was not also extensive. Again, it is important to also note that unlike in the Northern part of Nigeria where there was a recorded incessant religious motivated violence, Muslims in Bayelsa State enjoyed moderate harmonious relations with their Christian counterpart. The historical methodology of research was adopted by the researcher and this involved the analysis of primary, secondary and tertiary sources of data. In this regard, a number of oral interviews were conducted. Information was also sourced from the internet as well as from books and journals. Therefore, the paper recommends that, though ideological differences are inevitable among a group or more or among religious faithful, it should not be allowed to take a center stage else the observed growth of Islam in Bayelsa could be hampered.

Keywords: Arabic, Bayelsa State, *Da'wah*, Islamic proselytization, migrants, Muslim.

INTRODUCTION

Many factors were responsible for the growth of Islam in Bayelsa State among which was *Da'wah*. In Bayelsa, *Da'wah* was carried out under an organisation called Muslim Corpers Association of Nigeria (MCAN). The word *Da'wah* literally means "issuing a summon" or "making an invitation". A Muslim who practices *Da'wah*, either as a

religious worker or in a volunteer community effort, is called a *Dā'ī* (Racius, 2016).

A *Dā'ī* is thus a person who invites people to understand Islam through dialogue, not unlike the Islamic equivalent of a missionary inviting people to the faith, prayer and manner of Islamic life. According to Abbas Usman Ladan

Kaura;

The term *Da'wah* has other senses in the Qur'an. In *sura* (chapter) 30:25, for example, it denotes the call to the dead to rise on the Day of Judgment. When used in the Qur'an, it generally refers to Allah's invitation to live according to His will. *Da'wah* is also described as the duty to "actively encourage fellow Muslims in the pursuance of greater piety in all aspects of their lives", a definition which has become central to contemporary Islamic thought (Racius, 2016).

After" Muhammad's (SAW) death in 632, from the available historical evidence, it appears that Muslims did not immediately embark upon *Da'wah* activities - during and after the rapid conquests of the Byzantine and Persian lands, they little, if at all, ventured to preach to local non-Muslims about the virtues of Islam (Noss, 1974). *Da'wah* in the sense of inviting non-Muslims to embrace Islam was not yet on conquering Muslims' agenda. *Da'wah* came into wider usage almost a hundred years after Muhammad's death, in the wake of the 'Abbasid propaganda against the then ruling Umayyad clan in the 720's (Noss, 1974). However, the 'Abbasid *Da'wah* ceased as soon as the 'Abbasids were in power - the fact that attests to its political nature. *Da'wah* as a truly missionary activity, albeit still within the Muslim *Umma*, appeared in the form of the Isma'ili *Da'wah* of the 9th through 13th centuries. Isma'ilis, in many ways, can be seen as the pioneers of the organized Muslim missionary activities: their highly institutionalized and sophisticated *Da'wah* structure has hardly been repeated until today. Moreover, for the Isma'ilis, *Da'wah* was a state priority. The Isma'ili *Da'wah* encompassed extra- and intra-*ummatic* forms and blended both theology and politics (Uche, 2017). Therefore, the main objective of this research is to discuss the impact of the Muslim Corpsers Association of Nigeria (MCAN) in the proselytization of Islam in Bayelsa State from 1996-2015.

THE INTRODUCTION, SPREAD AND IMPACTS OF DA'WAH IN BAYELSA STATE

MCAN is an acronym that connote the Muslim Corpsers' Association of Nigeria. In order to trace the origin of this association, we must go back to the Nigerian civil war era. In their propaganda, the Igbos christened the war as a war against the 'Christian south'. To ensure the unity of both the northern and southern parts of the country, the then Military government led by General Yakubu Gowon declared the 'no victor, no vanquished' slogan in his broadcast immediately after the Biafra soldiers surrendered. Despite that, there was no love lost between both sides, especially among Christians and Muslims, who treated each other with suspicion. As one of its cardinal objectives, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)

Scheme was established to bridge the gap and reunite the Nigerian youths who are the future of the nation. The NYSC scheme brought to limelight by the decree No. 24 of 1973, made possible in Nigeria the deployment of eligible graduates from universities and institutions of higher learning within the country and abroad to undertake a national service in States/Regions other than their State of origin (See MCAN Handover Note, 2016). The establishment of this scheme provided a platform under which Muslim corps members could organize and coordinate themselves for the purpose of collectively carrying out Islamic proselytization- hence, the formation of the Muslim Corpsers' Association, which was inaugurated during the 1978/1979 service year (Adeleye, 2017). MCAN has its National Headquarters in Mabushi District of Abuja and branches all over the country. It is an umbrella for all Muslim Corps members serving in all states of the Federation, including the study area.

The Bayelsa State Chapter, like others, has members who are literate in English language, thereby giving them the advantage of communicating with the locals easily in their quest to propagate and spread Islam through the following aim and objectives (Kaura, and Uche, 2017).

1. To serve as the coordinating body and a forum for the exchange of ideas and programme between Muslim corps members in all parts of the federation.
2. To fight for and protect the legitimate interest and rights of the Muslim youth corps members in Nigeria.
3. To promote better understanding of Islam among Muslim corps members, students and the interest of the populace.
4. To coordinate the efforts of the various Islamic organisations with that of MCAN in the propagation of Islam in Nigeria and world over.

The Bayelsa State Chapter of the MCAN came into existence in 1997 a year after the creation of the State (Abdullahi, 2018). The association made progress in its activities through which it was able to build hostels for Muslim Corps Members; to assist in providing accommodation for many who most times became stranded. Apart from being stranded, it was an effort geared towards helping other Muslim brethren stay away from impending 'un-Islamic behaviours' such as social vices and immoralities. MCAN is unarguably an important organization in the quest for propagating Islam in the study area.

The idea of having a permanent lodge for all registered Muslim Corps Member, as mentioned earlier, was borne out of the need to assist and encourage those posted to Bayelsa State to remain and contribute their quota in propagating the faith. For more than eight (8) years since conceiving this idea, the lodge was finally completed in 2006 using money contributed by individual corps members and other donor Muslim groups (Lawal, 2017).

Like other religious bodies, the Muslim community in Nigeria sees NYSC Scheme as a means through which

young, educated, and energetic Muslim graduates can reach non-Muslim communities, especially in the southeastern and south-south regions with the religion, through MCAN. Although, the scheme is a call for patriotic national service, the Muslims believe it conforms with *Muhajir* which is an Islamic injunction of discipleship (Saminu, 2017). The activities of the MCAN are centered on *Da'wah* and was divided into two i.e the City and Rural *Da'wah* (Lawal, 2017).

The city *Da'wah*

Daily programme: This includes after *Subhi* and *Magrib* programme.

Subhi programme: Every Monday to Wednesday of the week, two, three or four short verses of the Qur'an are recited and memorized after which they are all revised on weekends. In addition, a chapter from the book of *Al-Muharramat* by Sheik Al-Muhajid or from the characteristics of the *Salaṭy* Sheik Abdul Hameed Fareed are read. On Thursdays and Fridays, an *adhkar* from the citadel of the believer are read and a member is dedicated to give a short *naseehah*.

Magrib-Isha programme: Every Tuesday, a chapter or topic is treated from the book of *Fiqh* by the Ameer. On Wednesday, an explanation of the forty *hadeeth* of *An-Nawawi* collection is treated by the Secretary General. By Friday, the book of *Kitsbu Tauheed* is treated by the *Da'wah* committee, and Saturday's *seerah* is treated by the Ameer.

Weekly programme: This programme includes: *Al-usrah* programme, Friday programme, Sister's circle, and *Islamiyyah* Classes.

Al-Usrah programme: This takes place in the MCAN lodge every Sunday between the hours of 10:00 am to 12:00 noon. In this programme, a capable brother is selected to present/deliver a topic determined by the *Da'wah* committee.

Juma'ah programme. On Fridays, pre-*Khutubah* is given by *Da'wah* Secretary at Ekeki Central Mosque in English language. Other mosques where such sermons were delivered include Nigeria Liquified Natural Gas (NLNG) Mosque, Okolobiri and at Okaka Prison Mosque.

Sisters' Circle: Every Friday, after *Solatul Asr*, the sisters assemble themselves for *Da'wah*. They recite and memorize some *Hadeeth* and/or *Adhkar* and occasionally they invite the Ameer to deliver lecture to them.

Islamiyyah classes: These are classes organized to teach believers, Muslim children and new converts about

Islamic faith. The classes are conducted during weekdays and at weekends, and are divided into the following;

Upper Class: *Hifz*, *Lughah*, *Tajweed* and *Qira'a*

Advance Class: *Hifz*, *Qira'a* and *Tajweed*

Lower Class: Teaching and learning of *Qur'anic* recitation and *Hifz* of some short *Surahs*.

The rural *Da'wah*

As the name implies, the Rural *Da'wah* entails outreach to local villages and across the waters into the riverine communities in the study area. This is not to say that their activities do not include or cover communities around the state capital. The MCAN *Da'wah* Committee recent activities include visitation to the following places:

Visitations to schools: These are mostly primary and secondary schools owned by Muslims, where both western and Islamic knowledge, are taught in line with the doctrines/visions of the Ahmadiyya Mission. Some of the schools include the following among others:

1. Al-Umma Primary and Secondary School, Amarata, Yenagoa.
2. Bright Star Academy, Yenagoa.
3. Al-Hikma Basic School.

Visitation to hospitals and motherless baby homes:

Some of the places include the Federal Medical Centre (FMC) - Yenagoa, the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital (NDUTH), Okolobiri and a host of Motherless Baby Homes around the study area. During such visits, the *Da'wah* Committee pray for the staff and pupils/students of the host schools, speeches on good morals and high academic standard are delivered as well as presentation of gifts. At the hospitals and motherless baby homes, prayers are rendered and gifts are also presented.

Visitation to other communities: The MCAN *Da'wah* Committee also visit places like Okolobiri, Ammassoma, Sagbama, Ogbia, Otueke, and Nembe. During such visits, the Committee meet MCAN members serving there as well as the Muslims living there. On such occasions lectures are delivered and gifts presented to especially new converts. So far *Da'wah* activities led by MCAN is seriously providing the much needed boost in the proselytizing of Islam in the Bayelsa area and its environs.

THE IMPACTS OF DA'WAH IN BAYELSA STATE

To carry out their activities in Bayelsa State effectively, the MCAN Ameer sourced funds through monthly contribution of two thousand naira (#2,000) from each corps member. The Ameer further explained thus;

We also receive donations from patrons, mosques, special appeal forms distributed to generate funds for some projects like building of the MCAN Lodge you see here. Although, there are some corps members who do not identify themselves with the association for reasons that are either lack of interest or they are weak spiritually. Other corps members like followers of Izala movement stay away due to their doctrinal beliefs. We in MCAN believe in working together for the sole goal of proselytizing Islam. No doubt, the issue of Izalah movement challenging the *Sufi* practices among the followers of *Qadiriyya* and *Tijaniyya* brotherhoods is a strong factor militating against the unity of Nigerian Muslim *umma*. However, we in MCAN ensure that corps members with Tariqah, and Izalah backgrounds all join hands to propagate the goals of the association (Adeleye, 2017).

In another interview, corps member Hakeem Adeleye, shared a different view on reasons why some Muslim corps members do not join MCAN during their service year. He said thus;

Some youth corps members refused to join us because they wanted the association to be run as a social organization instead of a mission oriented organization. The reason being that some youths see the service year period as an open freedom, where they could engage certain social life, they hitherto could not enjoy back home-hence MCAN is seen as a hindrance (Adeleye, 2017).

Despite the above explanations, it is pertinent to say that the peculiar terrain of Bayelsa State, most especially the riverine areas scare some intending Muslim corps members who usually seek re-deployment immediately after the orientation programme. However, on a general note, the existence of MCAN in Bayelsa had been a veritable organ through which several educated corps members who would have derailed from their Islamic training remain steadfast in the faith. MCAN members and officials also use their knowledge of English language to communicate with natives of Bayelsa, thereby bridging the language gap which other Hausa Muslim preachers could not.

Ramadan programme

Ramadan, also known as a period of fasting ordained by Allah for every Muslim faithful to observe, is a sacred month of self-denial and abstinence from food for a certain time for spiritual rejuvenation (Ahmad Sanusi Husain,

2022). During *ramadan*, believers are expected to have *sahur* (food eaten as early as 5:00 am) after which they will wait until *iftar* at 6:30 pm, when the day's fast is broken (Rabiu, 2018). *Ramadan* is an annual event that commences in any stipulated month subject to the sighting of the new moon of *Sawul* by a number of faithful confirmed by Islamic clerics; then finally the *Sultan* of Sokoto announces the commencement of the Ramadan period.

During this important Islamic religious practice, Muslims round the world organize series of lectures christened *Ramadan Tafsir*. In Bayelsa, members of the Muslim Corpers' Association of Nigeria (MCAN) initiate the *Ramadan* programme as an effort to raise the consciousness of the Muslims to their responsibilities and duties during the month of *Ramadan*. The corps members started the programme at the Central Mosque, Amarata, under the guidance of Imam Abu Safiyanu Uchendu, who himself is a learned cleric and the chief Imam of the mosque. Like in the North, West and some parts of the South, the programme enjoys media coverage on Africa Independent Television (AIT) in Bayelsa at least twice before the end of the Ramadan. An informant, Barrister Bilkisu W. Odoko recounts her experience thus;

The Ramadan programme also known as *tafsir* is very important among the Muslims. Here in Bayelsa, the men are in charge of tafsir and do appear on African Independent Television (AIT) at least twice before the end of the Ramadan. We, in the FOMWAN always visit the prison here in Bayelsa where we organize it for the inmates. I was once invited to explain the importance of Ramadan on AIT in 2015, where I answered questions from Muslims in the State during the programme (Odoko, 2017).

It was observed that involving women who understand English language helps in debunking the age long tradition of (*puddah*) which other men used to prevent them from attending Islamic functions outside their homes. It also helps to boost the number of educated Muslims needed to propagate Islam in a predominant English speaking society like Bayelsa. At the end of the month of Ramadan comes the Eid celebration. During the celebration, Muslim faithful visit family and other Muslim brothers and sisters where gifts are exchanged. To carry out an effective *Da'wah* all Muslim are expected to practice the following:

Gentleness

With regard to Muhammad's (SAW) mild nature in preaching Islam, the Qur'an says: And by the mercy of Allah you dealt with them gently. If you were harsh and hard hearted, they would have fled from around you

(Qur'an 3:159). The Qur'an says about Moses and Aaron who preached to Pharaoh, the claimant of God. Go speak to him, both of you, mildly in order that he may reflect or fear God (Qur'an 20:44). Muhammad was reported by his wife, Aisha to have said "Whenever gentleness is in a thing it beautifies it and whenever it is withdrawn from something it defaces (Kaura, 2017)". Muhammad was quoted by Jareer as saying, "One deprived of gentleness is deprived of all good". Mohammed Joseph affirms this while recalling how he was attracted to Islam. He said thus:

I am a Bayelsan and a native of Epie. I am from a family of Jehovah witnesses. I used to be Ovieteme Joseph. The events that led to my conversion to Islam stated during my days in Niger-Delta University (NDU) where a certain Hausa cobbler at the gate of the institution demonstrated an attitude gentleness that captivated my mind. Most times I patronise him, he either refused to collect money from me or ask me to pay any amount I have. One day I found some people threatening to beat him up after refusing to pay for the service he rendered to them claiming he is a non-indigene as such he must pay 'marching ground' (money collected from mostly non indigenes/residents of an area for residing/buying/developing property/land bought in the said location. The tax, levied by mostly indigenous youths is, however, illegal). I was shocked to hear the man pleading instead of standing for his right. When I asked him why, he said the Qur'an admonished Muslims to deal with others gently. I left wondering how lofty this faith is and I later made up my mind to embrace Islam (Zunurain, 2017).

The Muslims, no doubt, demonstrate this act of gentleness wherever they find themselves and in their interaction among themselves and with their host communities. This is not to say that there are no cases where extremists ignite religious crises that always leave non-Muslims view Islam as a violent faith.

Influence in politics

Muslims made it a part of their political theory (through relating *Da'wah* to jihad) and life (using the concept of *Da'wah* in their political agendas). Taken in general, the intertwining of *Da'wah* and politics, then, has been a feature throughout the Muslim history, though practical implications of this have been different in different ages (Joseph, 2017). This was evident in the first jihad led by the Prophet Mohammed (SAW) against the rulers of Mecca. After successfully taking over power, the Prophet

established a Caliphate; that remains the trend throughout Islamic history.

Other factors that also contributed in making Islam influential in politics includes colonial policies. This was due to the advantages given to northerners, predominantly Muslims when implementing the indirect rule system adopted by the British in colonial Nigeria. Ugbegili, while explaining the situation among the Tiv affirmed that in first instance, the British policy of indirect rule, which fitted very well into the Hausa leadership system, was applied after conquest in Tivland. This policy indeed gave the Hausa Muslims an edge over the Tiv especially in the sight of the British. The Tiv were compelled to pattern their political setting along the lines of Hausa Muslims (Uche, 2017). In the proceeding years, this policy certainly had an effect on the local people who may be attracted to the faith in quest for political benefit.

E. Uchendu's account on conflict and Islam in the Eastern Niger-Delta buttressed this when she opined that a number of Bayelsa youths through their admiration for Asari Dokubo converted to Islam between 2004 and 2009 (Ugbegili, 2012). While quoting Abusuyan Uche who confirmed this, said:

"When you talk of the Niger-Delta crisis you call to mind Asari Dokubo. He is a Muslim brother. Some feel that Allah has blessed him with power. Some Ijaw boys embraced Islam because of him. Boys who took Islam because of him are over one thousand (Uchendu, 2012)."

In a similar vein, interview with some indigenous Muslims reveals that they were attracted to Islam because they see the religion as a medium through which they could attain more prestige and also gain some advantages even among the Muslims in the north (Uchendu, 2012).

Speaking a common language

"I did not send any messenger except that he spoke the language of his people to explain to them". *Sura "Ibrahim"* 14:4 (Obi, 2017). The language referred to here is Arabic which is predominantly spoken among the Arabs in the Middle-East and Saudi Arabia in particular. Since the introduction of Islam in the early seventh 7th century through Prophet Mohammed (SAW), the sacred language of the faith remains Arabic which all believers are encouraged to learn. As at the time of this study, most Muslim faithful in Bayelsa State can read the Qur'an and thus communicate in Arabic which enhance their ability to worship together. This made it easier for Islamic preachers in Bayelsa State who use the English language (in most cases pidgin) to teach converts Islamic rituals after which they learn Arabic-a language of the Qur'an. In an interview with Alhaji Abu Safiyanu Uche, he posits thus:

I am an Igbo man from Ebonyi State and had my early Islamic education from there after which I was given scholarship to study in an Islamic higher institution in the Middle-East. I speak Igbo as my native tongue, English language, and none of the local languages in Bayelsa State but fluent Arabic because that is the language of the Holy Qur'an. This enables me communicate, worship and associate with other Muslim *umma* all over the world. In Bayelsa, I find my ability to speak English language an advantage for me when preaching to non-Muslim people of the State while Arabic helps in reading and translating the Qur'an to believers who mostly understand the language (Sani, 2017).

Barrister Bilikisu W., Barrister Boro E. and Alhaji Abdulrahman Zikiye all agreed that the Arabic language is very sacred in Islam (Uche, 2017). The trio affirmed that they all lived and schooled in the north for many years which avails them the opportunity to speak an appreciable Hausa language but a far better Arabic because of the credence it is accorded in Islam. Armed with Arabic, Hausa, English and Ijaw languages, they find it easy to communicate and also preach Islam to their non-Muslim brothers and sisters.

Location

Choosing the right location is very important in the practice of *Da'wah*. For example, Mount Safain the time of Muhammad was used for announcements. So, Muhammad went there to make his point. He chose that particular location because he knew the people who he was inviting to Islam. He knew their nature and characteristics, so he chose Mount Safa. He climbed up to its summit and addressed his people saying: "O people of Quraysh, if I were to tell you there was an army behind this hill would you listen to me (Odoko, 2017)?"

Modern *Da'wah* movements are varied in their objectives and activities. Examples include:

- The Muslim Brotherhood has focused on a methodology of building grassroots institutions and funding welfare projects, which has helped it survive decades of repression under various dictatorships in many Middle Eastern countries, with the group and its many offshoots still enjoying popular support and power (Sani, 2017).
- *Jamaat-e-Islami* has focused on presenting Islam as a complete way of life and on the methodology of building grassroots institutions and funding welfare projects.
- *Tablighi Jamaat* works on trying to bring the Muslims back to the fundamental practices of Islam such as

worship; they do this by encouraging members to speak and to teach them the virtues of good actions. The movement has a following of between 100 and 150 million people (Racius, 2016).

- *Ahmed Deedat* was a notable debater who was a revolutionary figure among Muslims for his effort in debating Christian polemics. Many Muslim debaters from popular debaters to grassroots *Da'wah* campaigners use his books and videos as reference material (*The Tablighi Jamaat Movement*).
- *Zakir Naik* was a student of Ahmed Deedat and followed in his teacher's footsteps by debating Christian polemics and by holding Questions and Answer sessions with Christians. Zakir Naik is particularly notable for taking the effort of debating Christian polemics to the Muslim mainstream with his popular channel Peace TV (Deedat, 2017).
- *Hizb ut-Tahrir* is a movement which focuses on educating the Muslim masses about the *Caliphate* and on establishing it (Naik, 2017).
- *iERA* is a research institute based in London which seeks to debate Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals, help new Muslims, train speakers and produce academic research papers on *Da'wah* issues (Tahrir, 2014).
- *Hikmah Times*. In Singapore, there is a significant impact of the Islamic *Da'wah* (Invitation) movement. There are many local/international organisations (e.g. Hikmah Times).
- The *Deen Mohammad Shaikh* mission has converted over 110,000 Hindus to Islam in Pakistan (*Islamic Education and Research Academy*).
- *Al-Naysaburi*: Code of Conduct depicts the values in which dais should spread the word of Islam to Muslims and non-Muslims (*Islamic Education and Research Academy*).
- *Idris's* work presents us with an indigenous account of the traditions of the *Da'wah* in Yaman. His account of the Nizari-Musta'li succession dispute reflects the official view of the Tayyibis, the only surviving Musta'li Ismaili community who, after the death of al-Amir, recognized the later Fatimid caliphs as their Imams, but did not long survive the collapse of the Fatimid at the hands of the Ayybids State in 1171 (*Islamic Education and Research Academy*).

The Bayelsa State chapter of *Da'wah* came into existence in 1997, a year after the creation of the State. The chapter has members who are literate thereby giving them the advantage of communicating with the locals easily in their quest to propagate and spread Islam in the study area. As one of the aims and objectives, the MCAN compliment the efforts of the various Islamic organisations such as FOMWAN, and NSCIA in the propagation of Islam in Nigeria and world over (*Islamic Education and Research Academy*).

Like other religious bodies, the Muslim *umma* in Nigeria

see the National Youth Service Corpse (NYSC) Scheme as a means through which young, educated, and energetic Muslim graduates can reach non-Muslim communities, especially in the Niger Delta region with the religion through MCAN. Although the NYSC is a clarion call for patriotic national service, the Muslims believe it conforms to *Muhajir* which is an Islamic injunction of discipleship (Kaura, 2017).

To carry out *Da'awah*, members of the Bayelsa State chapter divided their activities into two i.e the city and rural *da'wah*. The city *da'wah* had daily and weekly programmes. In either of the two, the members study the Qur'an under the leadership of the *Ameer* (leader) and the *Ameera* who assisted him in leading the female Muslim members. On Fridays, pre-*Khutubah* (sermon) was given in English language at Ekeki central Mosque. Other Mosques where such sermons were delivered include NLNG, Okolobiri, and Okaka Prison Mosques respectively. Through these activities, members were encouraged to be steadfast in the faith and to also teach those who are not vast in Islamic knowledge.

The rural *Da'wah* entails outreach to local villages and across the waters into riverine communities in the study area. This is not to say that their activities do not include or cover communities around the State capital. The MCAN *Da'wah* committee activities included visitation to schools, hospitals, motherless babies' homes, and Corpers' lodges. On such occasions lectures were delivered and gift items presented to especially new converts. The activities of this committee was seriously boosting the proselytisation of Islam in the Bayelsa State and its environs. In the words of Mallam A. S. Ladan Kaura;

The Muslim Corpers Association of Nigeria (MCAN) is a very important association and has served as an umbrella for many corpse members like me. I remember when I was first posted to Bayelsa State, my parents refused granting me the permission to serve here until a family friend informed us of the existence of MCAN and its activities in the state. On arrival, I was overwhelmed with joy and surprise to see the number of other Muslim brothers and sisters serving here as well as other Muslim community in the state who are here for business or federal assignment (Kaura, 2017).

Kaura's account was a reflection of fear and lack of knowledge of the growth of Islam in the study area by not only Muslim in the north but other Nigerians at large. It also indicated that the presence and activities of MCAN in Bayelsa contributed in the growth of Islam by attracting more Muslim youths into the area who at long run serve as vanguards for the proselytisation of Islam.

Increasing interest in Islam experienced by people who saw it as a means of achieving more prestige and better standard of living was another factor responsible for the

Table 1. Names of some indigenous Muslim converts in Bayelsa State.

S/No	Name
1	Alhaji Attahiru Mohammed
2	Alfa Adewoye Zunurain
3	Alhaji Abdulkadir Jibril
4	Alhaji Abdulrahaman Zikeye E.
5	Alhaji Abu Safiyanu Uche
6	Hajiya Mariam Abeki
7	Alhaji Badamasi Salihu
8	Alhaji Dr. Kasim Oru
9	Alhaji Gambo Mohammed
10	Alhaji Isah Fiekosufa
11	Alhaji Mohamadu Sale
12	Alhaji Mamman Sambo
13	Barr. Bilikisu Woyengidadiye
14	Alhaji Isa Ogbotubo
15	Mohammed Joseph
16	Alhaji Mohammed A. Agri
17	Alhaji Alagoa Ismaila
18	Alhaji Ogbobio Haleem
19	Alhaji Ibrahim Arumuna
20	Hamza P. Abeki
21	Mohammed Maxwell
22	Musa Aniedi
23	Abubakar Odede
24	Abdulaziz Ora
25	Alhaji Boro E.
26	Alhaji Ibrahim Namatebe
27	Nuhu Williams
28	Alhaji Jamil Obarugo
29	Mallam Mohammed Clinbe
30	Alhaji Tahiru Akpopiribo
31	Ahmed El-Rufai
32	Abdullahi Eke
33	Saidu Odede
34	Khadija Agu
35	Abdulaziz Obi
36	Alhaji Musa Otokor
37	Imam Zakariya Alawe
38	Ibrahim Tonye
39	Mohammed Akini
40	Mohammed Obi

Source: Compiled from information collected during field work, 2017.

growth of Islam in the study area. Such converts adopt Arabic names which is a common practice among the indigenous Muslim as shown in the Table 1.

One can trace the desire of many non-Muslims to embrace Islam because of its social, economic, and political influence to the end of the Civil War (Kaura, 2017). The post-Civil war era ushered in significant number of

northerners/Muslim into positions of authority either as military or civilian administrators. Egodi Uchendu supported this view when she quoted former Melford Goodhead Dokubo who converted to Islam and became Alhaji Mujahid Asari Dokubo. That Dokubo's decision to accept Islam stemmed from his growing political and social activities. Again, that within a few years Dokubo conversion to Islam, a number of youths in Bayelsa States converted to Islam between 2004 and 2009 (Oru, 2017).

There were also those who became Muslim through marriage, especially the females, who either got married to Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo or even Ijaw Muslim men. There were, as well, some who's interaction with Muslims in Port-Harcourt and other parts of Nigeria spurred them to accept Islam. The likes of Barristers E. Boro, and W. Bilkisu Odoko both converted to Islam during their period of undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Law, Bayero University, Kano (Uchendu, 2010). Others are Alhaji Chief Abdulrahman Zikaye, and Alhaji Isah Fiekosufa got converted in Kaduna and Rivers States respectively.

The absence of priesthood in Islam has placed the responsibility of preaching and spreading Islam on the shoulders of every Muslim (Boro, Odoko, Zikaye and Fiekosufa, 2017). This was true in Bayelsa State as ordinary Muslim traders, artisans, hawkers, members of the arm forces, paramilitary, NYSC members, and civil servants all participated in spreading the faith through *Da'wah*.

CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on the proselytization of Islam in Bayelsa State through the auspices of *Da'wah* from 1996-2015. It has been shown in the paper how several Islamic organizations that were located in former Rivers State decided to establish branches in the study area immediately the State was created in 1996 and how they also used *Da'wah* to spread Islam. It has also been shown that the establishment of a branch of the Muslim Corpers (sic) Association Nigeria (MCAN) had opened a new chapter in the effort to propagate Islam in Bayelsa. The members of this association, being youths and educated graduates, are making impacts due to their ability to communicate with the natives in English language. They carried out *Da'wah* and also organize Ramadan programmes in the State during fasting period. The paper, however, did not fail to identify and discuss some of the impacts of *Da'wah* in Bayelsa State.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Note

See Handover Note and Report of MCAN Bayelsa State Chapter Programme of Activities, 2016; compiled by Corps member Nurudeen Mauruf.

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Interviews

Abbas Shehu Ladan Kaura, MCAN member and *Da'wah* Bayelsa State Chapter Chairman, interview at MCAN Lodge, Okaka, Yenagoa, 25th September, 2017; and Alhaji Abu Safiyanu Uche, the Chief Imam, Amarata Central Mosque, interviews in Yenagoa, 17th September, 2017.

Abdulaziz Obi, 47 years, Mohammad Obi, 43 years, Alhaji Jamil Obaruyo, 52 years, Mohammed Maxwell, 34 years, and Ibrahim Tonye, 31 years, interviews at Ogbia, and Sagbama, 14th July, 2013 and 11th September, 2017.

Abubakar Lawal, MCAN member and *Da'wah* Bayelsa State Chapter Chairman, interview at NYSC Lodge, Nembe Bassambiri, 20th September, 2017.

Alfa Adewoye Zunurain, interview at Edepie, Yenagoa, 6th September, 2017.

Alhaji Abu Safiyanu Uche, the Chief Imam, Amarata Central Mosque, interviews in Yenagoa, 17th September, 2017.

Barr. Bilkisu W. O., Barr. Boro E. and Alhaji Abdulrahman Zikiye, interviews in Onopa, Yenizue-Gene, and Amarata respectively, Yenagoa, 20th July and 13th July, 2017.

Barr. E. Boro, Barrister Bilkisu W. O., Alhaji Abdulrahman Zikaye, and Alhaji Isa Fiekosufa, interviews at Yenizue-Gene, Onopa, Amarata, and Tobia town, 11th July, 2013 and 10th October, 2017.

Garba Saminu, MCAN member and *Da'wah* Bayelsa State Chapter Chairman, interview at NYSC Lodge, Nembe Ogbolomabiri, 20th September, 2017.

Hakeem Adeleye, 26 years, MCAN member, interview at MCAN Lodge, Okaka, Yenagoa, 25th September, 2017.

Imam Mohammad Sani Zamfara, 57 years, Deputy Chairman, Izala Group, Bayelsa State Chpater, interviews at Ovom, 9th July, 2013 and 17th September, 2017.

Mallam Mohammed Rabi, Chief Imam, 42 years, Central Mosque Brass, interviews in Brass, 15th September, 2018.

Mallam Safiyanu Yahuza Abdullahi, 37 years, interview at Brass, 15th September, 2018.

Mohammed Joseph, 32 years, Graduate, interview in Amassoma, 17th September, 2017.