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Centre for  
Humanitarian  
Dialogue

*Mediation for peace*

# Benue Mediation Process:

*Official Launch Report*



**VENUE: BENUE HOTEL, MAKURDI**

**DATE: 15<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2019.**

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## **I. Introduction**

Benue State is located in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. It has a very fertile cropland, grazing pasture, active corridors for sedentary and migrating cattle thus making it the epicentre of farmer-herder conflict. This conflict has resulted to massive loss of lives, properties, Gender Based Violence and upsurge of other criminal activities. A conflict assessment conducted by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) in collaboration with the office of the Vice President in Benue State between August and December, 2017, indicated that out of the 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs), 16 are the most affected in terms of farmer-herder violence. In order to deepen its understanding of the conflict, HD embarked on shuttle diplomacy among traditional rulers, religious groups, State and Local Governments as well community groups to douse tension. In addition, in early 2019, a peaceful election programming was implemented targeting political parties and elites, youth and women groups and journalists in Benue and Nasarawa States as an entry point into the peace building initiative. In order to constitute the mediation team and key actors, HD recently carried out a pre-mediation preparatory mission to identify the key actors, key issues for mediation and the current dynamics of the farmer-herder conflict.

With the backing of the Benue State Government and the support of the German Government, HD officially launched the Benue Mediation process between the different communities in Benue State, with key stakeholders drawn from the three senatorial Zones A, B and C. The dialogue process will focus primarily on continuous causes of tension that include that of pastoralist/farmer conflicts; internally displaced persons; cross-border disputes between the LGAs, cattle rustling among others. By addressing these issues through a dialogue process, HD hopes to involve the affected communities in developing collective solutions to their problems. HD completed a similar dialogue process in 2014 in Jos, Plateau State and in March 2016 for Southern Kaduna in Kaduna State.

## **II. Background information**

The launch of the HD Dialogue Process in Benue state is the product of behind-the-scene shuttle diplomacy efforts, consultations and pre-mediation preparations which have spanned well over a year, and which predated the outbreak of violence between farmers and pastoralists in Benue state in early 2018. HD had a few weeks ago, in this same venue, brought together for the very first time in the history of Benue state, the leaders of nine ethnic groups in Benue state, to commit to a peace mediation process which seeks to end the violence between farmers and herders in the state.

HD is currently involved in more than 40 dialogue and mediation initiatives in over 20 countries, some public, others confidential, across the world. Since early 2013, HD has led and facilitated



*Figure 1 : Father from the Catholic Church, giving his good will message at the official launch*

three inter-communal dialogue and conflict mediation processes in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, specifically in Plateau and Kaduna states. The dialogue efforts were community-driven, enabling communities to be more directly involved in finding lasting solutions to their issues and concerns, and to build trust and confidence. HD’s approach cuts across all levels of society and in its efforts, seeks the buy-in and support of

key stakeholders including the Federal, State and Local Governments, the business community, traditional rulers, community and religious leaders, women and youth. HD is also actively engaged in North East Nigeria where ongoing projects focus on dialogue around intercommunal and interreligious issues, engagement with Vigilante groups in terms of their interface with society and government, as well as with religious and traditional authorities on proffering an Alternative Narrative or codified response to extremist ideology.

Specifically on the farmer-herder issues, HD has actively sought to prevent and mitigate the effect of farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria’s Middle Belt, especially in the aftermath of the conflicts that erupted in early 2018. We have conducted several conflict assessment missions, engaged key

Stakeholders including government, socio-political groups, traditional and religious authorities, and other relevant actors in seeking a viable solution to the farmer-herder conflict.



Figure 2 : Deputy Commissioner of Police, Benue State, following the official launch proceedings

**III. Key Issues**

1. HD is fully committed to helping the communities in Benue arrive at a lasting solution to the farmer-herder problem. HD will henceforth be conducting series of dialogue sessions with the representatives of the various communities and will work towards achieving a lasting, inclusive and overarching process that will stand the test of time and foster peaceful, symbiotic and cooperative coexistence between the various communities.
2. HD had, prior to this official launch ( in collaboration with the Office of the Vice President, and the Clingendael Institute of the Netherlands), convened Negotiation and Dialogue Training workshops for the national executive and representatives of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), and the All Farmers Association in Nigeria (AFAN), both key stakeholders in Nigeria’s socio-economic and political firmament. Convening this training workshop was critical to the full commencement of the mediation

process and an important part of HD's overarching strategy towards addressing the endemic farmer-herder conflicts which have had devastating impact in the country, especially in the seven frontline states of Adamawa, Benue, Kaduna, Nasawara, Plateau, Taraba, Zamfara.

#### **IV. Community Good will messages**

##### **1. Agatu Community**

The representative reiterated that we should love each other as we love ourselves. He acknowledged that they have suffered and are in the media for the attacks that have been meted on them. He appreciated both State and federal government for providing them with good roads and admonished that they should eschew violence so that they can make good use of the roads. He said death is inevitable but they need to show love so that they can give good account of themselves before their creator at the end of their sojourn on earth.

##### **2. Etulo Community**

Appreciated HD's efforts in bringing the communities together and undertook to support the entire mediation process to its natural conclusion.

##### **3. Fulani Community**

MACBAN appreciated HD and said since the intervention of HD, the community leadership has gained knowledge on how to relate well with the farmers. He said in their culture, they do not fight to take land but they are offenders by nature of their culture because the animals have the tendency to trespass into farm lands.

##### **4. Hausa Community**

Welcomed all and appreciated HD for a very bold step to ensure that they enjoy peace in Benue. She said God created the world and asked that humans enjoy its bounty but the claims and counter claims on resources should be stopped so that peace will ensue.

##### **5. Idoma community**

Appreciated HD for creating a background and enabling environment to discuss their problems. The representative said they most eschew lip service and pessimism and really say what they mean otherwise they will only be wasting time without achieving anything.

#### 6. Egede community

Peace is the existence of the world and they want to join other communities in appreciation of HD for initiating this peace process. He encouraged communities to get rid of youth restiveness and segregation because that will not help in peaceful coexistence. He emphasized that they all belong to one Benue, One Nigeria and above all God. He pledged their support for this process.

#### 7. Jukun community

Emphasized that they are tired of war and that war does not pay but sometimes they are force into it. He said the Jukun man cannot contest with Tiv man in any way. The only Jukun man in the civil service is retired. They are fishermen but the only source of their livelihood which are the fish ponds are contested by the Tiv.

#### 8. Tiv community

Appreciated HD and said in fostering peace, their most be a right person and a wrong person but inability to identify the wrong and address it means the failure of the process. He said the mediators should trace the problem from the fact that why should everybody have a problem with Fulani. He said for the Jukun who claims Jukun doesn't like them is not right because if Tive don't want them, they would have been crushed since they are a very small community.

#### 9. Yoruba community

Finds this as an opportunity to learn. They see peace like tea and sugar, food and salt because there is no development without peace. He said the leaders have responsibility to ensure peace in their community because God has bestowed on them t5hat responsibility.

### **V. Format of the Mediation Process**

The format of the process will consist of joint sessions of the following communities (per Senatorial Zone) lasting four-days. The Zones and ethnic communities are listed below.

- **Zone A:** Tiv, Igbo, Fulani, Igede, Yoruba, Hausa, Jukun, Etulo, Agatu and Idoma
- **Zone B:** Tiv, Igbo, Fulani, Igede, Yoruba, Hausa, Jukun, Etulo, Agatu and Idoma
- **Zone C:** Tiv, Igbo, Fulani, Igede, Yoruba, Hausa, Jukun, Etulo, Agatu and Idoma

The communities of concern have each nominated 6 delegates to serve as representatives of the community and shall be comprised of:

1. A Development/Cultural Association Leader

2. A Representative of the Traditional Council
3. A Youth Leader
4. A Women Leader
5. A Religious Leader; and
6. A Prominent/Respected opinion leader.

(See the complete list of delegates attached)

HD will chair and facilitate the sessions of the Benue State Farmer/Herder Dialogue Process as well as any working groups constituted to support the process. Local, State, and Federal Government representatives will be assigned an observer role at the dialogue discussions. HD supports their full participation in the process since many issues have implications on government policy and direction.

### *Observers to the Benue Mediation process*

The following actors will be accorded an observer role to the mediation, providing support and advice where needed:

1. Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)
2. JNI
3. Representative of the Federal State of Nigeria (To be briefed on every milestone of the process to ensure a buy-in from the Federal State government.
4. Rep. of the Catholic Church.
5. Representative of the Chair of Council of Traditional Rulers, Benue State.

## **VI. ANNEXES:**







