

IPT Stories from Gombe

As told to Shanta Premawardhana on visit to Gombe State in May 2019

1. Sanda Abubaker, Talasse



Sanda Abubaker at the Training of Trainers

After a Boko Haram attack a few years ago, the local bank in Talasse never recovered. It had not met the threshold of deposits and the headquarters was threatening to close the bank. The bank needed N50 million in deposits to avoid closure.

Such a closure would cause the people of the village a great deal of hardship. They will need to go (76km) to Gombe city to do their banking. The cost and transportation time alone would be prohibitive. The village head pleaded with those who had moved out of the community for jobs and business to deposit their money in the village bank, but to no avail. The local IPT (Muslims and Christians) led by

Sanda Abubakar saw this as a serious concern for the village and spoke to the chief about it which led to Muslims and Christians mobilizing for action.

Last year, the IPT decided that this was an urgent, relevant and winnable project. The self-interest of the villagers was clear. They did a series of one on ones and discovered that the villagers could not deposit enough to keep the bank solvent. Then they did one on ones with leaders of community associations (like the association of farmers, and the association of motor cycle riders) and unions. They also went outside the village to find those who had moved out. They found one, who deposited N30 million and a few others who deposited N5 million and N10 million, making up more than the N50 million threshold.

Now the bank is solvent and is doing good business. The IPT has had its first success. Villagers and community groups know about the IPT and how Muslims and Christians are working together. Their power and reputation have grown.

2. AlKasim, Billiri, Tangale



AlKasim participating in the Training of Trainers



Last year, Tina made an impassioned appeal to the Traditional Ruler of Tangale to support the teaching of interfaith relationships to Muslim and Christian children.

There was no existing Muslim and Christian organization in Billiri when AlKasim had finished his training. But there was a Muslim youth Forum and a similar Christian one. "Before OMNIA, we couldn't even imagine that they could come together. Christians are 90% in this community and normally, they don't even talk to or about Muslims."

Tina (a Christian) had participated in the OMNIA training before AlKasim (a Muslim). She is the one who encouraged him to go to training. They did something that was

previously thought impossible: they brought the Tangale Muslim Youth Forum and the Christian Youth Forum together. They are now working together.

Tina's passion is to work with Muslim and Christian kids. She wants to teach them together, about each others' religion. Now, she has helpers from the Muslim and Christian youth forums. She needs curriculum help.

3. Ruth Abner, Kaltungo



Zuwaira (left) and Ruth (right) in Kaltungo, Oct. 2018

At the OMNIA training in December 2017, Ruth Abner (a Christian) and Zuwaira Alhassan (a Muslim) did a one on one, at which time they agreed to go back to their village of Kaltungo and encourage the women to build Christian-Muslim relationships. Three months later, 11 pairs of women came to see me who to talk about what they might do together. In October, over 120 women crowded into a small auditorium to hear me who speak and to discuss next steps. The few men in the room demanded that they too be given an opportunity to form IPTs! Today there are over 2000 women in their network.

Historically, Kaltungo has been vulnerable to intercommunal clashes and election-related violence. The IPTs came together prior to the election in February 2019 and held a community feast. They collected money, organized the event, brought food to share with each and invited Abare Kallah to speak of peace. Political affiliations do not usually transcend the binaries of religious identity. Muslims typically vote for Muslims and Christians for Christians. But they agreed to vote for the best candidate for the community, Muslim or Christian. Women played a vital role in preventing election-related violence. They used their influence over their husbands and sons urging them to reject violence. They also organized the Muslim and Christian young people to surround the area to protect houses of worship and other vulnerable locations from violence.

On Easter Sunday 2019 there was a tragic incident. A group of Christian young men and women (Boys and Girls Brigades) were participating in a celebratory Easter march, when a car rammed into the group killing 9 young people and injuring 35. The intentional killing was done by 2 Muslims. This led to riots as Christian young men reacted violently to Muslims in Gombe.

Ruth regularly monitored the social media used by the young people. There were many Facebook posts calling for the killing of Christians or Muslims. 7 out of 10 responses countered that. Those are OMNIA graduates, said Ruth. That's the difference OMNIA has made in this community. Because of the training the violence has not escalated to something else. She knows this because it's the OMNIA graduates who are making the difference. They, like the salt and the leaven, are changing the culture, she said.

4. Bagadaza IPT

After the Easter Sunday tragedy and the ensuing disturbances, Muslims were being attacked because they were seen as the perpetrators. The IPT came together, and using the OMNIA training they had received, the IPT held a youth orientation forum to help the young people understand what to do. Christian youth came together to patrol the area to protect the Muslims. This was not possible before OMNIA, they said.

Bagadaza is a peaceful community with good Muslim and Christian relationships. Extremists from outside the community come to sow discord and sometimes young people get caught up in their rhetoric. The IPT decided that one way to address this is to identify and challenge the extremists by making wristbands



The culvert at Bagadaza

for the members of the community, so that outsiders could be immediately identified and challenged. In this way, the IPT is a buffer against the extremist violence.

During the rainy season, the village is cut off from the rest of the world. The culvert is broken. In the dry season, they can drive across the irrigation canal bed. But not during the rainy season. The IPT built power in the village and asked the government to build the culvert. But this effort was stalled because of the February 2019 election. So the IPT decided that they would need to do it themselves. They asked people for donations, and raised N500,000. With that, they bought the rocks and cement, and

brought the community together to work on building the culvert. Muslims and Christians working together was a first for most people.

This was a major victory for the IPT. Now they are thinking about the next winnable project. The highest priorities for community are a clinic (particularly for maternity) and a primary school. There is also no govt. primary school. 80% of the people can't afford the private school fees. When the children are idle, they will find other things to do. The problem is that, unlike the culvert, they can't afford this. Therefore they will approach government authorities, but they need to wait until the new state governments gets settled in.

After OMNIA training, the imams and pastors of the village created an Elders Forum to address any problems that may arise there.

5. IPTs in Gombe City

Saleem Mohammed (Muslim) -- After the Easter Sunday tragedy occurred, Muslim and Christian young people were getting ready to attack each other. IPT members came together. They first got radio broadcasts to feature Abare Kallah to appeal for calm. Second, they asked Christian and Muslim elders to calm down their youth. Now they want to work on creating IPTs with those same youths so they can work together on lasting peace.

Ezekiel (Christian) -- OMNIA certificates have become a talking point. People wonder what this is about. Ezekiel's boss was so impressed that he gave Ezekiel a N10,000 bonus for having attended the training. Ezekiel confronted his boss about discrimination in the workplace (a Family Planning NGO) where Christians were being employed over Muslims who were more competent. The boss did not see this at first, but later admitted to the problem and welcomed the OMNIA training in his workplace.

Mohammed Mohammed (Muslim) -- a student at Gombe State University. Usually, Muslims support only Muslims and Christians support only Christians. In the student union government election, there was a popular Muslim. The Christian was not so popular. Mohammed brought them together and asked what their achievements were. It turned out that the Christian had much more achievements than the Muslim. So, he asked his Muslim friends to support the Christian because he had better achievements and that gave the Christian victory in the polls.

Saleem (Muslim) -- After the OMNIA training, they did one on ones to find out the problems in the community, and to find out their self-interest. They identified the question of youth dropouts from school and wanted to get them back to school to get their Senior School Certificate. They built a team of over 100 members and collected money to send some to school. This will be a continuing project.

Alhaji Sadiq (Muslim) – In the neighborhood of Nasarawo there are 7 churches. Because of the history of violence, young men in the church work as security guards, using weapons, checking devices, etc. as they come to church. The IPT called a meeting with the pastors. The Muslims said, you shouldn't have Christian boys guarding the church; they need to be inside at worship. We will have Muslim boys guard the church. The pastors agreed to do the same for the mosques.

Muslims acknowledged that there is a problem in the Muslim community. Some teachers and preachers advocate extremism. The IPT wants to organize Christian and Muslim youth to go together to visit the Muslim teachers and preachers and tell them to preach peace, rather than extremism. Because it is the young people who suffered violence in the Easter Sunday tragedy, their voice is more powerful, they said, and it is good to do it during the Ramadan period, because many people are preaching and many are listening.

6. Kembu



The IPT in the village of Kembu met under a tree.

In the village of Kembu, 6 people died in a cholera epidemic and 55 were treated. The IPT there decided that the problem was the lack of safe drinking water, and the way to solve the problem is to dig a deep-well. They built power by gathering a large group of community residents, and made representation to the state government. This was just before the elections in February of 2019. In the election a new government was elected. Now they need to wait until they are installed. They will have to begin that advocacy again.

In the meantime, they have gone to the community and started to raise money. They need N500,000 for this project. They think they can raise N100,000 from the community.

They are also exploring what it would mean for them to do this project jointly with the adjoining village of Gelengu.

7. Gelengu

In the village of Gelengu, the IPT met at the front porch of the chief of the village. About 70 people gathered. The chief spoke of the two OMNIA trainings he attended two years ago. There he made a commitment to build an IPT in his community, and this is it. Since then, for 2 years, there has not been a single communal clash in his community. One woman spoke of the excitement that is created by the IPT in the village, because it has given the opportunity that was not there before -- for Christians,



The chief of the village of Galengu participated in our Training of Trainers

Muslims and African Traditionalists to come together as brothers and sisters. An imam spoke of how he is now encouraged to preach peace that is inherent in Islam. One pastor (EYN – Brethren Church) spoke of how he lived in the northeastern-most areas of Nigeria near the border with Cameroon. He spoke of how they were regularly threatened by Boko Haram, such that his young children would have nightmares. Fortunately, this pastor was transferred to the village of Gelengu where he now lives. He gave eloquent testimony to the peace that exists in the village. When there are village ceremonies and drums are being played, his children still worry that it must be Boko Haram coming to get them. But now, he can assure them that they are safe. This is only possible because of OMNIA, he said.

8. Bauchi State University



Five students (Muslim) from Bauchi State University attended the Advanced Training. They will start an IPT there as soon as they go back. They plan to ask members to pay dues as other student associations on campus do.

Two of the students came out of Boko Haram. One student showed his OMNIA certificate to his father. The following day, the student and the father came to see Abare Kallah. He profusely thanked Abare about what he had done for his son -- shown him the path to peace. He suggested that OMNIA? take the training to all the secondary school teachers in Gombe, so that they can teach this to their students.

9. Meeting with Governor-elect Alhaji Mohammed Inuwa Yahaya

Everything needs to change, says the governor-elect, and therefore he has no particular priorities. Yet, he is enthusiastic about two things: peacebuilding and economic development. He was keen on the idea of teaching entrepreneurship to young people. OMNIA offered to bring him a proposal on both those during its visit next.

As we did one on ones with a lot of people, it became clear that public school education is a serious need. Government is not investing in education, leaving it to the religious sector. OMNIA? needs to send him a proposal on education as well.