

An aerial photograph of a winding asphalt road that curves through a vast, green valley. The landscape is covered in dense vegetation, with some rocky outcrops visible on the right side. In the distance, rolling hills and mountains are visible under a dramatic sky with large, dark clouds. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow that illuminates the scene from the left. The overall atmosphere is serene and majestic.

Post-Liberal Aid in Practice: Hungary Helps and Christians in Nigeria

Observations & Recommendations

Nicholas Naquin

Dániel Farkas

Calum Nicholson



DANUBE
INSTITUTE

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This report was commissioned by Hungary Helps in cooperation with the Danube Institute.

Authors: Nicholas Naquin, Dániel Farkas, and Calum Nicholson

Danube Institute Leadership

President: John O'Sullivan

Executive Director: István Kiss

Director of Research: Calum Nicholson

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November 2025

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Image: Aerial view of Ado Ekiti in Ekiti State, Nigeria, from Shutterstock/Kehinde Temitope Odutayo



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About the Danube Institute

The Danube Institute, established in 2013 by the Batthyány Lajos Foundation in Budapest, serves as a hub for the exchange of ideas and individuals within Central Europe and between Central Europe, other parts of Europe, and the English-speaking world. Rooted in a commitment to respectful conservatism in cultural, religious, and social life, the Institute also upholds the broad classical liberal tradition in economics and a realistic Atlanticism in national security policy. These guiding principles are complemented by a dedication to exploring the interplay between democracy and patriotism, emphasizing the nation-state as the cornerstone of democratic governance and international cooperation.

Through research, analysis, publication, debate, and scholarly exchanges, the Danube Institute engages with center-right intellectuals, political leaders, and public-spirited citizens, while also fostering dialogue with counterparts on the democratic center-left. Its activities include establishing and supporting research groups, facilitating international conferences and fellowships, and encouraging youth participation in scholarly and political discourse. By drawing upon the expertise of leading minds across national boundaries, the Institute aims to contribute to the development of democratic societies grounded in national identity and civic engagement.

About the Authors



Nicholas Naquin (Ph.D., Princeton University, 2013), is a former officer in the United States Army with over twelve years of experience working with security forces across the world. With a BA in History from The Johns Hopkins University and MAs in Classical and European history from The Johns Hopkins University, Oxford University and Princeton University, Dr. Naquin brings unique historical and linguistic expertise to his military and political analysis. His first military service was as an enlisted soldier in the French Foreign Legion, with which he deployed to Afghanistan. After service in the Foreign Legion he served as an active-duty infantry officer in the United States Army at various Airborne units. He combines over two decades of study of history, religion and languages with over a decade of military service and experiences within three different national armies.



Dániel Farkas is a historian. He received his master's degree in modern political and military history from the Károli Gáspár University of Budapest. He is now a PhD student at the university's doctoral school, focusing on the Cold War-era networks of Hungary and Latin America. Daniel's research areas at the Danube Institute concentrate on Hungary's place in globalization processes, its underlying geopolitical choices, and Central Europe's relations with Latin America.



Dr. Calum T.M. Nicholson read Social Anthropology at Trinity College, Cambridge, and was awarded an MPhil in Migration Studies from St Antony's College, Oxford. He holds a doctorate in Human Geography. He was most recently the Director of the Climate Policy Institute, and has served as a Visiting Fellow at the Mathias Corvinus Collegium since 2021. He also continues to teach courses on international migration, international development, and the impact of social media at the PACE Institute, University of Cambridge. In 2023, his edited volume, *Climate Migration: critical perspectives for law, policy, and research*, was published by Hart: Bloomsbury. His research interests encompass the role of science in society, political polarization, and international interventions.

Post-Liberal Aid in Practice: Hungary Helps in Nigeria

Nicholas Naquin, Dániel Farkas, and Calum Nicholson

Abstract

On Saturday, 1 November 2025, the President of the United States publicly acknowledged the ongoing persecution of Nigerian Christians and signaled that the United States would be prepared to act unilaterally should local and regional efforts prove inadequate.

His declaration did not come in a vacuum, but against the backdrop of a historical realignment being undertaken in how and why international intervention is conducted. On 1 July 2025, USAID, widely considered the world's foremost development agency since its founding in 1961, was shuttered. This ended the post-Second World War development paradigm, characterized by the large-scale technocratic aid programmes and universalist human rights language of liberal international institutions.

Yet even as the paradigm for solutions has dissolved, the underlying global development challenges themselves, from poverty to demographic pressure, and the destabilizing effects of both, remain all too real, and continue to generate secondary geopolitical consequences, including forced migration, regional instability, and the spread of extremist networks.

The key question, then, is not if international development should continue, but what form a post-liberal approach to development should take. What conceptual framework should guide engagement in contexts where the old developmental orthodoxies are exhausted but human need and strategic imperatives persist?

Hungary offers an instructive precedent. In 2017, the Government of Hungary established Hungary Helps, a state development agency premised on the moral and cultural responsibility to protect vulnerable communities, particularly persecuted Christian minorities, by offering them the means to sustain themselves at the local level.

In June and July 2025, and in cooperation with and funded by Hungary Helps, the Danube Institute undertook a field research program in Nigeria, to independently examine the agency's projects with Christian communities, and to assess their impact, and identify opportunities for refinement and expansion. The research team conducted interviews and observational fieldwork across multiple sites and stakeholder tiers, including community and religious leaders, internally displaced persons and at-risk Christian populations, local civil society partners, regional administrators, security officials and members of anti-insurgency units. This report presents the findings of that research. It is hoped that its recommendations can prove useful not just to Hungary Helps, but to any agency in the post-liberal development context, particularly with reference to Nigeria.



River landscape scene, Nigeria. (Shutterstock).

Introduction

The persecution of Christians has become one of the most severe and under-addressed crises of the early twenty-first century. Across Africa, the Middle East, and parts of South Asia, Christian communities face targeted violence, coercive displacement, and the erosion of local religious and cultural life. Yet the dominant international development frameworks of recent decades, built on large-scale technocratic aid programmes and universalist human rights language, have struggled to address this challenge in a coherent or durable way. Their assumptions often sit uneasily with the cultural, religious and political realities of the contexts in which persecution occurs.

This landscape is now undergoing a decisive shift. The dismantling of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2025 did not simply reduce available aid. Rather, it marked the end of the post-Cold War development paradigm in which Western institutions positioned themselves as universal problem-solvers and attempted to standardize governance norms across vastly different societies. Its withdrawal has created a strategic opening: space for alternative models. The present moment therefore offers an opportunity to rethink development on more realistic terms.

This report examines that opportunity through a focused case: the condition of Christian communities in Nigeria. Nigeria today records more killings of Christians for their faith than any other country in the world. Violence in the Middle Belt and northern regions has produced large-scale displacement and is fueling a gradual fragmentation of communal and civic trust. Yet Nigeria is also a pivotal regional power. Its demographic weight, economic poten-

tial, and role in West African security mean that the trajectory of its internal stability will shape the broader geopolitical environment in the region and, by extension, well beyond.

The findings presented here are based on three weeks of field research conducted by a team from the Danube Institute (DI) in June and July 2025, funded by and undertaken in partnership with Hungary Helps (HH). The team conducted more than thirty interviews with religious leaders, internally displaced Christian communities, humanitarian practitioners, local administrators, security personnel, and civil society actors, alongside site visits to HH-supported projects in Sokoto, Maiduguri, Onitsha and multiple Middle Belt communities. The purpose of this research was to understand not only the scale of persecution but also the operational environment in which any post-liberal development model must function.

In service of the above, this report proceeds in three parts. First, it gives background on Hungary Helps, and outlines the global context in which a post-liberal development model is emerging and explains why Nigeria represents a strategic test case within that shift. Second, it summarizes the design, purpose and method of the joint Danube Institute/Hungary Helps field research program. Third, it offers twenty structured recommendations for strengthening HH's operational strategy, narrative positioning and long-term role as a leading actor in shaping the post-USAID development landscape.

African red dirt road in the bush. (Shutterstock/Nataly Reinch).



Hungary Helps in Nigeria: Background & Context

Since the end of World War II, Hungary has rarely been uninvolved in efforts to deliver developmental aid and investments across the ‘developing’ world. As a Soviet-client republic during the age of decolonization, Budapest followed Moscow’s directives in delivering a wide range of aid across Asia, Africa and Latin America, from supplying canned food to North Vietnamese soldiers and civilians, distributing grants for Nigerian students to delivering industrial know-how to Cuba, and field hospitals to victims of Peruvian floods. By dint of these projects and programs, Hungary’s regime served the goals of Socialist globalization, the worldwide spread of Soviet-style modernization and Soviet-friendly governments with these activities.¹

Hungary’s national and foreign policy goals have changed markedly since the end of the Cold War, and the motivations behind its Cold War development aid and investment are scarcely conceivable in today’s Hungarian political realities. Nonetheless, it bears recalling Hungary’s experiences in development efforts during the Soviet era to emphasize the point that Hungary, as a relatively advanced European country, has long-established legal and practical frameworks for delivering aid and investment throughout the developing world—or, to use the more common term today, the “Global South”.

Hungary Helps Agency’s Legal Justification and Specified Mission

Following the end of Communism in 1990, Hungary retreated from offering large-scale foreign aid. Given the pains of economic transition to a market economy, legacy programs were generally reduced to multilateral aid and educational assistance. By 1999, Hungary’s official development aid was reduced to an annual amount of \$5.4 million, of which \$4.6 million comprised Hungary’s membership fee in the World Bank Development Organization, and \$370,000 in grants for foreign students.²

Although not without great social costs, Hungary accomplished its democratic transition and became a recognized member of the ‘new Western bloc’. From 2004, its economy was also bolstered by EU funds that strengthened Hungary’s capabilities to deliver development assistance. As Hungary transitioned into the EU orbit, its leaders rethought its post-Cold War approach to foreign development aid. The year 2002 witnessed the formation of the Hungarian government’s International Developmental Cooperation Commit-

tee. In 2014, the first strategic policy for international developmental cooperation was postulated.³ Following the entry of all other V4 (Poland, Czechia, Slovakia) countries into the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee, Hungary made its own entry in 2016.⁴

By this time, the country was already delivering international aid to the Global South, and its international assistance rose precipitously in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Judging from the available official reports, the amount of Official Development Assistance (ODA) increased from approximately \$7 million to no less than \$450 million between 2003 and 2021.⁵ The share allotted to Less Developed Countries (LDCs) rose quickly, reaching 26.1% by 2018 out of all ODA provided by Hungary.⁶ This is due to the Hungarian government’s efforts to implement new, unorthodox goals as well as its general adaptation to prevailing norms of liberal development assistance as practiced and preached in the EU.

In 2011, the Fidesz government helped to reshape the discussion of Hungary’s development aid when it introduced a new Fundamental Law to Hungary, in which it is stated that “We, the members of the Hungarian nation (...) recognize the nation-preserving role of Christianity”. The government thus defined Hungary as a nation turning towards values understood in the traditionalist sense, and its view of the right direction of the world as renewing Christendom instead of working toward the “universal and homogenous state” of post-Cold War neoliberalism. In this context, when the Hungarian government began noteworthy campaigns to restore local churches degraded after decades of socialist neglect and widespread societal indifference, it was logical that the government eventually saw fit to establish a designated branch of the state specifically aimed toward aiding Christian communities abroad.⁷

Under Fidesz leadership, Hungary quickly developed a geostrategy to stake out important paths of foreign policy independence and to steer its ambitions to promote traditionally understood Christian civilization at home and abroad. The country launched its “Global Opening” foreign policy strategy in 2011.⁸ Alongside the assertion that Hungary is looking for “mutually advantageous cooperation opportunities” with Asian, African and Latin American countries on economic fields, it also called for enhancing the “global attention” of Hungary, which it defined as attention to “issues (...) that at first glance do not affect our country, but are important on a global scale, and thus become ever



Olosunta, a historical rocky hill in Ekiti, West Nigeria. (Shutterstock/Tolu Owwoeye).

more important in international affairs [like terrorism, world nutrition, world health (...)]. It was one of the first pronouncements of Hungary's global goals as a sovereign state. It situated Hungary not only as a state looking for enhancing its standing in international life with partnerships, but one that actively contributes to the global good. The ambitions of the "Global Opening" strategy extended to countries where Hungarian diplomatic presence was drawn down following the fall of Socialism. Rather than simply following goals set by its immediate partners—the European Union and NATO—Hungary accentuated a strategy based on its own nationally defined objectives.

The realization of Hungary's vision of faith-based humanitarian and development aid abroad began with the enunciation of the following two objectives stipulated in Government Decision 1829/2016 (XII. 23) that set out the responsibilities of the Deputy State Secretariat for the Aid of Persecuted Christians:

- (1) Providing direct support for persecuted Christian communities.
- (2) Raising domestic and international political and public awareness of the phenomenon and increasing scale of Christian persecution in the twenty-first century.

The Government of Hungary formally established the Hungary Helps Program through Government Decision 244/2017 (VIII. 28) in order to deliver Hungary's assistance within a coordinated and unified framework. This was updated with Act CXX of 2018 of Hungarian Parliament and amended the program to a full-blown organization, the Hungary Helps Agency. It was established finally on 14 April 2019, to function as a fully state-owned, non-profit private limited company whose task is to ensure the rapid and effective provision of assistance to persecuted Christians and victims of humanitarian catastrophes, and whose efforts shall contribute to Hungary's international efforts to eradicate the root causes of migration through direct local assistance.⁹ To avoid confusion with different terms currently in use, we will hereafter refer to both the Hungary Helps Program and the Agency with the acronym HH (Hungary Helps).

Hungary Helps Presence in Africa

Since its inception in 2017, HH first focused on the Middle East and the fallout of the Islamic State's destruction, helping churches directly to execute reconstruction work, especially in Iraq. In its first years of engagement in the Levant, HH provided mostly disaster and crisis relief.

Developmental aid was generally deployed in the fields of health and education, funding reconstruction of schools across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Israel, and financing the operations of healthcare services. HH also rapidly expanded its footprint in Africa. According to available data, HH primarily worked through faith-based organizations and Hungarian foundations to finance humanitarian ventures across the continent and higher education grant programs for Christian youth.

In 2017, the HH inaugurated its efforts in Africa with a package designated to Northern Nigeria with funding for the construction of health and educational institutions in the Roman Catholic Maiduguri Diocese.¹⁰ In 2018, HH, for the first time, funded a project in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), supporting construction work for an ophthalmological clinic.¹¹ In 2019, HH rapidly expanded its efforts across Africa, providing assistance to Mozambican internal refugees and funding humanitarian programs of Ethiopian Christian communities.¹²

Moreover, during this same period HH launched new projects in the Nigerian Diocese of Sokoto, provided aid for the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN) in Nigeria's Plateau State and funded healthcare provision and infrastructure in Onitsha, Anambra State through the AFRÉKA foundation.¹³ For HH, 2020 and 2021 were years of rapid expansion throughout the African continent and globally as well, with its first initiated projects in South Asia, the Far East and Latin America.

During these years, HH's African leg developed quickly, with initial projects in Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Benin and Zambia. HH also began to fund vocational training in the continent for the first time, as well as an innovative project for locust eradication in Kenya.¹⁴

At the moment, HH is an agency of the Hungarian government with an unique global footprint. Its projects in the last eight years cover a wide array of sectors and nineteen countries in Africa alone. In 2021, the funds allocated by HHA represented 8.4% of the total amount of development aid provided by Hungary to developing countries.¹⁵ By 2021, the Hungarian government was already surpassing its goal of 0.25% of ODA/GNI ratio that it aimed to reach by 2025, and in 2025 it is now close to the 0.33% goal intended for 2030.¹⁶ All this has taken place at a time of increasing resource scarcity and worsening security environment for traditional 'wealthy' donor states in Europe, that caused aid funding to drop for the first year in 2024 after five consecutive years of growth.¹⁷

Rationale Behind Hungary Helps' Intervention in Nigeria

Nigeria was one of the first countries where HH intervened, working through the Roman Catholic Maiduguri Diocese in 2017 for its first project. By this time, Borno State (of which Maiduguri is the capital) had already become known as a global hot-spot of aid interest because of Islamic extremism of Boko Haram and its threat to indigenous Christian populations.

Writ large, Nigeria is a deeply troubled country where violence against its Christian populations takes place on a scale not seen elsewhere in the world today. The most populous state in Africa, with approximately 230-250 million inhabitants, Nigeria's people alone comprise at least fifteen percent of the population of the African continent.¹⁸ This makes its internal problems look extreme on a quantitative scale. Indeed, according to the international advocacy group Open Doors, 'more believers are killed for their faith in Nigeria each year, than everywhere else in the world combined'. That means around two-thirds of Christians killed overall (3,100 out of 4,476 globally).

Nigeria ranks seventh worldwide for the greatest overall violence against Christians.¹⁹ Nigeria is not just an area of suffering. It is geopolitically a 'keystone state' of West Africa, with enormous human, economic and political potential and therefore the capability either to destabilize the region or to serve as a force for regional peace and development. The Nigerian economy is second among Sub-Saharan economies, and its massive fossil fuel reserves are critical in today's world of energy crises. What is more, despite enormous internal challenges, major investment banks such as Goldman Sachs are estimating that Nigeria could be the world's fifth largest economy by 2075.²⁰

On the military front, since Nigerian independence, the country's armed forces have been essential to past African Union peacekeeping operations.²¹ What is more, of late Nigeria's domestic arms production has increased notably, and Nigeria is aggressively positioning itself to become one of the largest arms and ammunition suppliers for Sub-Saharan Africa.²² In this context, HH intervention is helping to promote Hungarian regional strategic goals in a critical lynchpin state for the broader developments in Western Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

After its initial investments in Maiduguri Diocese, HH donations expanded rapidly to Sokoto and to Onitsha through the AFRÉKA foundation, making the program's reach in Nigeria nationwide. Over the past few years, Nigeria's so-called 'Middle Belt'—including the prominent

Middle Belt states of Benue, Plateau and Kaduna—has also attracted increased international attention due to the escalating level of instability owing to sustained and often horrific violence between mostly Fulani nomadic herder groups and local, majority Christian farmer populations.²³

It is increasingly clear to international observers that mass emigration from Nigeria poses a considerable threat to regional stability and eventually to Europe's security and prosperity. A gateway into Africa's increasingly contested and coup-ridden Sahel region, Nigeria remains a necessary partner for any realistic effort to contain and to degrade resurgent Islamist terrorism in the region, which is now considered the foremost global hot-spot for Islamist terrorism in the world, witnessing approximately 51% of global-terrorism related deaths recorded worldwide in 2024.²⁴

Prevailing realities in Nigeria and lack of middle-class access to better life prospects have already inspired a steady stream of emigration from Nigeria to the West throughout the 2020s, with an estimated 3,679,496 Nigerians leaving the country between 2021 and 2023 for the preferred locations of the United Kingdom, Canada, the US and Europe.²⁵ According to a commonly cited 2022 report from the African Polling Institute, an estimated 69% of young Nigerians surveyed stated that they would try to emigrate if this were possible for them.²⁶

Nigeria's population is young and quickly growing, predicted to surpass the US population by 2050 and China's population by 2100.²⁷ If only a fraction of the estimated hundreds of millions of Nigerians wishing to emigrate over the coming decades succeed in making it to the UK, Europe, Canada or the US, this would entail an estimated tens of millions of Nigerians that would be resettling in these countries over the same time-span.

In addition to the disruption that this would undoubtedly cause in Western societies, regional instability in West Africa spurred by the eventuality of mass Nigerian emigration would destabilize surrounding countries in West Africa, augmenting the overall numbers of West African emigrants to Europe and elsewhere. Scholars have already warned about the current and potential impacts of African destabilization to spikes in migrant arrivals throughout the Mediterranean.²⁸

For these reasons, among others, HH interventions are directly related to the core mission that the Hungarian government has given to HH under its founding and prevailing governing laws. Firstly, the Government Decision 1829/2016 (XII. 23) explicitly mandates that HH (1) provide direct support for persecuted Christian communi-

ties while (2) raising domestic and international political and public awareness of the phenomenon and increasing scale of Christian persecution in the 21st century. Second, the 2018 Act CXX that established the HH stipulates that its efforts shall contribute to Hungary's international efforts to eradicate the root causes of migration through direct and local assistance.

Given HH's 'triple mandate'—(1) to help persecuted Christian communities, (2) to raise international awareness about their plight and (3) to address the root causes of international migration to Europe and elsewhere—Nigeria remains a critical arena for HH to intervene in ways that are not only impactful for local Christian communities, but also help to meet Hungarian national and regional strategic objectives.

Exhibit 4: Our Projections Imply that China, the United States, India, Indonesia, and Germany Will be the World's Five Largest Economies in 2050

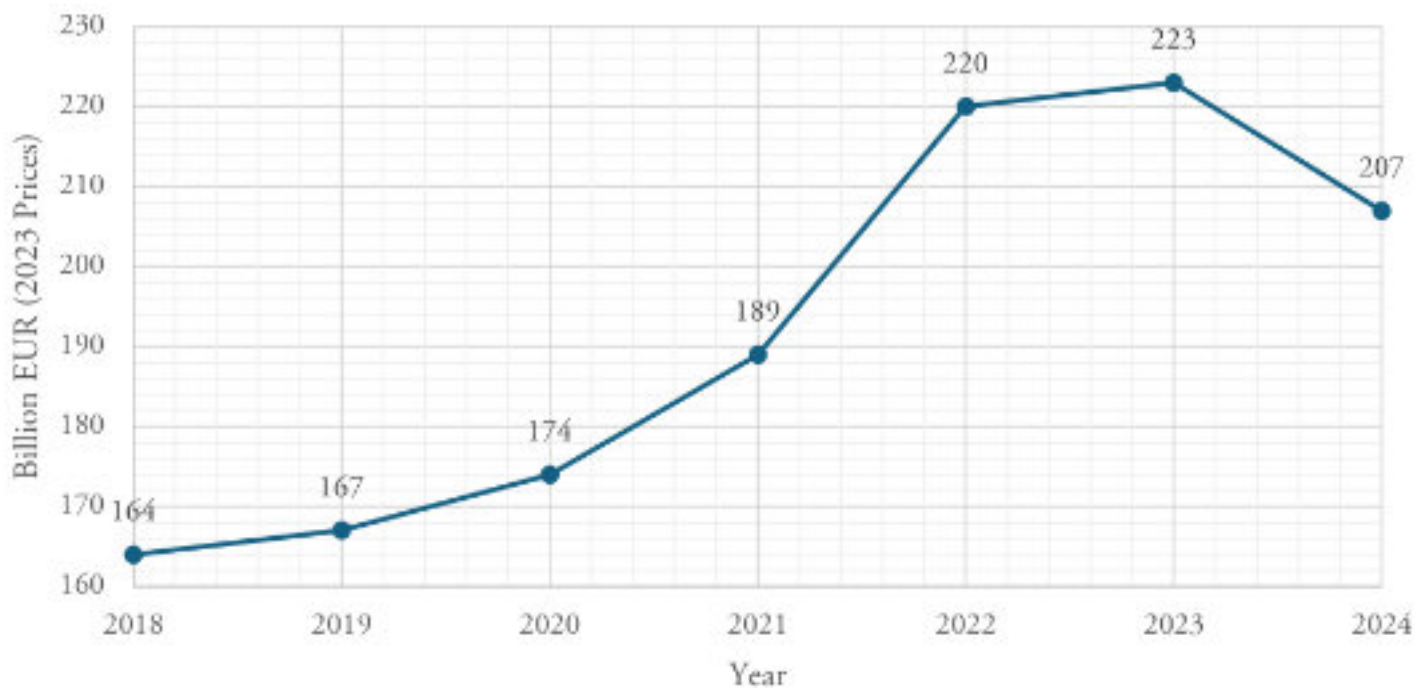
World's largest economies (measured in USD)

Ranking	1980	2000	2022	2050	2075
1	United States	United States	United States	China	China
2	Japan	Japan	China	United States	India
3	Germany	Germany	Japan	India	United States
4	France	United Kingdom	Germany	Indonesia	Indonesia
5	United Kingdom	France	India	Germany	Nigeria
6	Italy	China	United Kingdom	Japan	Pakistan
7	China	Italy	France	United Kingdom	Egypt
8	Canada	Canada	Canada	Brazil	Brazil
9	Argentina	Mexico	Russia	France	Germany
10	Spain	Brazil	Italy	Russia	United Kingdom
11	Mexico	Spain	Brazil	Mexico	Mexico
12	Netherlands	Korea	Korea	Egypt	Japan
13	India	India	Australia	Saudi Arabia	Russia
14	Saudi Arabia	Netherlands	Mexico	Canada	Philippines
15	Australia	Australia	Spain	Nigeria	France

Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

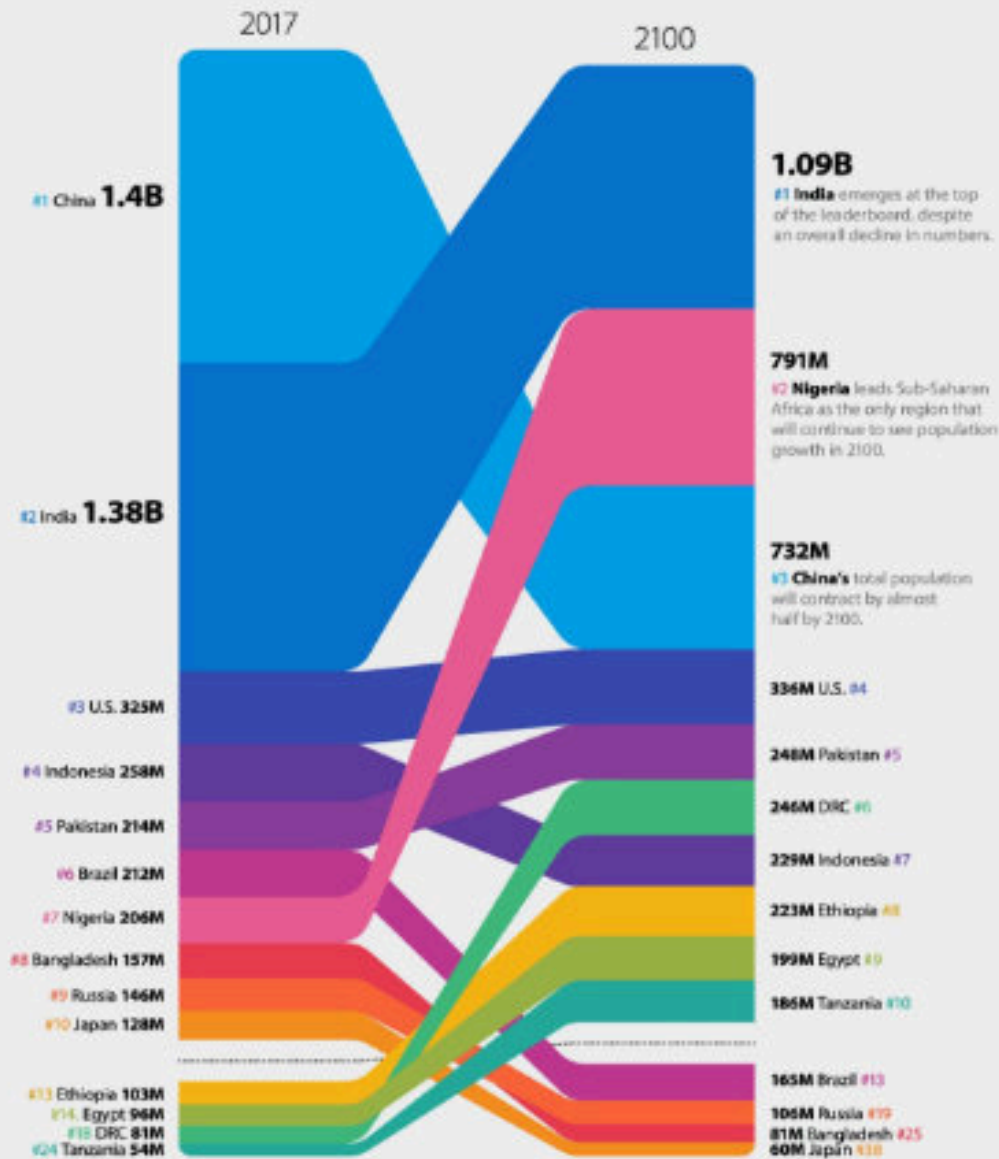
Projections for the World's Future Largest Economies.²⁹

Global Official Development Assistance (2018-2024)



Graph Illustrating the Global Increase in Official Development Assistance from 2018-2024.

Top 10 Countries by Population



Various demographic factors, from lower fertility rates to higher life expectancies, are key reasons behind these differing estimates.



Illustration of Projected Global Population Growth.³⁰

Danube Institute Fieldwork in Nigeria: Methods and Observations

In 2023, HH and the Danube Institute (DI) partnered for an assessment of HH initiatives and projects, when a team of DI researchers traveled to the north of Iraq to tour and to research at sites where HH aid was distributed. This cooperation offered HH the opportunity to get ‘outsiders’ looking closely at its global footprint with an academically grounded view, but still with a mind to offer concrete and useful policy recommendations. Led by Dr. Jeffrey Kaplan, this first partnered trip to northern Iraq concluded with the publication of the book, *Christians in Iraqi Kurdistan: a tale of Suffering, Hope, and Resilience*.

The recent joint HH/DI trip to Nigeria in the summer of 2025 represents an effort to continue this partnership, allowing DI scholars and researchers to evaluate in concrete cases the reality of Hungarian international policy, thereby furthering their understanding of the nature and place of Hungary in the international system. In turn, DI researchers were asked to provide HH and Hungarian government decision-makers material with which to assess the impact of HH as well as recommendations to adapt its strategies to prevailing geopolitical realities, especially in the seismic wake of US President Donald J. Trump’s return to the White House in January 2025.

There were three main goals of this joint HH/DI research trip to Nigeria:

- (1) To assess the impact of the shutdown of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in Nigeria and specifically on Nigeria’s robust network of public and private aid provisioners.
- (2) To assess the effectiveness and sustainability of existing HH projects in Nigeria and to recommend new opportunities for intervention in Nigeria that meet Hungarian national goals.
- (3) To provide a general assessment of the current security situation in Nigeria and to suggest what steps HH might take, in keeping with its governing mandates, to mitigate persistent threats to the lives and livelihoods of local Christians.

Research Methodology

In preparation for this research trip, the DI research team compiled detailed economic and social data on eight originally targeted Nigerian states—Kaduna, Kano, Plateau,

Benue, Sokoto, Borno, Anambra, Imo—using open source intelligence (OSINT) gathering methods, and summarized the findings in an internal ‘handbook’ for research purposes. Aside from its inclusion of basic data-sets, this internal handbook provided detailed descriptions of the agricultural, infrastructure and security sectors in each state.

Due to the limited amount of time on the ground in Nigeria (approximately twenty days for the two principal researchers), the research team focused its efforts on one-off interviews with critical players in the local aid, development, religious and security scenes in order to gain a broad understanding of the problems and to get a comparative look at different viewpoints in the shortest time-frame possible.

Across three weeks in various locations in Nigeria, the team conducted no fewer than 33 interviews and discussions either with groups or single interviewees. Initially, the two principal DI researchers, Nicholas Naquin and Dániel Farkas traveled through three Middle Belt states (Kaduna, Plateau, Benue). In these regions, they met and interviewed local leaders, humanitarian professionals and representatives of internal refugee groups. In Benue State, they visited and observed refugee camps as well, ranging from bigger, more established camps to the then relatively recently formed camp of refugees from the Yelewata attack of 13 June 2025 that claimed no fewer than 200 victims. The team also collected and compiled key documentation and local publications, where they were available and accessible.

On 1 July 2025, the DI Director of Research, Calum Nicholson and a representative from HH joined this core DI research team. Together this group, in addition to numerous meetings in Abuja, traveled to Sokoto (Sokoto Caliphate), Maiduguri (Borno State) and Onitsha (Anambra State), all locations with ongoing HH interventions. This joint HH/DI team compiled data and observations from interviews with appropriate religious and political leaders and humanitarian practitioners and on-site visits to humanitarian and development projects financed by HH and other international organizations.

Distinguishing Features of Hungary Helps in Nigeria Aid

As elsewhere, the abrupt cutoff of USAID funding in early 2025 changed the landscape of humanitarian interventions in Nigeria. Many legacy development organizations were all



Scenic landscape of mountain town, Nigeria. (Shutterstock).

but unidirectionally attached to direct or indirect USAID funding sources for their projects, especially in the fields of sanitation and health. In Benue State, for example, multiple humanitarian organizations agreed that 90% of their budgets for humanitarian aid projects and efforts were immediately lost because of the USAID cutoff.³¹

Over the course of this research trip, the HH/DI team identified ways by which HH significantly differs from existing and legacy humanitarian and development aid projects operating on the ground in Nigeria, and these are worth outlining here.

Firstly, as a state-sponsored organization, HH is by statute and by outlook an agent of the Hungarian government whose efforts are ultimately to pursue Hungarian state policies and strategies. Hungary's relatively small size and budget compel it to be more judicious in analyzing projects and also help to prevent it from indulging in what are ultimately megalomaniacal, unrealistic and overly moralistic 'world-saving' ambitions that often characterize the mind-sets and efforts of large international aid organizations and their interventions, especially since the end of the Cold War.

Second, HH has long established and operated within a framework of 'direct aid' provided to local Christian organizations and leaders - most of the time to local Catholic bishops. This approach distinguishes HH from many other aid agencies that work through indirect methods such as cut-out companies and local partner companies and agencies, or require local aid agencies to contract directly from the aid provisioners of their own countries (as is the case with Austria and with Italy, among others).

Third, Hungary's relatively small size and diplomatic footprint in Nigeria allow for close coordination between HH and the Hungarian Embassy in Nigeria, streamlining decision-making processes and oversight capabilities.

Fourth, as a relative newcomer to the international development system that was created specifically by an avowedly 'post-liberal' government, HH is not really part of the existing international aid development industrial complex, and therefore was largely immune to the effects of the USAID shut-down.

Fifth, owing to its explicit 'triple mandate', HH has already emerged as an international leader both in highlighting violence against Christians worldwide and in linking the purpose of development aid to the prevention of mass migration to Europe and beyond.

For the relatively new HH, it is too soon to discuss a

definitive HH 'method' or 'approach'. That said, our case studies in Nigeria have revealed that at least in the five above ways, HH activities and efforts in Nigeria differ significantly from those of most existing and operational governmental and private-sector purveyors of humanitarian and development aid. As HH gains experience and grows as an organization, our overall recommendation is that these distinguishing and broadly positive and constructive features be highlighted and cultivated as part of the formalization and standardization of HH's operating principles and frameworks worldwide.

General Themes and Conclusions

Based on the recent HH/DI cooperation in Nigeria and the observations and insights drawn from our on-site visits and interviews, here we think it appropriate to highlight general conclusions from this trip that can inform future strategic development for HH as it evaluates and refines its efforts in Nigeria and elsewhere.

First, almost all Nigerian practitioners in the humanitarian and development aid sectors agreed that the USAID shutdown was a needed 'wake-up call', no matter how abrupt and disruptive. Even those directly and negatively affected by the shutdown shared this general appraisal. There appears to be a widespread understanding that USAID and other similar agencies have helped to create 'dependency' and graft that actually worked to prevent the various levels of the Nigerian government (local, state and federal) from developing and implementing their own effective measures and institutions in the healthcare, sanitation and food distribution sectors. As Giles Bolton commented about development aid over a decade ago, 'if aid were in the private sector, most of the donors in the world would have gone out of business long ago'.³² The closure of USAID may not have put them all definitely out of business yet, but for many legacy development aid players the clock is ticking.

Second, in theory, Nigerians would prefer to see more 'development' or 'sustainable' models that look more like investment, and not repeats of 'emergency aid' or 'humanitarian aid' that rarely serve to address systemic problems. Practically speaking, however, Nigerians often simply want money on hand and they are used to getting handouts and aid money with relatively little accountability and oversight.³³ While 'sustainability' is definitely a buzzword for those involved in the development space today, there are relatively few projects on the ground that actually emphasize development investments with stringent controls and demands for demonstrated returns on investment. This observation is one again in line with Bolton's analysis that, 'in an ideal world, the West would accept a role as venture capitalist for the

world's poorest countries too if it is serious about sparking growth, instead of the rather patronizing spoon-feeding of small amounts of assistance here and there'.³⁴ Nigerians tend to be open to such a 'venture capitalist' approach while they are at the same time growing more resentful of such traditional 'spoon-feeding' approaches to development and humanitarian aid, even though they will still gladly accept what is often 'free money'.

Third, regular (remote or in-person) monitoring of projects in Nigeria is essential, and also increasingly possible thanks to affordable and non-invasive monitoring technologies. In any situation where public money is involved, it is important to establish clear and effective safeguards aimed at 'keeping honest people honest'. Such safeguards in Nigeria should include regular and detailed on-site and remote monitoring of all funded projects and initiatives in the country. Until the recent USAID closure, there had indeed been 'little honest public debate about the quality of aid. And this absence of feedback is a significant factor in why so much bad aid is able to persist... The outcome of all this is probably the most unaccountable multibillion-dollar industry in the world. This is a shame. Because it's also one of the most important'.³⁵ HH should not be involved in projects that are ultimately 'unaccountable' to Hungarian taxpayers, and where 'there is virtually no oversight of what charities (or any other aid organizations) do...continents away from the people who [have] entrusted them with their cash'.³⁶

Fourth, community policing in Nigeria is often touted as a desired solution for the security situation in the Middle Belt and nationwide, but its widespread implementation is unlikely in the near future. What is more, to implement such solutions would require legislation at the federal level that would also allow the rulers of Sharia-law dominated states to recruit, to equip and to field their own police forces. The consequences of such expanded security forces nationwide at the state level are unknown and potentially deleterious to Christian communities in the Middle Belt and elsewhere. Nigerian Federal security and anti-terrorism services, if properly supported, directed and led, have considerable means by which to disrupt ongoing cycles of violence in Nigeria.

Fifth, the ongoing tragedy of Nigeria's inability to realize its potential is in large part the consequence of a negative loop of reinforcing problems in what we shall label here for convenience the 'economy-government-security' (EGS) domains. We have developed a graph, visualized on the following page, to describe this negative and self-reinforcing EGS loop that inhibits Nigerian development and growth at all levels of political organization in the country.

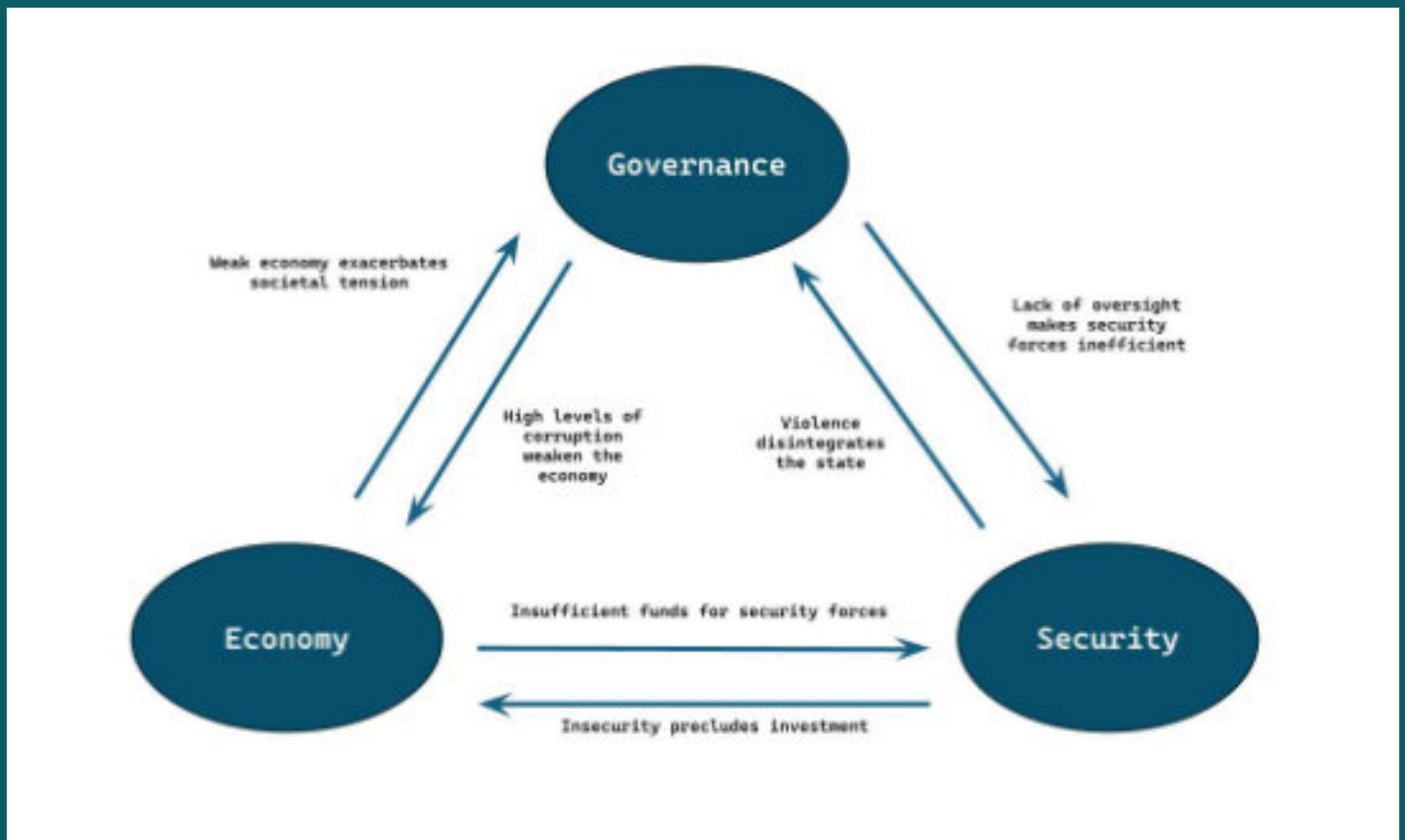
In conceptual terms, we believe that at least some HH development efforts and projects should be envisioned and structured not necessarily for their projected 'positive effects', but instead in order to disrupt such negatively reinforcing EGS cycles. HH may be able to achieve its strategic goals in Nigeria and elsewhere better through 'tactical disruption' than through traditional development and aid tactics.

In the remainder of this report, we shall provide overviews of twenty specific and actionable recommendations for HH tailored to its activities in Nigeria, but many of which are also applicable to HH's global work regardless of location. All below recommendations are meant to advance at least one element of HH's 'triple mandate'.

For this report, we have structured recommendations into five categories as below:

- (1) Interventions with Security Implications
- (2) Narrative and Narrative Management
- (3) Diplomatic and Political Interventions
- (4) Sustainable Intervention
- (5) Project Management, Oversight, and Branding

We have structured the below recommendations in a modified 'issue, discussion, recommendation' format commonly used in After-Action Reports (AAR) in US and NATO military units.



Economy-Government-Security Loop, Visualized via Diagram



Hungary Helps' Projects (2017-2021), Visualized via Google Maps

Recommendations: Interventions with Security Implications

Before outlining explicit security recommendations for HH and its activities in Nigeria based on the recent DI research trip, it is important to emphasize some conceptual reflections about the nature of violence against and persecution of Christians in Nigeria today. In order for HH effectively to pursue two elements of its ‘triple mandate’—to help local Christians and to increase international awareness of their plight—it is important to have a reasonably sound conceptual understanding of the historical origins and current evolving nature of violence in Nigeria today.

‘Violence is multi-faceted but often takes on religious dimensions as it develops.’

—Samuel Aruwan, former leader of the Kaduna Security Service.

Violence in Nigeria arises from the incomplete nature of the country’s process to realize a modern ‘nation state’ conceptualized according to European norms as developed over the past few centuries. The borders of the current Nigerian state are by and large arbitrary. Although the same may be said for the borders of many European countries, the establishment of such borders in many cases happened centuries ago, and the centralized powers that imposed these borders by and large remained in place in the meantime, thereby thwarting many centrifugal tendencies.

The Nigerian system was imposed by the British, who in 1914 unified their existing colonial and commercial enterprises in the region as ‘Nigeria’. This artificial process has left Nigerian statesmen at all levels with mixed ideas about the nature of central state power and the goals of national integration. From the very beginning of the Nigerian national project, northern elites feared ‘southern encroachment’ from the large Yoruba and Igbo blocs and other smaller ones, like the Tivs of Benue State. This pushed them to demand northern domination in the new nation state. In January 1966, a coup of middle-ranking officers was branded as an ‘Igbo coup’ by northern leaders, and in consequence a mixed northern Christian-Muslim group of officers grabbed power in July 1966.

This artificial nation state structure of problematic origins and unclear loyalties was in due course hijacked by local elites as a source of wealth accumulation in an increasingly globalized economy. Governability, in this sense, was not

developed as a singular goal. Neither had Nigerian elites any need for a well-run and unified state for their goals, nor had any single group the power to offer an unified vision for other elite groups to enforce comprehensive national projects. Meanwhile, traditional authorities decayed over time, enabling novel forms of local and regional conflict.

The lack of any mechanism of reconciliation and enforcement among non-integrated communities has since coupled with novel pressures of modernization in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Nigerian population has skyrocketed, becoming the largest in Africa, and at least the sixth largest in the world. Nonetheless, the pace of agricultural modernization has not kept pace with population growth, instead pushing farmers to till new lands using relatively primitive methods, which is now exacerbating a problem of land scarcity.

The rapid nominal GDP growth of the country, meanwhile, has ensured that local elites have accumulated vast wealth that they can use for local patronage and to preserve the status quo from which they profit enormously. This situation fosters a situation wherein the state is effectively a patchwork of relatively governable urban nodes and connecting paths of patronage and influence surrounded by vast ungovernable spaces, where large-scale violence is customary. In these ungovernable spaces, local disagreements or simple resource problems can cause serious conflicts that feed into so-called cycles of violence that the elites in Nigeria’s ‘governable’ spaces have few interests to solve, both because they are largely unaffected by such violence but also because many elites have found ways to profit from such violence.

As the Governor of Plateau State, Caleb Mutfwang, declared at a gathering at which the HH/DI research group participated, ‘the phenomenon of violence in Nigeria is caused and enabled by the elite’. This broader elite-enabled situation then slowly cascades into conflicts of civilizational levels - a Christian farmer or community leader in the Middle Belt states can easily perceive the pattern of Fulani pastors massacring Christian communities as a part of a larger Muslim plot, and Muslims can perceive any efforts to bolster federal and state security forces as part of ‘southern’ and Christian efforts inspired and financed by ‘imperialist’ Western powers. Whatever the various conspiracies, plots and stratagems in Nigeria at all levels, the fact stands

that most disagreements follow tribal and communal lines that are often defined by religion. In this way, religion can become an organizing principle of loyalties and antagonisms across the Middle Belt and throughout this singularly divided nation.

This convergence of conflicts and an emerging ‘civilizational’ split is evident in local experiences as well. In our interviews across the Middle Belt, it is especially striking to witness the evolving nature of separation and antagonism between Muslim pastoralists and Christian farmers. A group of Kaduna refugees claimed no earlier contact with those Fulani groups that attacked them across the state and drove refugees away from their homes in the tens of thousands. This is because many of the Fulanis attacking Nigerian Christian communities are new immigrants entering Nigeria from across the Sahel. In areas where traditionally pastoralist and farmer groups rarely had any substantial relationships or ties, the injection of new foreign pastoralist Fulani groups has led to suspicions of a larger Fulani plot to colonize Christian lands in Nigeria’s Middle Belt.

Our group witnessed such developments in Kwoi Diocese, Southern Kaduna, where locals living in the urban center of Kwoi pointed out to us the closest Fulani village observable on the heights near the town. They claimed to have traditionally had amicable ties with them but also warned that at the same their trust in them is constantly decreasing owing to the growing number of Fulani attacks across Nigeria.

Although the traditional ‘Nigerian’ Fulani groups are often not the ones attacking Christian communities, they are nonetheless suspected of cooperating with the ‘stranger’ violent Fulanis who come from beyond the border. The original and traditional separation of communities is thus progressing into a stage of active war, where communities standing ‘on the fence’ are slowly drifting away toward opposing sides.

It is worth emphasizing here the proposition that, at its heart, this violence is the result of Nigeria’s poisonous petro-politics, often dressed up as religious zealotry or ethnic chauvinism.

“In these direct acts of violence alone...the Nigerian looting machine claims a life every six hours. The common thread between the Niger Delta’s warring militias, the gangs that sack northern villages, and the armed vote-riggers who rampage nationwide at election time on behalf of their masters at every level of Nigeria’s federal government

is the life-and-death pursuit of oil money”. As the journalist Tom Burgis describes the current political situation in Nigeria:

‘A governor of one of Nigeria’s thirty-six states is effectively president of his own fiefdom. He has immunity from prosecution and controls the state security budget. The chairman of each of the 774 local governments is answerable to the state governor. To win a presidential primary a candidate needs two-thirds of the states to back him. That backing is in the gift of the governors. The Governors’ Forum is perhaps the most potent gathering of the land. Only about half of Nigeria’s oil revenues are allocated to the federal government. A fifth goes to the local governments. The governors control the quarter of oil revenues that goes to the states. Oil-producing states receive an additional 13 percent share of Nigeria’s oil income before it is divided between the tiers of government. The state houses of the Niger Delta are powerful pistons of the looting machine.’

With annual oil income in Nigeria ranging between \$20 billion and \$60 billion over the past decades, it is hard to underestimate the role of petro-politics in creating the conditions for corruption and violence that we see today in Nigeria. This vast amount of foreign capital trickles through the Nigerian economy largely at the behest of governors and bureaucrats who control the spigots of this effortless cash flow. Violence that is ultimately motivated by attempts to control or to tap into this cash flow can easily be justified by impassioned recourse to ‘civilizational’ or religious justifications.

In this context, we cannot ‘talk’ our way out of this growing problem of violence in Nigeria (e.g. witness Nigeria’s seemingly endless ‘peace-building’ sessions with ‘stakeholders’ sitting at countless posh ‘roundtables’, often if not always financed by international aid organizations). Given the nature of this complex emerging conflict, there is no clear way to negotiate the issue away, especially as there are no clear political, religious or traditional figures with the authority to take meaningful and binding decisions in eventual negotiations.

In Nigeria, we are not witnessing a case of groups competing for a defined prize (excepting the prize of access to the oil income that we mentioned above), but rather an assortment of communal grievances emerging towards the organizing principle of nationwide religious conflict, yet without all-encompassing goals or leadership. In this context, true organized ‘peace-building’ is not endless discussion between local elites with token participation of their dependent populations. Instead, it is the painful, daunting task of building the very fabric of a state where there is a persistent common interest for a reasonable level of co-

*Rainforest canopy walk, Nigeria.
(Shutterstock/Fabian Plock).*



habitation and cooperation. The five security-related recommendations below should be understood and interpreted in light of the above background and context.

Security and Apparatus at the Catholic Secretariat of the Catholic Nigerian Bishops Conference

Our visit to the Catholic Secretariat of the Catholic Nigerian Bishops Conference in Nigeria showed that the Catholic Church, although lacking training, expertise and resources, takes security seriously and dedicates full-time staff to this issue. The director of Caritas Nigeria showed us some of the steps that he had taken to improve security at his building and noted that similar steps could be highly effective in other parts of Nigeria. After discussions with the Secretariat's security manager, he expressed the need for additional training above all else, and also explained how the nationwide mandates of the Secretariat and of Caritas Nigeria could help to spread good practices throughout the country's vast Catholic community and beyond. Although direct intervention in security matters does not conform to HH's 'triple mandate', HH is in a position to serve as a trusted broker between the Catholic Secretariat and other local partners and potential security providers from governmental or non-governmental sources.

Recommendations: Coordinate through diplomatic channels to connect the Catholic Secretariat and Caritas Nigeria with potential governmental and/or non-governmental bodies that could be in a position to provide security training and equipment.

Cooperation with Nigerian Counter Terrorism Center

Although HH by mandate cannot intervene directly in security matters, to have an impact in the security domain it is not necessary to consider security-related funding or intervention. The Nigerian Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) is conducting a program that is an essential element of any counterinsurgency campaign; namely, to create mechanisms that drain terrorist organizations of their potential recruits. The program, launched in 2015 by president Muhammadu Buhari, aims to offer reintegration for low-level soldiers of Boko Haram, if they are willing to undergo a rehabilitation program in the facility of the 'Operation Safe Corridor' located in Mallam Sidi, Gombe State.

While the idea of giving amnesty to terrorists can be controversial, an essential feature of counterinsurgency is to

draw down the recruit pool of insurgent organizations; in a way, to fight not for territory or for the destruction of the opposing armed forces, but for the 'hearts and minds' of people, as expressed by the British general Gerald Templer during the Malayan Emergency in 1952. In the case of this program, it is not just an idea, but an effectively working mechanism that enjoys the recognition of the international community. An American expert on Nigeria in his testimony to the US Council of International Religious Freedom emphasized the key role of the Operation Safe Corridor in the moderate success of the Nigerian state against jihadists.³⁷

The Safe Corridor program, as a major feature of the Nigerian efforts against Boko Haram and ISWAP, enjoys high international attention, and offers a clear entry point for international organizations for direct support to the Nigerian government in its counter-terrorism operations. The program is partially funded by international donors, thus making it a unique blend of international and national efforts. Helping the NCTC in this effort is very timely: as the Crisis Group pointed out in 2021, the program, while highly innovative, lacks resources on several fields, like vocational training and proper screening for candidates (a lot of civilians, formerly under Boko Haram rule were netted).³⁸ This program offers a special opportunity for HH to contribute directly to Nigeria's stabilization via funding or supervising the humanitarian aspects of the program (housing, food supply, training, WASH, etc.)

Moreover, during discussions at the Diocese of Maiduguri, it emerged that taking priests and other religious personnel as hostages is now a significant business and revenue stream for bandits throughout the country. Just a week before we visited Maiduguri, a priest from the diocese had been taken hostage during a raid on a Nigerian military convoy that was escorting him (he has since been released as a ransom was paid).³⁹ The Catholic Church in Nigeria now regularly finds itself in situations where it must pay ransoms to kidnappers, with few other legal or extra-legal resources. The fact that bandits have been able to develop such a 'business' with impunity is indicative of the state's lack of 'legibility' and ability to intervene across broad sections of the country and its population. What is more, the reality of this business contributes enormously to the prevailing sense of insecurity among Nigerian Christians today.⁴⁰

Recommendations: Review Nigerian Terrorism Prevention and Prohibition Act (2022) and ways for collaboration with Hungarian Government actors and the NCTC for Operation Safe Corridor. There is also room for HH to

take part in certain non-kinetic aspects of Operation Safe Corridor. HH can also serve as a trusted middle-man to connect the NTCT with appropriate faith-based partners. Through diplomatic and other channels, HH can encourage and support the creation of a hostage-monitoring and rescue agency in conjunction with the Catholic Secretariat, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) in Nigeria. Since the kidnapping of priests is a well-known, relevant and scandalous matter for the entire Nigerian state, focus on this particular issue is warranted and necessary.

Radicalization of Local Communities

There are many additional creative opportunities to contribute to the field of security on the part of Hungarian agencies and organizations. In conversations with Father John Bogna Bakani, Auxiliary Bishop of Maiduguri Diocese, the HH/DI research team found that Maiduguri Catholics perceive several societal issues as harbingers of instability and insecurity, but these are mostly left undocumented as informal observations, without the opportunity to transform such valid and timely information into important narrative pieces quantifiable enough to pass along through local security officials and diplomatic channels to the international community. One of these issues is the changing landscape of the streets when local Muslims are becoming more radicalized, or when radicalized ones move in from the outside. The obvious signal of this is the appearance of burqas and niqabs as part of the female clothing.

Given the right approach, and the level of local access of Catholics, the spread of local Muslim radicalization can be quite quantifiable, which can be both an important insight for international peacemakers and an alert for local and international Christian communities. The core idea for this kind of intervention is for a person walking in the street periodically to count women wearing burqa or niqab in a certain public space—like an important market, or pedestrian route at a given point of time of a day. This and other similar data collection mechanisms can provide critical insights into Islamic radicalization as it is taking place and before it reaches critical levels.

Recommendations: In collaboration with HH and the Diocese of Maiduguri (and/or national Catholic bodies), DI creates surveys and other measures to monitor indicators that suggest the growth of extremism, radicalism, and

increased drug use. Clearly the data gathered needs to be assessed considering many variables, but given the local knowledge and access of the Catholic Secretariat and the sociological tools of the Danube Institute, it is possible to develop such tools for local Christians, which can potentially enhance security, or at least increase awareness of emerging trends and issues that could impact local communities' security situation.

Lack of Accurate and Exhaustive Data

While there are numerous relatively reliable sources for news and information about the ongoing violence in Nigeria—including Truth Nigeria and other online publications—it remains surprisingly difficult to find accurate, verifiable data about violence and displacement in Local Government Areas (LGAs) throughout the country. For example, during our trip we interviewed Manzo Maigari, the Local Government Chairman of Kachia (Kaduna State), whose community had witnessed horrific violence from Fulani raiders over the weeks preceding our arrival. Nothing about this was reported in national or international news, nor in commonly referenced online resources about violence and displacement affecting Christian communities throughout northern Nigeria.

During our visit to Plateau State, thanks to a recommendation from the Hungarian Embassy in Abuja, our research team conducted an interview with the Jos-based Stefanos Foundation, which strives to create a nationwide network of informants about communal violence and displacement. This foundation appears to have a good information system in place and a solid network throughout the country. With added support and partnership, the Stefanos Foundation could be in a position to establish reliable informants and mechanisms to share verified timely information in all of the 774 LGAs in the country. Timely, updated and verified data about violence throughout the country can be appropriately used to pressure state and federal governments in Nigeria, and to inform international organizations and partners abroad.

Recommendations: Invite the Stefanos Foundation to send representatives to Budapest for a full presentation of its capabilities and goals with HH, DI and other relevant governmental organizations and agencies. Consider long-term partnership with the Stefanos Foundation as a centralized data-collection agency and infrastructure.

Untapped Potential of ECOWAS for Potential Regional Security Solutions

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), established by the Treaty of Lagos in 1975, is a significant regional economic and political bloc whose headquarters is in Abuja, Nigeria. Over the past few decades, the US has contributed at least \$7 billion to West African security, much of it through ECOWAS. EU nations and the UK have likewise contributed significant sums to ECOWAS budget and infrastructure over the same period, and the EU currently supplies most of ECOWAS' peacekeeping budget.⁴¹

With significant funds coming from US and EU taxpayers, ECOWAS depends on outside funding to maintain its bureaucracy and day-to-day operations. Therefore, through proper diplomatic and political intervention, Hungary and other EU nations have leverage to shape ECOWAS priorities and engagements. For Nigeria, losing Western financial support for ECOWAS would mean losing significant international status and regional leverage.

Since its foundation, ECOWAS has repeatedly intervened in regional peacekeeping missions, some of which were spearheaded by the Nigerian military. ECOWAS has both the infrastructure and the legal mandate to contribute

more robustly to improving the security situation for Nigerians writ large, and especially for Nigerian Christian communities in the Middle Belt. Given the nature and scope of violence against Christians in Nigeria and the significant impact of such violence on Nigeria's international reputation, there is a strong case to be made for ECOWAS mobilization to enhance the security profile of at risk Christian communities in Nigeria's Middle Belt.

Nigeria's insecurity crisis goes beyond its borders and is a regional issue – which makes it especially relevant for ECOWAS. Islamist fighters and weapons move freely across Nigeria's often porous northern borders. Fulani ethnic militias, which commit most of the violence against Nigerian Christians, are also a trans-border issue, as many enter Nigeria from surrounding countries.⁴²

Recommendations: Hungary should leverage its relationships in the EU and in the US to apply pressure on the Nigerian government and on ECOWAS to organize, to equip and to field a dedicated task force under ECOWAS mandate to help to protect Christian communities in the Middle Belt and, more broadly, to tackle the endemic insecurity within Nigeria. The task force could work closely with the US Embassy Military Group and other foreign partners to plan and to coordinate its organization, equipping, training and operations.



Cattle farmer herding his livestock, Nigeria. (Danube Institute).

Recommendations: Narrative and Narrative Management

Both Christians and Muslim activists whom we interviewed discussed the deterioration of Christian-Muslim relationships over the past decades, which they attribute in part to the spread and proliferation of relatively retrograde and recidivist forms of Islam, often thanks to international funding bent on promoting specific agendas within Nigeria and in West Africa writ large.

Proliferation of Retrograde Forms of Islam Throughout Northern Nigeria

It is important to expose especially retrograde versions of Islam in Nigeria to the broader Islamic community. In this respect, the UAE and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) could help, especially as they have increasing economic interests in Nigeria and have strongly and visibly committed to combating the spread of ideologies and practices spread and informed by the Muslim Brotherhood and its followers. Hungary maintains relatively good relations with GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries and therefore could elicit their help in fighting the rise and spread of radical and recidivist Islamic beliefs and practices in Nigeria, including the controversial practice of *Almajiranci*, whereby Islamic parents throughout northern Nigeria send their children into effective servitude with Quranic teachers in large cities.

In the city of Kano alone there are hundreds of thousands of children studying as *almajari* in Quranic schools, and millions more *almajari* are widely seen begging in streets throughout Northern Nigeria. Despite the efforts of President Goodluck Jonathan to overhaul the system of *Almajiranci*, this practice persists and thrives today throughout northern Nigeria. This and other forms of radical and recidivist Islam endanger both Nigeria's development and its population, both Christian and Muslim, both of which are subject to the violence and repercussions of violent Islamic groups as they expand their control over ungoverned and/or under-governed spaces in Nigeria.

Recommendations: Using diplomatic channels, Hungary Helps should encourage UAE/KSA involvement with Islamic community in Nigeria that helps to minimize extremism and to encourage integration into modern societies. Practically speaking, this could be initiated by holding a conference in Abu Dhabi's Abrahamic Family House with representatives from Nigerian Muslim and Christian communities.

Lack of Unified Narratives on Violence Against Christians in Nigeria

An issue that can be a barrier of interfaith communication is the debate about the classification of violence across Nigeria. Given the level of violence and for reasons of emphasis, many Christian communities regularly address the ongoing situation as a 'genocide against Christians' and reference the Islamic domination of Nigeria as an unchanging goal of the Muslims of northern Nigeria since the times of the jihad of Usman dan Fodio, founder of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1804. This narrative can be taken so far as to reject any notion of Muslims suffering in the conflict.

On 20 June 2025, a bus from the Muslim state of Kano carried passengers to a wedding in the south of Plateau State, Nigeria. On the road in Plateau State, the bus was stopped by Christian Plateau locals. The majority of the occupants of the vehicle were massacred after they were discovered to be Muslims. When asked for comment on this specific occasion, the president of the Evangelical Church Winning All, Dr. Job Ayuba Bagat Mallam, claimed that the passengers of the bus were 'muslim warriors', presenting the issue as another 'fake' accusation against Christians.⁴³

In contrast to this, most Catholic leaders - Bishop Steven Mamzani of Yola Diocese, Bishop Kukah of Sokoto Diocese, Auxiliary Bishop of Maiduguri Diocese, John Bagna Bakani, leader of the Catholic Caritas, Father Peter Babangida Audu, and the Papal Nuncio to Nigeria, Archbishop Michael Crotty—acknowledged Muslim discrimination against Christians as a core issue, but rejected notions of an ongoing genocide.⁴⁴ Father Babangida Audu said that the situation is indeed developing toward a genocide, while Archbishop Crotty warned that the unpunished crimes of Fulani groups against Christians could lead to a serious backlash against them, which could in turn result in even higher levels of violence than today.⁴⁵

The priests of Maiduguri Diocese in general pointed to the problem of decreasing village authority and the overreaching power of central state governments over village and LGA authorities. This clearly causes a decay of trust in institutions, and this is much more explanatory than to frame the conflict in the framework of a 'civilizational' conflict by origin.

In the post-liberal and multipolar era, framing problems as one of incomplete nation-building and the lack of resources for local communities is in general much more useful than investing in narratives of ‘civilizational’ conflict. Moreover, as the Nuncio warned, stoking the fire of the conflict can lead to even more conflagration, which can conflict with part of HH’s ‘triple mandate’ to stabilize developing countries in order to curb international migration.

As a lone state-sponsored actor in an arena otherwise dominated by NGOs that operate on limited donations, HH occupies a privileged position in the International Religious Freedom (IRF) movement to promote unified narratives and objectives among foreign individuals and entities concerned about the situation of Christians in Nigeria. HH, with its unique standing in the international aid community, may promote a more sophisticated understanding of Nigeria’s problems and the need to deploy measures that contribute to the stability of the country, instead of promoting inflammatory rhetoric that could easily lead to greater confrontation and violence.

Recommendations: Although a long-term effort, HH should develop a deliberate and clear narrative for its publications about the violence affecting all Nigerian Christian communities. The development of such a narrative should entail consultation with the Nigerian Catholic Secretariat, CAN, the Papal Nuncio, Anglican Church leaders, Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) and all major Christian denominations in the country. Informed and ratified by these organizations, HH should promote its unified narrative about violence in Nigeria in its publications and encourage other actors in the IRF space to adhere to its adopted language and narrative. HH can also encourage the adoption of this narrative among often inconsistent Nigerian Christian communities.

Internal Narratives in Hungary Helps and Justifying Principles

Although born under a particular set of circumstances that set it apart from most other international aid organizations, HH nonetheless belongs to the broader ‘ecosystem’ of international aid organizations. Without carefully developed antidotes and competing claims, HH in the long term is susceptible to adopting the rhetoric, motives and justifications of the broader international aid community, even if these at times conflict with HH’s founding mission and ‘triple mandate’.

We recommend conscious deliberation and enunciation of the ‘culture’ and ‘vision’ of HH for all its employees and staff. Prevailing ideas and ethos among international aid groups and their supporters today often encourage and comprise illusions of effective omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence, and are underpinned by ambitions ‘to save the world’ that border on the megalomaniacal. Most recently, aid organizations funded and supported by US-AID and other international organizations actively encouraged ‘cultural imperialism’ that wedded promises of aid with obligations to support ‘gender equity’, LGBTQ+ initiatives, ‘democracy-building’ and emphasis on climate change that bordered on the far-fetched—such as when well-wishing aid organizations and their sponsors recently attributed the violence in Nigeria’s Middle-Belt largely to the effects of ‘climate change’.⁴⁶

With the abrupt removal of USAID, such misplaced areas of emphasis are downgraded, but certainly still alive and present among legacy aid workers and their local employees in Nigeria.⁴⁷ As far off as in a remote two-room building on the outskirts of Maiduguri, in the midst of a sprawling IDP camp, we witnessed posters at a small vocational training center sponsored by a nominally Catholic aid organization that boasted numerous posters with LGBTQ+-themed backgrounds advocating for ‘gender justice’.⁴⁸

Although legacy aid organizations are certainly more discreet in the aftermath of USAID’s unceremonious dethroning, they remain largely intact through increased efficiency, private donations and contributions from more sympathetic bodies such as the EU. It is not impossible that such legacy organizations and their ideologies will one day return to play an important or even foremost role in international development aid, especially if the US under the Trump administration does not manage to stand up an appropriately modified substitute for USAID.

In this context, we believe that HH will remain more effective long-term as an organization if it creates an organizational culture that consistently emphasizes its legal ‘triple mandate’ and its obligations to the Hungarian taxpayer—and that HH should try to be able credibly to justify every project that it funds (if not every forint that it spends, since some inefficiency and mistakes are unavoidable in development efforts) to Hungarian lawmakers and the Hungarian people.

Like any other aid organization, Hungary Helps is not able ‘to save the world’, and ultimately it is foreign policy tool of the Hungarian government to enhance national strate-

gic goals. Employees should not be encouraged to seek out opportunities 'to do good' no matter what the cost or opportunity, but instead to weigh judiciously all engagements in light of the organization's 'triple mandate' and to be proud of the fact that they can help their human brothers and sisters across the world while at the same time pursuing concrete Hungarian national interests.

Recommendations: Encourage pointed, responsible and realistic discussions of HH ethos, goals and motivation for internal and external use and formulate a deliberate campaign to shape and to solidify the HH organizational culture. DI is prepared to help in this initiative with additional recommendations and resources as requested.



Idanre Hill, Ondo State, Nigeria.(Shutterstock/Amaka Chidioka).

Recommendations: Diplomatic and Political Intervention

Throughout this trip, interviewees emphasized the potential for US and other foreign governments to impact the security and development situation in Nigeria through timely public statements. Interviewees were divided as to whether or not including Nigeria on the US State Department's Countries of Particular Concern Special Watch List would have any substantive effect on the ground.⁴⁹ Although appreciative of recent pronouncements such as the US House Resolution that highlighted the persecution of Nigerian Christians, there is no consensus in Nigeria as to how such statements and pronouncements could positively impact realities for Christians in Nigeria today.⁵⁰

Appropriate Diplomatic Intervention from the Hungarian Embassy

There is widespread consensus, however, that Nigerian elites rely on seamless access to Europe, to the United Kingdom and to the United States for banking, medical care and schooling for their children. Although some Nigerian elites have begun hedging by placing assets in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) or Egypt, it is widely believed that restricting the access of Nigerian elites to Western hospitals, schools and banking institutions would serve to increase their levels of accountability and the level of their investment within Nigeria itself.

Although of modest means within the EU structure, Hungary nonetheless has the means to promote through diplomatic means the restriction of Nigerian travel and investments in the EU, and also to influence statements and attitudes in the US.

Recommendations: Hungary should conduct diplomatic studies to determine legal mechanisms for promoting the restriction of Nigerian travel and investments in Europe based on the ongoing conflict and violence in the nation. Hungary can also develop and promote a list of direct sanctions for leaders implicated in violence and terroristic activities in Nigeria, including freezing of funds and travel bans for noted offenders. This is an area of research where DI could help HH to develop options.

Waste of Expired Stocks in the Wake of USAID's Closure

Hungary could also try to use its diplomatic capabilities to settle the "loose ends" of closed USAID programs. In Benue State, according to local humanitarian organizations, 90% of humanitarian programs were dependent on USAID for funding.⁵¹ Most of these programs were in some way connected to healthcare—programs looking to curb the spread of AIDS, STDs, and other serious epidemics. Loss of funding rendered most of the medical stocks associated with these programs inaccessible and unusable. Helping to identify and to distribute valid medical stock and to avoid the wasting of these resources already paid for by American taxpayers and delivered for communities in need is important. Intervening effectively in this case with the US government would also demonstrate the capabilities of Hungary Helps as an actor with high-level access and ready to seek out unorthodox solutions.

Recommendations: Coordinate with the US Embassy in Abuja to explore options for the use of any remaining stocks of medical supplies, or other resources before their expiration. Hungary Helps could offer help in negotiating the release of these stocks by means of setting up new contacts with the US government.

Recommendations: Sustainable Intervention

As one IDP in Kaduna State mentioned, ‘Justice can take different forms’. IDPs often cannot get back their houses and recover what was lost, but we can help to provide them and their descendants with something valuable that can help them to forge better lives in the future.

Internally Displaced Persons Camps in the Middle-Belt

Making intervention sustainable requires specific understanding of what is solvable and what is a process that might no longer be feasible to arrest. The IDPs of Nigeria’s Middle Belt are, by and large, stuck in place because of their inability to continue their original, normal life, but also because their original living conditions are barring them from any deeper integration into modern and urban life. In this sense, they are subject to a process that we could describe as a kind of violence-compelled ‘forced urbanization’ of rural populations. While the forcefulness of this process is not normal, the sudden urbanization of Global South societies is a known phenomenon, with the predictable outcome that these people appear on the urban labor market where technical skills are needed.⁵²

One of the best approaches to tackle this problem would be to help these groups to integrate into life within a money-based, urban economy by providing them with vocational training to find a more competitive place in the urban labor market. Vocational training can be enhanced from closely surveying the requirements of local economies; that is, to determine which fields or firms accept moderately skilled blue-collar workers. In this way, a really sustainable model, respecting local sovereignties and natural processes, can be constructed over time. Technical and vocational education and training comprise a core element of the UNHCR’s Refugee Education Strategy of 2030 as well.⁵³ HH can thus enhance its cooperation with international organizations, while also using its earlier accumulated experience of supporting vocational training programs in Mali, Senegal and various Middle Eastern countries. What is more, the Catholic Church in Nigeria already operates similar projects, such as an institution in the city of Maiduguri operated by the diocese, where regular training is provided to IDPs who mostly came from the border regions with Cameroon where Boko Haram is now active.⁵⁴

Recommendations: Support the building and operation of vocational training centers for young Nigerian IDPs in areas of high IDP-concentrated, such as Kaduna State, Benue State and Borno State.⁵⁵ These vocation training centers could also have a limited ability to provide ‘residence permits’ and scholarships to high-performing students for specialized study in Hungary or elsewhere in Europe.

Lack of Adequate Medical Testing Facilities in Nigeria

Hungary Helps has already made significant strides toward systematically funding the creation of institutions that foster inter-communal engagement and nation-building across the Middle East and Africa. One of the examples of how HH can further work ‘to disrupt’ the negative EGS feedback mechanisms described above are institutions that serve as a space of interaction and source of development for given communities. A health center, for example, is valuable for all communities in the area because of the necessary and often life-saving services that it provides. Moreover, such an institution as a space physically channels people together to share common experiences, thus making personal and inter-communal interactions possible, which can lead to better understanding and potentially the emergence of common goals for peaceful coexistence and better governance. In this sense, competent and proficient medical facilities disrupt the negative feedback of the economy-governance axis.

The practice of HH in funding health infrastructure throughout Africa represents a timely and important element to sustainable aid projects. Identifying and deploying projects that can be sustained economically is especially important. For example, the construction of diagnostic centers across Nigeria is an ongoing phenomena, which is clearly profit-based, but still helps to expand healthcare access for local communities. At present, there are few if any advanced diagnostic centers outside of Abuja or Lagos, and such centers are sorely needed elsewhere and can reliably generate profits.

Without any outside funding aside from modest Nigerian diaspora donations, the Anglican Kwoi Diocese is currently finishing a self-funded diagnostic center in rural Kaduna. Likewise, the US mission ‘Ignition633’ is in the final stages of constructing a diagnostic clinic in the southern outskirts of Makurdi, Benue State. In both cases, such

diagnostic centers are filling critical gaps in healthcare access for locals, and both projects are aiming to become self-sustaining. The Kwoi diocese simply does not have funds to operate the clinic any other way than as a profit-based enterprise, while 'Ignition633' has a strategy to develop every project as a self-sustaining investment.

Recommendations: Fund regional clinics that can make reliable income by providing much-needed testing services. While no up-to-date statistics exist, our findings in Nigeria suggest that diagnostic centers are both critical and potentially sustainable investments in the 'new normal' of development aid, where external funding is quite scarce. HH has experience with constructing clinics and health centers across the Middle East and Africa. Harnessing such experience in light of recent findings in Nigeria can be a way to develop a comprehensive framework for supporting infrastructure and capacity building in a sustainable way. A nationwide range of diagnostic clinics in Nigeria supported and staffed by HH (and potentially associated with local churches working together with like-minded Muslims) could not only provide sustainable income and jobs to local communities, it could also significantly increase Hungary's profile with Nigerian politicians at all levels of governance.

Impact-Investment Funds for Christian Small Businesses

Enhancing reliance on verified local knowledge about sustainable interventions is critical in all new HH efforts. Legacy development and aid models have often emphasized large 'projects' to measure the effectiveness of their interventions, but experience in the development sector has shown that focus on 'projects' can actually have stagnating or counterproductive effects. As one development expert opined, 'obsession with "projects" is a horrible way to spend money and not effective'.⁵⁶

One possible structured way to make money regularly available for small actors with local knowledge is micro-finance. This is already a sector with more than 900 institutions in Nigeria, but the area in which this sector is vulnerable is precisely the field of lacking 'the common bond that often serves as a collateral substitute' as a World Bank study on Nigerian micro-finance observes.⁵⁷ This is a field where small faith-based loans can fill a critical gap.

Through faith-based organizations, it is more feasible to get familiar with the cash-flows of the clients and to gain the overall on-the-ground knowledge essential for the

long-term success of microloans. Hungary Helps' standard approach of working through faith-based organizations was born in order to get help directly to where it is actually needed. This approach can prove valid and profitable in the context of micro-finance as well. Moreover, this direct approach can be coupled with vocational training programs, which can serve as a holistic virtuous cycle of strengthening the economy. Well-targeted investment in the micro-finance field can disrupt the negative Security-Economy cycle weakening the economy, and in turn, disrupt the negative cycle of a negative Economy-Governance cycle that fuels societal instability and over-reliance on the often corrupt patron-client networks that ravage Nigeria's politics and economy.

Recommendations: Hungary Helps should fund a pilot business incubator and/or micro-finance impact-fund, potentially in cooperation with the Caritas Nigeria and otherwise within the Secretariat for the Catholic Nigerian Bishops' Conference (CNBC), with a specific focus on micro-loans.

Lack of Agricultural Development

Despite its enormous potential, Nigeria's agricultural sector remains woefully underdeveloped. This contributes not only to the unreal situation where there is 'famine' and 'food shortage' in Nigeria's most agriculturally rich states such as Benue, but also creates a massive financial drain on Nigeria as it is forced to devote foreign currency earnings and reserves to importing both raw and refined foodstuffs.

By way of overview, Nigeria has over 70.8 million hectares of agricultural land (75% of total land area), of which 34 million hectares are arable. Agriculture accounted for approximately 25.70% of GDP in 2020.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, and most bizarrely, Nigeria remains a net food importer, and the agricultural trade deficit has continued to expand in nominal terms from 2016 until 2021.⁵⁹ Between 2016 and 2019, for example, Nigeria's cumulative agricultural imports stood at NGN 3.35 trillion, (\$2.32 billion) four times higher than the agricultural export of NGN 803 billion (\$558 million) within the same period.⁶⁰

Most of Nigeria's approximately 100 million rural dwellers (40-48% of the estimated national population) are small-holder farmers cultivating fewer than two hectares of land. They constitute about 70% of the total farming population and produce up to 90% of the national agricultural output.⁶¹ According to 2018 estimates, only 1% of Nigerian cropland was irrigated, meaning that farmers could

only cultivate during rainy seasons. Nigeria's Agricultural Transformation Agenda is promoting small-scale irrigation, but the effectiveness of such endeavors seems limited at best.⁶²

The Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index (2022) estimates that 38.6% of Nigerians, or 77.2 million citizens face food insecurity; 28.7% face nutrition insecurity and 50.6% lack access to cooking fuel.⁶³ The World Food Program estimated that about 26.5 million Nigerians will face 'acute hunger' in the June-August 2024 lean season. This represents a 'staggering increase' from the 2023 figure of 18.6 million for the same time. Insecurity and internal displacement are main drivers of food insecurity.⁶⁴ In 2023, Nigeria ranks 109 out of 125 ranked countries on the 2023 Global Hunger Index, with a 28.3 score, indicating a level of hunger that is serious.⁶⁵

Blessed with millions of hectares of uncultivated or under-cultivated land, Nigeria has almost peerless prospects for growth and development in the agricultural sector—an opportunity that international investors from Gulf Coop-

eration Council (GCC) states have been especially keen to harness over recent years.⁶⁶

Targeted Hungary Helps support for agricultural projects could help to forge business opportunities for Hungarian companies while simultaneously helping to create jobs and economic opportunity for Nigerians in specifically targeted areas.

Recommendations: (1) Partner with Hungarian agriculture companies to support agribusiness hubs in Kachia and or other locations; (2) Partner with the Israeli aid agency MASHAV to help to bring advanced irrigation and agricultural techniques to target pilot areas; (3) Partner with Water4Mercy and other proven charities friendly to faith-based initiatives to provide water for consumption, sanitation and irrigation purposes in targeted areas; (4) Explore options of World Bank funding through the World Bank Faith-Based Organization (FBO) program for large-scale agricultural projects.



St. Patrick School of Illela, IT room. Machines and wiring are installed, but cannot be used due to lack of electricity. (Danube Institute).

Recommendations: Project Management, Oversight, and Branding

On-site visits to several projects funded by HH revealed poor upkeep and maintenance, if not outright neglect. The St. Patrick School in Illela, near the city of Sokoto was relatively clean but it still lacks basic amenities, such as running water and regular electricity.⁶⁷ What is more, when we arrived at the site, there was a large pile of burning rubbish adjacent to the school building.

Poor Outward Appearance of Projects Funded by Hungary Helps

Visiting another unfinished site, the “Holy Family Mother and Child Clinic” funded by HH in Sokoto Diocese, we saw a building meant to serve as a regional clinic in serious disrepair, with overgrown surrounding lawns, unfinished wiring and plumbing, numerous broken windows, cracked walls and a deteriorating roof that now requires an expensive overhaul.

Likewise, in Onitsha, we witnessed buildings recently funded by HH whose quality of construction and upkeep was wanting. A newly-built teaching hospital was erected with clear structural asymmetries, and within the laboratories, the shelving was already bending and folding off the walls where they had been put. By contrast, nearby was an orphanage built in 1945 by the British, 15 years before Nigerian independence. Despite being essentially unrenovated, the building was structurally sound, solid, and in fundamentally good condition.

Although it is possible to make what are essentially patronizing and ‘paternalist’ excuses for poor upkeep of HH-funded facilities (e.g. poor local climate, inadequate local cleanliness standards, overuse), the bottom line is that there is no reason for which HH cannot and should not expect that all its funded projects be maintained to a certain standard, and then strive to uphold these standards through a variety of means, including the withholding of future funding if necessary. To expect and to enforce certain standards of cleanliness and appearance is not merely an arbitrary ‘cosmetic’ emphasis, but something that makes sense if we take into account what sociologists and criminologists called the ‘broken window theory’.

According to this theory, physical evidence of dilapidated and poorly maintained buildings can enhance senses of social disorganization and preclude civic and communal

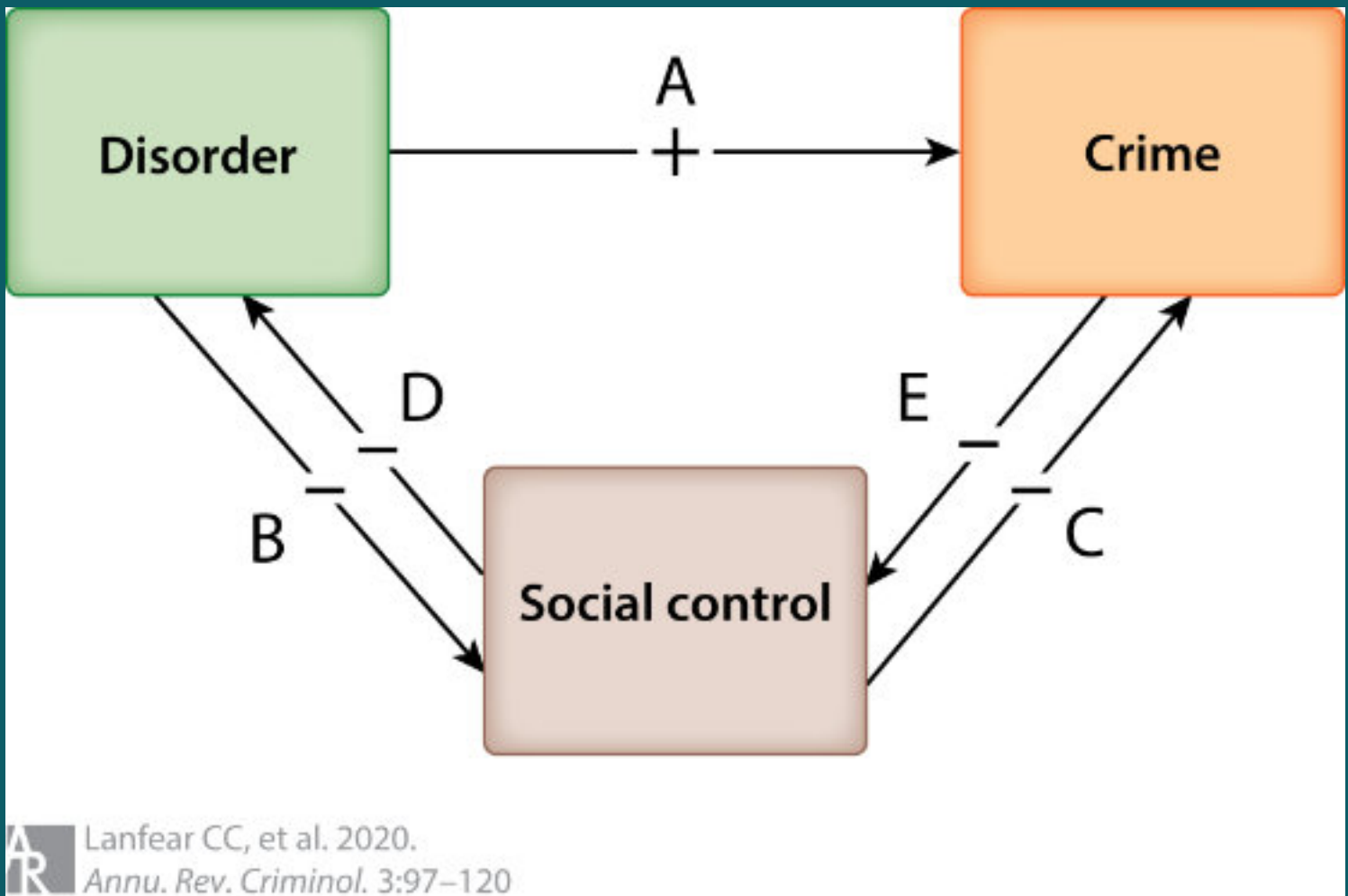
pride. It is certainly possible for sociologists to debate the validity of this theory, but it bears noting that Catholic Church buildings and structures worldwide accept this idea as ‘common sense’ as they routinely emphasize the orderly upkeep and beautification of their properties whenever possible.

Lack of maintenance can also prove costly and counterproductive. In the case of the unfinished Sokoto Diocese clinic, an obvious lack of maintenance will make it necessary to find significant additional financing for a new roof structure. Good stewardship of HH funds and projects is a reasonable expectation for HH program managers and for the ultimate donors, the Hungarian taxpayer.

Recommendations: Adopt a modified ‘broken window theory’ to govern expectations for maintenance and upkeep of all HH projects; insist on standards of cleanliness and upkeep and regularly monitor projects for cleanliness, orderliness and maintenance with remote and in-person checks. Such monitoring can be carried out through relatively inexpensive and non-invasive means. For example, one HH employee could be assigned exclusively to reach out every week to various HH projects and project managers by means of video enabled over WhatsApp, during which calls the receivers of aid would be expected to give updates on the status and upkeep of HH projects.

Hungary Helps Emergency Interventions and ‘Branding Control’

The one-off food donations to Benue State internal refugee camps in 2023 certainly alleviated the plight of thousands of refugees in Benue State at a difficult moment. It is important to emphasize, however, that Internally Displaced Persons’ (IDP) camps are part of the problem itself. Of course, their existence is logical. Local interviews proved that the insecurity is at such levels that any kind of safe resettlement for refugees is highly in doubt.⁶⁸ A young ‘leader’ of a camp recounted that his village was only five kilometers away from his IDP camp, but that he was still unable to move back because of the high threat of Fulani herders. In another case, to take the example of the horrible 13 June 2025 massacre at Yelwata, Guma LGA. As of July 2025, attacks are still ongoing on nearby villages and even on security forces deployed in the area. Michael Burton, the local leader of the Ignition633 mission, which reg-



“Conceptual model of broken windows theory: disorder, social control, and crime. Two paths link disorder to crime: a direct path, in which (a) disorder signals community indifference, which increases crime; and an indirect path, in which (b) disorder elicits actual community indifference, which weakens social control, which in turn (c) increases crime. These effects are reinforced as (d) weakened social control stimulates more disorder and (e) crime weakens social control. Two feedback pathways (d and e) mean this is a nonrecursive model.”⁶⁹

ularly caters to refugees, described that there are cases of IDPs chased away from their villages two or three times. This inability to move back is coupled by a critical lack of skills, as a majority of these IDPs are farmers with a lack of basic education, limited English skills and quite unused to living in urban settings. The latter point is proven by the situation of the camp housing the Yelwata refugees, that is in an urban area.

A complaint of IDPs living in the camp is that they are uncomfortable utilizing the rudimentary toilets provided by international agencies—they would rather use the bush, as they would do in their villages.

These observations all point to the fact that resettlement of refugees to their original life settings is extremely challenging and, perhaps more often than not, an impossible goal. Still, an off-ramp from refugee camps is needed, and the longer such IDP camps persist, the less relevant it is to advertise them as a place where people can get aid. Crowding people in refugee camps and keeping them there is a comfortable way for ‘aid dumps’ to reach these groups. As the state of such IDP camps becomes more and more precarious, however, HH should not support them in the post-USAID era.

In Benue State, outside of an established IDP camp with thousands of long-term ‘residents’, our research team witnessed a seriously degraded metal sign that advertised time-bound emergency food relief from Hungary Helps several years ago. Since then HH has had no involvement with this IDP camp. From the sign, however, it appeared that HH was endorsing and contributing to the upkeep of this camp—which had by far the worst conditions for IDPs that we saw in Benue State.⁷⁰

Recommendations: We recommend strategically measuring and monitoring the use of the HH signs at project site installations. The fact that the aid distribution happened is obviously very helpful for people, but it is important to deploy the HH brand only when the place or project is something that HH would continuously endorse.

Several Unfinished Hungary Helps Projects

Loose ends and unfinished projects are obvious problems in an agency where the footprint is global, and where this very global expanse makes capacities for monitoring and evaluation limited. In both of the Northern Nigerian dioceses that we visited (Sokoto and Maiduguri, Borno), our

research team found similar problems. Both dioceses received substantial monetary sums, €1 million and 1,335 million respectively, to construct two schools and a hospital/health center.

In both cases, not all of the projects were finished. In Sokoto, a complex testing and health center is left unfinished, which would have been only the second comprehensive testing center in the states of Sokoto, Katsina and Zamfara. The structure of the building is ready, some interior flooring is done and at least part of the wiring is completed. Funds have nonetheless run out for reasons that local hosts could not adequately address or explain—other than generally the rapid rise of inflation in Nigeria.

Moreover, the building has since fallen in disrepair, some of the windows are already broken, and part of the roof is showing such serious signs of wear that it will undoubtedly require replacement. Similarly, the St. Stephen College in Borno State, funded in 2017, was structurally completed by a Kaduna entrepreneur, but since left unfinished with no plan to finance the completion of the project.⁷¹ Some of the walls on the construction site have already started to crumble.

This raises valid and necessary questions for HH leaders. Economic downturns, inflation and exchange rate problems are natural and unavoidable problems in planning. All the same, it is important for the global footprint of Hungarian aid and cooperation efforts—including but not limited to these projects in Nigeria—that HH develop adequate mechanisms to forecast and to plan for the effects of local problems such that its funded projects are completed to standard and in a relatively timely way.

Recommendations: Do not finance projects that have not been or potentially will not be completed in a timely way. Insist on transparency for contracts and increase auditing of donations as to the way funds are used (DI can help to build some mechanisms for measuring transparency). In the case of currently unfinished projects, a comprehensive audit before the continuation of the work and funding is essential: firstly, to understand and potentially to avoid similar problems in the next stage of the project, and second, to develop good practices for implementation in the planning and approving of new, similar projects, both in Nigeria and elsewhere within the HH scope of activity.



Damaged roof structure at the Holy Family Mother and Child Clinic, most likely a result of improper draining, Nigeria. (Danube Institute).

Lack of Local Participation in Development Projects

For current and future HH projects, it is important to consider how funds are perceived by the community where it is targeted. Nigeria's society and social institutions have a lack of funds, and this is why foreign funding is desired and relevant. If local investment is entirely lacking from development projects, however, a problem of management can arise. Purely externally funded projects can be seen as resources that are not counted as a net loss to local communities and organizations if they are left uncompleted, because no locally sourced funds are lost.

To illustrate how such attitudes towards funding can manifest themselves on the ground in Nigeria, we can compare the situation of the half-finished Sokoto diagnostic center with a similar center in Kwoi, Southern Kaduna State, which is managed by the local Anglican diocese. In both cases, a similar issue persists: planned budget is inadequate, thus the structurally ready building is yet to be used for its designed purpose. The Kwoi complex, however, is wholly community-financed and, according to Bishop Paul Mamzani, concrete plans exist for sourcing and completing the projects.

Moreover, its upkeep was demonstrably superior to that seen in Sokoto and the community was obviously actively engaged in the building and the maintenance of these structures. The Anglican Diocese of Kwoi, according to local interviews, has not yet received any funding from foreign donors, not even from the Church of England itself. It can be observed how the involvement of local funding can promote the timely completion and continued maintenance of projects, lest local investment funds be lost to otherwise avoidable delays and degradation.

Recommendations: HH should require donations, collections, and contributions from local diocese or parish as part of projects. Before providing additional funds, HH can set realistic donation benchmarks that each community has to reach before project funding from HH is initiated.

Legibility and Illegibility of Hungary Helps Projects

Another tool to keep track of the usefulness of the project is concentrating on projects whose impacts are easily measurable, or at least classifying and differentiating projects on a scale of measurability, or 'legibility'. The latter expres-

sion in public policy contexts comes from James C. Scott's *Seeing like a State*.

Legibility in this context means how a state simplifies and standardizes complex social tendencies. While this is a process that sometimes can be harmful as it simplifies realities, for HH's purposes, where the donor needs to oversee a vast array of global projects with limited organizational reach, increasing 'legibility' can be useful. One such 'legible' project can be solar power projects, which HH has already funded in various cases.⁷² Such projects and their relative effectiveness can be easily measured, for example, by the metrics of the usage of the system. Moreover, such a system can offer a tool to measure the effectiveness of other projects.

For example, the impact of the Illela school in Sokoto Diocese is hard to measure in itself. While the capacity of the new building and its ratio to the student population can be measured, it is hard to estimate to what extent this building funded by HH actually expanded the educational capabilities of the school and its overall impact on the local community. The usage of electricity at such a school, however, can be easily measured (provided that HH is given access to this data). In a post-liberal era, such measures can serve as easily understandable metrics for aid projects across the globe. This way decision-makers can easily check the effectiveness and usage of provided aid which in turn can help them understand clearly how their donations help on the ground.

Recommendations: Classify projects sites and forecast interventions on a scale of 'legibility' and maintain specific projects for 'low legibility' to 'high legibility' contexts. DI can help to develop and to update a 'legibility scale' with associated appropriate projects for the use of HH.

Lack of Continuous Hungary Helps Presence or Country Office in Nigeria

Legibility, of course, is not always something easily at hand, and people in need do not always want projects that can be easily and conveniently measured. Without legibility and measurement, however, this means that the project is reliant on local partners who in practice control information and management on-site. This means that HH is reliant on outside feedback for quality control, or else on the occasional visits like the recent HH/DI trip to Nigeria. Two sub-projects, as we have seen, have already run into significant (that is, over \$1 million) budget problems, which potentially means whole groups of people did not

receive their school-building, as in Borno, or patients could not access a new diagnostic facility, as in Sokoto.

It is important for HH to conduct an assessment of these delayed projects and to determine what losses were accumulated because of the problems management of local partners, and whether in the light of these losses it would be wise to deploy a country office that can make up for such large losses by mitigating or avoiding such costly delays or management problems. The proper approach here is also dependent on the HH focus for its deployment of funds. The original HH model is to disburse funds entirely to local partners in order to save operational and overhead costs (which can be quite high for Western NGOs).

This practice, however, entails vetting partners continuously on a case-by-case basis, instead of having a single interior HH structure for execution and oversight. It is also important to examine whether HH's continuous expansion across the world is the desired direction, and how it is related to special focus on designated area(s). This question about HH emphasis can also be extended to whether there is any specific HH area focus on developmental and crisis aid, and if there is a definitive and/or desired ratio between providing development aid and responding to emergencies. These are all questions that a local HH office in Nigeria could help to coordinate in order to meet the strategic HH vision for the country and region.

The research team understands that the HH Sahel Region office is in Chad, and that no new locations are yet planned. It also understands that there are significant costs to standing up a regional office. The enhancement of monitoring, however, can take many different forms. Even without a dedicated country office, HH could hire contractors of specific fields to conduct professional assessments of projects from budgetary, management, or even engineering approaches. There is a relative abundance of such professionals, and given the USAID cutoff, they are likely to show up on the labor market ready for collaboration in other development projects.

Depending on answers about larger HH strategies of lateral expansion or special area focus, these professionals can be potentially utilized for expansion and increased monitoring of HH activities in Nigeria. Also, it must be emphasized that by working through the Hungary Embassy and local partner organizations, it may be possible to create a dedicated HH local office at considerably less expense in comparison with those incurred in Chad.

Recommendations: Consider creating a dedicated HH country office in Nigeria (as in Chad) or at least partially duplicating the oversight possible from a country-office through technological monitoring. DI researchers stand ready to assist in formulating feasible and cost-effective plans for a dedicated HH country office in Nigeria.



Interior of diagnostic facility constructed through donations by Hungary Helps, Nigeria. (Danube Institute).

Conclusions

The condition of Christian communities in Nigeria is not merely a humanitarian concern. It is a strategic test case for the future of international development in a post-liberal era. The dismantling of USAID has not removed the need for development; it has cleared conceptual space for something new, grounded in realism not idealism. The question now is which actors will define the next phase of development practice, and on what philosophical foundations.

Hungary Helps is unusually well-positioned to do so. Despite being the foreign-assistance arm of a small Central European state and of relatively recent formation, HH has already established a distinctive presence in the global aid ecosystem and within the arena of international religious freedom (IRF). It operates with a clarity of purpose that most legacy development agencies have long since lost. Its “triple mandate” (to assist persecuted Christian communities, to raise global awareness of their situation, and to address the root causes of migration) is not mere rhetoric. It has been carried out in practice through direct cooperation with local churches, dioceses, and civil society networks, without attempting to impose institutional blueprints or universal governance templates.

This approach is recognisably post-liberal: rooted in cultural realism, respectful of local authority, and oriented toward keeping communities in place. In Nigeria, this approach has taken concrete form. HH has developed relationships across the Catholic Church and associated agencies, supported projects in education, healthcare, agriculture, and vocational training, and established a working operational familiarity in one of the most complex environments in Africa. Even without a full country office (Chad is currently the only such site) HH has created the framework of an international network capable of doing things on scale.

The strategic significance of this moment is sharpened by the renewed American attention to Nigeria. The American President’s explicit prioritization of the conflict dynamics affecting Nigerian Christians signals that Nigeria is once again becoming a theater of geopolitical interest. The form of that engagement is not yet settled. Models already operating on the ground - practical, locally-anchored, sovereignty-conscious - will shape what follows. HH’s presence therefore has implications beyond the immediate communities it assists. It offers a credible alternative to the exhausted universalist paradigm that dominated the post-Cold War period.

Nigeria is a keystone state for the region: a demographic giant, a potential economic driver, and a regional security hinge. Its trajectory will influence patterns of migration, regional stability, and the future political shape of West Africa. Helping Nigerian Christian communities remain rooted is therefore not only a moral imperative but a contribution to regional stability and, by extension, to European strategic interests. If Nigeria stabilizes, West Africa stabilizes; if it fragments, the consequences will reach the Mediterranean.

In this context, HH now has the opportunity to move from effective intervention to model-building. More sustainable, business-oriented development ventures can be constructed in partnership with Hungarian civil society, the Hungarian MFA’s development arm, and selected private-sector actors. These efforts can generate local resilience, reduce migration pressures, and demonstrate that post-liberal development is not only conceptually coherent but operationally viable.

The Danube Institute stands ready to support this next phase. The field relationships established during the 2025 research program, and the analytical insights developed through this report, can serve HH in strengthening its operational presence, refining narrative strategies, and developing structured monitoring frameworks. Nigeria is large, complex, and contested. That is precisely why it matters.

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³¹ Roundtable discussion at the Foundation for Justice Development and Peace organized by the Foundation, Makurdi, Benue State, 2025.06.28.

³² Giles Bolton, *Africa Doesn't Matter: How the West Has Failed the Poorest Continent and What We Can Do About It*, (Arcade, 2012) 110.

³³ In Benue State, for example, based on numerous interviews we concluded that despite vast evidence for sustained USAID financial support for a wide variety of local projects, no USAID official from the US Embassy in Abuja had visited the area in recent memory of the locals at USAID-supported sites. Roundtable discussion at the Foundation for Justice Development and Peace organized by the Foundation, Makurdi, Benue State, 2025.06.28.

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⁴³ Discussion with Dr. Job Ayuba Bagat Mallam, President of ECWA, Jos, Plateau State 2025.06.28.[OLD]

⁴⁴ Interview with Father Babangida Audu, Head of CARITAS Nigeria, Abuja, 2025.06.30.

⁴⁵ Interview with His Eminence Francis James Crotty, Papal Nuncio, Abuja, 2025.07.01.

⁴⁶ Witness the 2024 headline report from UNHCR “Climate Change Fuels Deadly Conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt” November 12, 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/climate-change-fuels-deadly-conflict-nigeria-s-middle-belt>

⁴⁷ We witnessed this phenomenon in numerous interviews, including during a roundtable of local NGO workers in Benue State sponsored by the local Roman Catholic 'Justice and Peace Commission' on 06.28. At this meeting, local aid workers did not hesitate to promote ideas such as the need for 'climate change justice', and many advocated for the distribution of contraceptives, sex education that clearly contradicted Catholic teachings and the promotion of LGBTQ+ initiatives, ideas fashionable among the international aid community and perhaps necessary to receive funding, but highly questionable in this Catholic context.

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⁶⁷ Construction funded by Hungary Helps in 2019.

⁶⁸ Interview with the young leader of Camp 4 in Benue, outskirts of Makurdi, 2025.06.28.

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⁷⁰ Field inspection on Site 1, Makurdi, Benue State, 2025.06.28.

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