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# Where 'cops' play cupid

**MATCHMAKING:** A programme run by the Hisbah aims to match widows and divorcees with available men

**KANO**

A LINE of women wait their turn at a building in northern Nigeria, ready to participate in a programme local officials hope will bring two results: marriage and peace.

Love might have to come later. The programme, run by the syariah police here in the largest city in Nigeria's mainly Muslim north, aimed to match widows and divorcees with available men.

Officials hoped it would, in part, help curb unrest in the north, which had been hit by violence blamed on Islamist group Boko Haram, as well as reduce other social problems by providing a stable home for children.

"With the current security situation here, children with no proper parental guide and care are more likely to be influenced and fed with these extremist tendencies," said Nabahani Usman, deputy head of the Hisbah, as the syariah police are known.

"It is very important they are saved from these destructive elements through this programme, where they can have stable family life with their mothers and step-fathers looking after them."

Analysts said unemployment and frustration among young people had helped feed the violence which had rocked Nigeria's north, leaving more than 1,000 dead since mid-2009.

Whether marriage would have a positive effect remained to be seen, but for now, women and men seemed eager to participate. Arranged marriages are common across northern Nigeria, an impoverished region near the Sahara desert.

Non-governmental

health organisations offered free HIV screening to the spouse-seekers, which the Hisbah had made mandatory to the applicants.

Radio announcements were aired in February calling on men open to marrying selected widows and divorcees to come forward.

The women were located through an NGO called the Voice of Widows, Divorcees and Orphans of Nigeria (Vowan).

Recently, Amina Adamu, 38, clutched her handbag under her arm and walked towards a long table at the end of the hall to a bearded man for her screening interview.

She was among the first set of 100 women brought to the Hisbah headquarters for the programme.

Three other bearded men and two veiled women at the table called out names of dozens of applicants who sat on rows of plastic chairs.

Questions included basic information, such as occupation, income and number of children. Men were asked why they wanted to get married again, among other things.

Those who qualified were allowed to meet each other at the Hisbah office, choosing who they might wish to marry.

A group wedding would be held later for participants, but those who preferred not to wait, could go ahead with their marriages.

"I need a mature, sincere and caring husband, which is why I want the Hisbah to be involved because I need security in my marriage," Adamu said after being screened by the panel.

Outside in the courtyard, men waited to be called into the hall for the screening.

They included those who had been divorced or widowed, as well as bachelors and those looking for additional wives, as Islam allows a man to marry up to four women.

For the men, another important factor also played a role: money.

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Ismail Ibrahim, a 25-year-old bachelor and a school teacher, said he could not afford to get married since the dowry would be too expensive. The Hisbah programme took care of that, paying the dowry and also providing a small grant to help them set up a home.

Officials declined to say how much would be paid, though dowries here typically range from 10,000 naira (RM190) to 20,000 naira.

"It is quite expensive to marry a young woman, which is why I want to be part of this initiative to enable me to marry the woman of my choice at low cost," Ibrahim said.

Altine Abdullahi, head of Vowan here, also said divorce had become a problem in the city. Men who married through the programme could not divorce their wives without permission from the Hisbah.

"People change wives the way they change their wardrobes.

"We feel the best way to stop this and give security to our members is to arrange marriages through the Hisbah."

She said the high number of divorces "leave (women) to fend for themselves and the children without any support from the fathers".

"The children end up as menaces to society, which is why most

teenage criminals here are from broken homes."

Hajara Adamu, a 48-year-old widow, vowed to make the best of the programme.

"I will not make a hasty choice. I want a responsible, respectable and mature man. I'm confident I'll get him here," said Adamu.

The men involved in the programme ranged from the young to the not-so-young.

Muhammad Tukur, 75, was looking for a third wife.

"I have not yet made my choice. I'm still waiting for the woman my mind is at peace with," he said. **AFP**

**"I want a responsible, respectable and mature man. I'm confident I'll get him here."**  
**Hajara Adamu**  
widow



**Divorcees and widows wait to be called in for a meeting with a screening panel, as part of a marriage scheme for widows and divorced women, in the northern Nigerian city of Kano. (Inset) Two prospective suitors looking through the forms of marriage applicants to choose the woman they wish to marry. AFP pix**