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CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF RELIGIOUS CRISIS AND CONFLICTS ON DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This research examines how religious crises and conflicts have affected development in Nigeria. The destruction of lives and property by religious extremists has been a challenge to development in Nigeria. It aims to find the major causes of this crisis and conflicts and find everlasting solutions to the root causes. This research concludes that religious intolerance from different religious groups in Nigeria was a result of the misinterpretation of religious teachings of the leaders of terrorist groups to their followers. It also finds out that religious crises and conflicts in Nigeria affect development as they lead to loss of lives and destruction of property. It also dictated that the effects of crisis and religious conflicts in Nigeria led to an increase in the unemployment rate, withdrawal of foreign investments and education imbalance. The research concludes that religious crises and conflicts are unhealthy for the nation's development. It is recommended that religious leaders form the minds of Nigerians with the teaching of love and peace, as it is proclaimed in their various religious books and beliefs.

Introduction

Conflict is a break from a disagreement or quarrel between two or more people or groups of people. Conflict can also be defined as when something is contested. The inability to resolve this disagreement or quarrel could lead to the escalation of crisis and conflict. Alegbeleye (2014), in line with this, defines conflict as “a situation or condition of disharmony in an interactional process”. Presently, in Nigeria, there are various conflicts in different parts of the country, which have led to deaths, destruction of lives and property, disruption of economic and social activities, poverty, insecurity and displacements. Scholars have identified conflict with its multidimensional consequences as an obstacle to progress, economic growth, political stability and overall socio-economic development (Edewor, Aluko & Folarin 2014; Polachek & Sevastianova 2012; Ray & Esteban 2017).

According to Peace N. Ngwoke and Ezichi A. Ituma (2020): “the consistent killing and destruction of property, as a result of ethnic and religious clashes in Nigeria, are dominated by Fulani herdsmen, who are nomadic cattle grazers but are known for their militant actions in their host communities, and the Boko Haram group, comprising Islamic fundamentalist militants”. Tukur (2018) quoted the governor of Borno State, Mr Kashim Shettima, saying that “the insurgency has led to the deaths of almost 100,000 persons, based on estimates by community leaders in the State over the years”. From the assertion of the governor of Borno State, one would agree that the incessant killing by Boko Haram has become an affront to humanity. In recent times, the Fulani herdsmen have become a threat to their host communities, with several incidents of attacks they have carried out against their host communities. According to Salawu (2010), “most of the Boko Haram or Fulani herdsman attacks were linked to religious intolerance, as some of the conflicts were ethnically or religiously driven”. However, during the religious conflict outbreak in Northern Nigeria, the Christians in south-eastern Nigeria were the major victims of mass

killings. In all these conflicts, lives were lost, people were displaced from their homes, businesses were disrupted, and people's goods were destroyed in most cases. As a result of all these conflicts, sustainable development in Nigeria appears to be an unachievable goal. What would have contributed to sustainable development is destroyed as a result of excessive crises and religious conflicts.

Onah et al. (2017) suggest that as "adherents of different religions imbibe the moral teachings of religions such as love for one another", peaceful coexistence will be achieved". However, Salawu (2010) argues that providing "adequate and effective security in each state that should be able to respond promptly to any insurgence of ethno-religious crisis anywhere at any time" will curb the ethno-religious conflicts". The aim of this research is to find out the major causes and effects of religious crises and conflicts on the development of Nigeria. The research will also provide solutions to this crisis and conflict.

Some Instances of Religious Crisis and Conflicts in Nigeria

The Maitatsine crises

The Maitatsine crisis, which broke out in the northern part of Nigeria, started in 1980 and ended in the year 1985. The crises, according to Falola, as cited in Aghedo (2014), "were one of the major religious crises in Nigeria that claimed over 10,000 lives. Their main goal was to promote the Islamic religion within Northern Nigeria and preach against modernization, such as the use of television, radio and car; Western education and so on". According to Okwueze (2003 in Ngwoke and Ituma 2020), "the Maitatsine crises were led by an Islamic cleric Mohammed Marwa Maitatsine, 'who had his infamous kingdom in the heart of Kano with a fanatical band of more than 10,000 followers". The Maitatsine group, according to Aghedo (2014), was known for its exhibition of religious intolerance towards anyone who did not share the same belief. The group's name was derived from the name of the leader, Maitatsine, which is a Hausa word meaning 'the one who curses' because of his curse-laden public speeches; due to its religious intolerance, the group fought against the Nigerian government and the Nigerian state" Thus, the group fought and killed people who had opinions that differed from their belief, as they considered such people unbelievers, tagging them as infidels.

However, it is worth noting that this group drew its members from the poor, uneducated and unemployed, who were economically, socially and politically marginalized. Thus, Ikenga-Metuh (1994) in Ngwoke and Ituma (2020) agrees with this line of thought when he recognizes that the social, political and economic dimensions of the Maitatsine can be linked to marginalization, as the people involved were mostly of the marginalized groups. According to (Hunwick 1992) "Maitatsine's preachings were antagonistic to Muslims outside of his community. It is reported that at least 5,000 people, including Maitatsine, were killed in clashes with the police and army". Ibrahim Jibrin. (1989) and Reuters (1993), reported thus: "Maitatsine disturbances recurred in Kaduna in 1982, Yola in 1984, Maiduguri in 1985 and Funtua in 1993".

Kano Religious Uprising

According to Ngwoke and Ituma (2020), "the religious crises in Kano State started with the uprising which was occasioned by the violent reaction of Muslim youth against the hosting of a Christian crusade, where a notable German Evangelist, Reinhard Bonnke, and some American preachers were to visit Kano". According to Best and Rakodi (2011), the

crisis“started as a protest by the Muslims against the hosting of the planned crusade, to stop the crusade from being held, but finally led to attacks on the churches, businesses and houses in SabonGari town, Kano State”. The attack claimed many lives and properties.

Boko Haram insurgency

Ngwoke & Ituma (2020) quoted Idowu (2015): “Boko Haram started as a fundamental Islamic sect to help the government of the Northern Region achieve its intention of implementing sharia law across the northern states. Their activities have led to the killings of thousands of people, the destruction of property and the displacement of people from their homes and businesses. They have created the threat of insecurity in the entire country”. According to Alegbeleye (2014) in Ngwoke&Ituma (2020), “The Boko Haram group has claimed responsibility for many killings, kidnappings and multiple bombings in Nigeria, such as: “The Christmas bombing of a Catholic church in Madala, Niger State in 2010 and the bombing of the United Nations House in Abuja, attacks on prisons, police stations and military formation in Jaji, Kaduna State, the kidnapping of a French family of seven, the Shettima of Borno”.

According to Odunsi (2020) in Ngwoke&Ituma (2020), “Boko Haram has focused most of its insurgent attacks on the Christian religious group in Nigeria. One of the recent attacks by Boko Haram on the Christian religious group included the killing of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) chairman, Reverend LawanAndimi, in Michika Local Government Area, Adamawa State, whom they abducted when they attacked the city on Thursday, 02 January 2020”. Ngwoke (2020) quoted Eyoboka (2020) thus: “They also forced the Christian adherents they captured to denounce their religion and join the Islamic religious group or face consequent action from them. Such action was exhibited to one of the captured Chibok girls, who refused to denounce her religion and accept the Islamic religion; they released others but held her back”. Based on these instances, the various operational attacks by Boko Haram were of the fact that their attacks are based on intolerance towards other religious groups. According to Ngwoke & Ituma (2020), “the report from the Global Terrorism Index (2019) reveals that 22 415 people have been killed by Boko Haram since 2002. Today, the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is synonymous with destruction, which is anti-development”.

Fulani Herdsmen Upheavals

The Fulani herdsmen’s clash with their host community has been recorded in all strata of the country. According to Aliyu, Ikedinma and Akinwande (2018) in Ngwoke (2020), the clash of Fulani herdsmen with farmers in their host community dates back to 2012 with the killing of one Mr Benjamin Chegue, Director of Personnel Management in Isoko North Local Government Area, Delta State. Since then, the spate of killings linked to these clashes has continued across the entire northern and southern zones of the country.

Ndujihe (2018) in Ngwoke (2020) stated thus: “Most of these clashes started in the northern part of the country. In the north-central part of the country, some of the incidents included a Fulani herdsmen attack in Agatu, in which they burned the Inoli, Ologba, Olegeje, Olegogboche, Olegede, Adana, Inminy and Abugbe communities on 29 February 2013. Others include the attack on civilians in Aguta Local Government Area on 20 February 2016, killing 500 and displacing 7000 people”. In the north-east states, one recent incident is the attack on the people of Jalingo, the state capital of Taraba, by the Fulani herdsmen on 15 June 2019, as reported by a resident of KasuwanBera, who stated that

Jalingo was on fire and that the Fulani herdsmen were on the rampage firing gunshots randomly in the village (Vanguard 2019). The following week, there was another attack by the same Fulani herdsmen on the residents of Tudiri and Janibanibu communities in Ardo Kola Local Government Area in Taraba State on 16 and 17 June, killing 10 people (Femi Bolaji2019).

According to Hassan (2020), “In the north-west states, in one recent attack, over 10 communities in the Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State were invaded on 06 January 2020 by the Fulani herdsmen, who killed not less than 35 persons and abducted over 58 persons; another attack in the early days of March 2020 led to the death of 51 persons”. However, Johnson (2020) reported Thus: “The southern region of the nation has not been left out, as they have also received their share of attacks from the Fulani herdsmen. In the southwest states, one current conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and their host community resulted in an attack by the Fulani herdsmen in March 2020. In the attack, the Fulani herdsmen killed three persons, including a rice farmer and his son, who were reportedly murdered on their farm by herdsmen in the community of Arimogija, Ose Council Area, Ondo State”.

A similar incident was reported by Okafor & Neme (2020) as follows: “In the south-south states, a recent incident in Delta State claimed 14 lives. The crisis began on Thursday, 13 February 2020, when herdsmen arrived at the Uwheru community in Ughelli North Local Council, Delta State, with a large number of cows and destroyed farms; the youth mobilized and warded them off their farms, but the herdsmen regrouped, armed themselves and returned to the community and started attacking them.

According to Mamah et al. (2016) report, “In the south-east states, an incident occurred in the Nimbo community in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area, Enugu State, in the early hours of Monday, 25 April 2016, resulting in the death of over 40 persons, burning of 11 houses including a Catholic church, destruction of vehicles and motorcycles and slaughter of domestic animals”. Ngwoke & Ituma (2020) quoted the Global Terrorism (Index 2019) thus: “The rampage killings of people and destruction of farmland and property by the Fulani herdsmen have become an issue of great concern to the unity and development of Nigeria. The increase in killings by the Fulani herdsmen is alarming and has caused the death of 3641 people in 3 years, with 57% of these deaths occurring in 2018 (Amnesty International 2018). Thus, this explains why the Fulani herdsmen are rated the fourth deadliest militant group in the world”.

Causes of religious crisis and conflicts in Nigeria

Unemployment

Religious conflicts have taken a historical toll in Nigeria. They manifest in different patterns and have led to the destruction of lives, displacement of people and destruction of property. The experience of these ethno-religious conflicts has affected Nigeria’s sustainable development. Some authors have attributed the cause of these conflicts to various factors ranging from marginalization and competition for economic and political spaces to sharing of land, economic and mineral resources (Alegbeleye2014; Canci&Odukoya2016; Omotosho2003; Onah et al. 2017; Salawu2010).

Furthermore, one would agree with Alegbeleye (2014:144), who posits that ‘the high rate of unemployment in the country coupled with social injustice and inequality are also causes of these conflicts’. Just as in the words of the Holy Bible, ‘idle hands are the devil’s

workshop' (Pr 16:27 TLB), most jobless Nigerians have become tools in the hands of hoodlums, who pay them to carry out violent attacks.

Scarcity of resources

The conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and their host community is attributed to the scarcity of resources such as land, water and pasture. This scarcity has led to competition for resources, which is the cause of the current ethnic conflict in Nigeria (Amnesty International 2018). This has led to repeated bloody clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and their host community.

Failure of Control Institutions

The failure of the social control institution in Nigeria can also be seen as a contributor to the various religious conflicts witnessed in Nigeria today. This is evidenced in the research by Canci and Odukoya (2016), who posit that:

“Absence of vehicles of social control that were characteristic of traditional African societies, such as kinship, religious and political systems concerned with the well-being of the community, has led to the escalation of ethno-religious conflicts”.

From the study of Canci and Odukoya, one would agree that institutions such as traditional rulership, which is referred to as Oba or Onii in ‘the south-west, Obi or Eze in the south-east and Emir or Sultan in the northern parts of Nigeria, have been actively functioning as a social control institution that controls their ethnic groups to maintain peace within their people. They also come into dialogue when there is an outbreak of conflict between people from different communities. In an African society, the traditional ruler controls his subjects, who are necessarily people with a common identity. Also, in the religious and political systems, there is always a religious leader and a political leader, who lead the religious and political groups, respectively. Hence, their subjects obey their commands. Therefore, one would agree that if all these social institutions actively performed their functions, they could maintain peaceful coexistence amongst their subjects (ethnic or religious groups) and other groups.

Religious intolerance

The causes of conflicts, such as the Maitatsine riots, Kano religious crises, Jos crises, and Boko Haram, can be linked to religious intolerance. According to Onah et al. (2017), religious intolerance was the primary factor instigating violence in Nigeria. They cited cases ranging from the Maitatsine riots in 1980 to the Boko Haram uprising. The Maitatsine riots manifested because of the violent attacks from Mohammed Marwa's (the group leader) adherents on other religious groups. Onah et al.'s (2017) research reveals that the Kafanchan tumult of March 1987 started in the College of Education over a crusade organised by Christian students and spread to Funtua, Kaduna Metropolis, Zaria and environs. Religious intolerance is also seen in the attacks of Boko Haram, which exhibit religious intolerance against the Christian group by killing Christians, destroying their churches and even raping their women, claiming that it is *jizya*, which means a tax paid by Christians under Islamic law. The lack of a genuine desire to tolerate people from a religious group one does not believe in or belong to has made it difficult for people from different ethnic and religious groups to understand each other's beliefs and culture (Omotosho 2003). Hence, this leaves room for the wrong perspective and behaviour towards each other. Most of the violence has occurred in the Muslim-dominated north, where it is reported that Christians are often



denied educational privileges, public preaching is forbidden, and churches have been destroyed by radical Muslims (Christianity Today 22 June 1992, 67).

Government Interest

Government interest and preferential treatment of a particular religion also escalate the religious crisis and conflict in Nigeria. In line with this, Hunwick (1992) asserts: "Religious affiliation has sometimes served as a criterion for receiving government benefits." According to Ransome-Kuti (1992), the government "has also been accused of interfering in the religious conflict as a way to divert attention from other matters."

From the assessment of the aforementioned causes of religious crises and conflicts in Nigeria, one can deduce that the religious intolerance that is seen among Nigerians from different religious groups is the result of misinterpretation of religious teachings by the leaders of terrorist groups to their followers.

Effects of Religious Crises and Conflicts on Sustainable Development

Nigeria, as a country, has been battling with the challenges of religious conflict, which is capable of disintegrating the fabric of sustainable development. The conflict has led to the loss of many lives, destruction of property and displacement of people from their businesses and homes. Therefore, this article discusses some of the effects of religious crises and conflict in Nigeria.

Food Production and Poverty Effect

The religious crisis and conflict in Nigeria has upset the agricultural sector, especially the crises involving the farmers and Fulani herdsman, due to which farms worth billions of naira have been destroyed. Also, the research work of Idowu (2015) shows that more than 1.5 million people, mostly farmers, have fled their homes in the face of several ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Certainly, this will affect food production, thus resulting in shortages. These shortages lead to an increase in food prices, thus making food unaffordable for some people because of the increased cost. This also means that some people are forced into poverty because of their losses from the destruction of their businesses or farmland.

Educational Imbalance

Education is a foundation for sustainable development. However, conflicts have far-reaching educational implications, destroying school structures where the teaching/learning exercises occur. They also affect the people, including the staff and students; in a state with ongoing conflicts, the learning environment would not be conducive to teaching/learning. According to Adebayo (2010), the ethno-religious crisis in the northern part of Nigeria is destroying education, which is a very important sector for driving sustainable development, as the instability of education from various cases of ethno-religious conflict has led to a brain drain. Subsequently, education is affected as the nation strives to manage the conflicts by declaring a state of emergency, which leads to a temporary closure of schools within the conflict area. In some cases, school buildings and other infrastructure are destroyed in the face of the conflict. One of the obvious consequences of the conflicts in education is that the curriculum designed to graduate students in a stipulated number of years faces the challenge of being disrupted, leading to situations where students may spend more years in a 4-year programme. Thus, educational programmes in the country have seriously been

affected by incidences of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. Therefore, one would agree that these impending effects of the conflict have contributed to why some youths have become school dropouts.

The Scourge of Unemployment

The scourge of unemployment has been a monster plaguing sustainable development since independence. The increase in the country's population does not correspond to the available employment opportunities. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), in their 2018 third-quarter labour report, 23.1% of Nigerians were unemployed. This report is worrisome, indicating that unemployment is increasing in Nigeria. It is a sorry situation as some people who put in the effort to set up a small-scale business or farm end up losing their business or farm to the destructive attacks by hoodlums, thereby forcing some people out of employment and setting the economy of the nation backwards. There is no doubt that the various religious conflicts have contributed to the unemployed state of some Nigerians, as people whose place of work has been destroyed join the unemployed. Many displaced people have also been forced into unemployment as they are forced out of their communities, either by the Fulani herdsman or Boko Haram attacks. It is worrisome to note that some of the affected people do not have any other source of income, and this further leads them to join the militant groups, who promise to pay them, thereby leading to an increase in the crime rate. Supporting this point, Onuoha (2012) posits that poverty and unemployment have forced some of them into secret cults, armed robbery gangs, prostitution and infant soldiers. It is a bleak situation; people end up losing their businesses or farms to destructive attacks by hoodlums, alongside the government infrastructure, thereby setting the economy of the nation backwards.

As established, the effect of ethnoreligious conflicts in Nigeria is quite alarming, with hundreds of lives and properties lost. Many people were forced to escape their communities, abandoning their farms and businesses and being added to the number of jobless citizens in the labour market, all resulting from the ethno-religious crises, which have indeed affected Nigeria's sustainable development.

The Influence of Religion

The relationship between religion and society can be applied to Nigerian society based on the fact that the majority of Nigerians are religious faithful. The various religious bodies draw their members from all segments of the population in Nigeria and know the local situation well. Also, the religious bodies are rooted in the community, with a presence across entire states, even down to remote communities. Hence, religion serves the whole society, which includes people from various families and communities, as well as those who work in government and private parastatal (Oladipo 2000). With this advantage, religion has the potential strength to effectively mobilise and influence the people of various communities in Nigeria. Therefore, as religion serves the people, it will provide 'social cohesion to help maintain social solidarity through shared rituals and beliefs, social control to enforce religious-based morals and norms to help maintain conformity and control in the society', as proposed for the function of religion in the society (Durkheim cited in NziokiMunyao, MuemaMwania&Mwinzi2017). From Durkheim's above submission, one can deduce that religion has the power to influence people's value systems in any given society. Thus, through the teachings of norms and values stipulated in their religious book and beliefs,

religion influences individuals affiliated with them (their adherents) and adhere to their teachings. Arguing in the same direction, Osunyikanmi and Sapele (2019) posit that religion is undoubtedly a significant influence today.

From what we can deduce of the major causes of these conflicts, ranging from intolerance to marginalisation to greed, religion has significantly influenced them. However, the research argues that religious teachings condemn the killing of the innocent, greed, corruption and doing evil. Thus, in line with this, religion can be used to form the minds of Nigerians with the teachings of love and peace, as in the teachings of various religious bodies. This is supported by Okwueze (2003), who posits that every religious group maintains the teaching of peace with God and with fellow human beings. Therefore, with these teachings, religion can influence people to live harmoniously. Other teachings, as seen in the sacred book, and teachings of the three major religions (traditional religion, Christianity and Islam) in Nigeria that influence people to live in harmony amongst themselves include loving one another, desisting from doing evil, avoiding killing a fellow human being and so on.

Christian religious groups that base their teachings on the teachings and life of Jesus Christ uphold key fundamental principles such as love one another, as instructed by Jesus Christ (Jn 13:32-26 KJV): 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another'. Living in peace with everybody is another fundamental teaching of Christian religious groups as written in Hebrews 12:14 (KJV): 'follow peace with all men and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord'. Moreover, the teachings discourage doing anything bad or evil to anyone and maintain doing good to all humans, as written in 1 Thessalonians 5:15 (KJV): 'See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men'.

Along the same line, the Islamic religious group takes their teachings from the life and teachings of Muhammed, which is documented in their sacred book (the Holy Qu'ran). The Qu'ran encourages Muslims to do that which is halal [permitted], to refrain from that which is haram [evil], to do righteous good deeds and to recommend one another to the truth (Al-Ma'ruf), which Allah has ordained. The Qur'an emphasises the abhorrence of everything evil (haram) (Danjibo cited in Faleye 2013).

The same goes for the indigenous religious groups (ATR), who hold instant justice against wrongdoing. The ATR is based on fundamental teachings of just treatment of every human, love, hospitality and abhorrence of any action that leads to the killing of a fellow human being, which they regard as Igbuochu [abomination]. Thus, such an action is meant to incur the wrath of the god against the perpetrator. Also, the teachings and practices of ATR include 'values and morals which deal with the ideas that defend or sustain the life of the people in their relationship with one another and the world around them' (Ekeopara&Ekpenyong2016). Therefore, from the submissions above, one can agree that because the influence of religion on society has increased to the extent that its presence is visible everywhere (Herbert 2017), religion can efficiently and effectively contribute immensely to the actualisation of ending the ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria.

It is worth noting that in Nigeria today, religion has also been used to promote conflict. This is evident in the work of Ajayi (2009), who posits that Nigerian politicians use religion to cause division and instigate violence. This situation plays out as politicians use religious sentiments to exploit the people to gain political positions psychologically. However, the positive role of religion can mitigate these negative roles of religion. This can

be achieved by influencing and forming people's minds with the fundamental teachings of various religious bodies, which anchor on treating every human justly, loving every human and showing hospitality. In support of this point, Ituma, Ukeachusim and Illechukwu (2013) argue that when people's hearts and minds are rightly guided, they will live on the high tendencies of proper behaviour. Therefore, with the habit of treating every human justly, loving every human, and showing hospitality, the conflicts in society will fade away.

Solutions to Religious Crisis and Conflict in the Development of Nigeria

1. Negotiation can be used to prevent and end religious persecution.
2. Recognition of equal rights of all people regardless of religion or belief: The rights of each religious group shall be recognized.
3. Equal distribution of national wealth: The Government should distribute national wealth equally without trying to favour a particular religion of their interest.
4. Right teaching of religious doctrine: Each religion should teach its members the right doctrine without hating others of other religions. They should always see themselves as brothers and sisters.
5. Seeing each other as one: Each religion shall see other people of other religion as one, created by God.
6. Implementation of Freedom of worship: Religious freedom must be done across gender boundaries. The people involved in the process should not be harm.
7. Respect to other people's religion: Each religion should respect other religion and allow them function according to their own unique way.
8. Serious Engagement in peace building. They can strive to include people of faith and of none, civil society leaders, government representatives, and allies from the international community. Campaigns that include multiple religious communities multiply their effectiveness as well by demonstrating that they are defending universal principle, not narrow tribalism.
9. Recognition of Indigenous Traditions: The government should recognize the indigenous traditions as a religion and give those people the same rights as other people of faith.
10. Building trust through dialogue. Dialogue is a powerful tool for those advocating for religious freedom. Where governments or other authorities restrict people's freedom of religious belief or unbelief, those centres of power often act out of prejudice or fear about other groups. Dialogue can reduce and remove that prejudice and fear. Dialogue can be vital to address sensitive issues related to religious freedom, such as conversion, apostasy, and blasphemy. A regular dialogue can build understanding and reduce conflicts between governments and societies.
11. Promoting resilience by building capacity. Leaders and activists in religious communities, including minority communities, can be trained in conflict resolution. This can help them manage conflict within and between communities before it turns violent. Skills such as mediation and negotiation can be used to prevent or end religious persecution. Resilient, inclusive societies, in which equal rights of all people are recognized regardless of religion or belief, can be promoted from the top down—and through the bottom up, through nonviolent, grassroots campaigns.

12. Various stakeholders need to be trained. This will help monitor religious freedom indicators and maintain a safe, responsive mechanism for reporting potential violations, ensuring the respect and protection of religious freedom for all.

Recommendations

This study shares some recommendations to actualize the goal of ending the religious crisis and conflicts in Nigeria:

1. Religious leaders should form the minds of Nigerians with the teachings of love and peace as in their various religious books and beliefs. This can be achieved through their teachings at religious gatherings.
2. The Nigerian educational curriculum should include courses to help form and educate people's minds on love and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. This can be achieved by setting up a committee comprising members from the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), National Universities Commission (NUC) and Federal Ministry of Education (FME) to ensure that ethics are included in the curriculum from primary education level to tertiary level, both as a course and also as a department.
3. Religious groups in Nigeria should put in measures to caution or punish their adherents in any action that promotes violence. The religious groups should also set up a committee that will monitor and counsel adherents who propagate violence or engage in violence.
4. Religious leaders should discourage and condemn any act of intolerance or violence from their adherents towards other religious groups.
5. Seminars, conferences and workshops that focus on promoting the teachings of love and peace should be organised by various religious bodies in Nigeria, where trained religious leaders, traditional rulers, scholars, counsellors and other professionals would assist in propagating an anti-violence campaign.
6. Finally, the Nigerian government should implement the principle of power-sharing at both the federal and state levels as surrogates for ethno-religious identities. The government should make copious efforts to disassociate itself from any form of inclination to any religion because it is a secular state.

Conclusion

It has been established from the findings of this study that the rate at which religious crisis and conflicts thrive in Nigeria, with its resultant effects such as threats to lives and property, displacement of people, destruction of existing infrastructure, impeding of business activities and discouragement of investors, it hinders the sustainable development of Nigeria. Therefore, priority should be given to all stakeholders for measures that will foster peaceful coexistence amongst the different ethnic and religious groups. Because most Nigerians identify with a religion and our leaders are sworn into office with a religious oath, this article concludes that religious leaders should take key responsibility for driving this project as agents of social change. This can be achieved by forming the people's minds with the religious teachings of love and peace, which the three major religious bodies in Nigeria teach. This will eliminate any form of marginalization against any group and give every citizen a sense of being a true citizen of the country. Therefore, love and peace will thrive

above personal interest, and the country will thrive in all areas. Then, sustainable development across all parts of Nigeria will be achieved.

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