

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF UNHEALTHY INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Inter-religious relations are aimed at promoting mutual understanding and coexistence among adherents of the Christian and Islamic faiths in Nigeria. But unhealthy inter-religious relations amongst them have inhibited multiple facets of national development, perpetuating cycles of poverty, instability, and institutional fragility. Existing studies have focused largely on their economic, political, social, and cultural relations with little attention paid to the socio-economic implications of unhealthy relations among them. A qualitative approach, utilizing secondary data analysis, was used to explore the socio-economic implications of unhealthy interreligious relations in Nigeria. This article synthesizes empirical and contextual evidence to argue that unhealthy interreligious relations among adherents of the major faiths have had major socio-economic consequences that impact many scopes of daily life and governance, manifested through terrorism, discriminatory policies, and communal violence, which severely impedes economic growth, exacerbates inequality, and destabilises governance. This work revealed that unhealthy religious relations can impede the realization of the full potential of Nigeria's human capital. This happens when individuals are discriminated against based on their religious affiliation; their contributions to the economy and society would not be fully utilized, leading to a loss of talent and productivity. The paper suggests that addressing these socio-economic implications requires a multifaceted approach that includes promoting inter-religious dialogue, strengthening institutions to manage diversity, and fostering inclusive development that benefits all, regardless of religious affiliation. This analysis concludes that sustainable socio-economic progress necessitates constitutional restructuring, inclusive resource distribution, and robust interreligious dialogue to transform Nigeria's religious diversity from a liability into an asset.

Keywords: Socio-Economic, Inter-Religious Relations, Christians, Muslims, and Nigeria

Introduction

Throughout its existence as an independent country, Nigeria has had several incidences of inter-faith violence, and the issue is thought to have become worse and more persistent over time. More than twenty thousand Nigerians have died in several distinct confrontations along ethnic, religious, and other intra- and inter-communal lines since the end of military government in 1999.¹ While most of the occurrences have been relatively minor, some conflicts have destroyed whole villages and the loss of hundreds of people in a matter of days or weeks.

Nigeria's history has been significantly shaped by the division between Islam and Christianity as well as the differences in religion and ethnic affiliation. It has also contributed significantly to the ongoing problem of Christians and Muslims living in heterogeneous society. The majority of Nigerians express the view that such a diversity of individuals and ideologies cannot make impact on the growth of a strong and steady democracy. However, the intricacy offers a legitimate basis for reevaluating the intercultural and multicultural effects of coexisting faiths in a specific nation like Nigeria.

Akinade² noted that ties between various faiths, particularly among adherents of Islam and Christianity have varied from war to peace, from arguments to dialogues, and from economic

¹ I. Nwanaju. 2005. *Christian – Muslim Relations in Nigeria*. Free Enterprises Publishers. Lagos. P 35

² A. E. Akinade. 2002. *Perilous Agenda: Christian-Muslim Relations in modern Nigeria*. North Carolina; High Point University

collaboration to outright combat in the country. Ever since the military regime ended in the year 1999 and a new republic was established, Nigeria appeared inundated with many years of disorder and incessant rampaging. At the center of these skirmish, above twenty thousand people have lost their lives, an indefinite but emphatically large number have been exiled from their homes and unascertained amounts of places of worship, and households have been razed.³ It appears that many of the same manipulations and disorders that occurred for the period of the military rule have managed to keep their grasp on Nigeria's low intensity democracy.

Although, the precise impetuses behind the skirmish in Nigeria are extremely arguable, the lack of harmony has utmost unquestionably remained at odds alongside ethno-religious positions.⁴ Even with this intricacy, on the contrary, apart from the fact that the skirmishes entirely fall over alongside the reasonably comprehensive class of ethno-religious, as much again had been separated along the confines of the two main religions. Unquestionably, cultural effects are just as totally embedded as religious ones, but by examining the entire variety of rivalry during the last decade, there is barely any submission that Muslim communities fight other Muslim communities, or Christian people fight other Christian people. Conversely, an enquiry of the substantiation discloses that irrespective of the unique grounds of these skirmishes, they more or less always launch Muslims against Christians or Christians against Muslims. And assumed impetuses, for instance, political supremacy or economic prospect, and consenting religious conviction to work as an indirect means rather than a uninterrupted factor, when smashes breakdown, they are hardly ignited by intra-religious encounter and are commonly the end result of inter-religious struggle.⁵

In light of this, there is now an aggressive element involving more than one religion in Nigeria due to the cynical exploitation of religion and religious matters. Complicating things, ambitious people have also behaved as demagogues by capitalizing on deeply ingrained biases for their gain. Subsequently, the several religious groups in Nigeria notably Christians and Muslims—have entered into a bitter power tussle. Since the 1980s, Nigeria has been the target of a wide variety of religio-political conspiracies, many of which have harmed civil society.

The research adopts Samuel Adewale's theory of Cross-Fertilization of religious elements which states that the ideas or elements of one religion flow into the other religions to enrich them. This theory reflects a system of approach whereby people of diverse religious beliefs interact with one another in Nigeria society. There is no doubt that the value of one religion flows into another thereby contributing to cordial inter-religious relations among the people. It is for this reason, that, the Cross-Fertilization of religion theory is very appropriate for this work.

There's no doubt that this research is not coming *ex nihilo* because it is an offshoot of what other scholars have done, hence, the need to review the relevant literature. Ayantayo⁶ opines that reviewing literature provides justification for embarking on original research. Therefore, this will enable us to identify the gap not covered by scholars.

Onabanjo⁷ remarks that crisis has impeded both political and economic growth as well as unity of the country. More than sixty years after Nigeria gained independence; the unity of the country was still in doubt. Religion remains a stumbling block to economic development and peaceful coexistence due to its negative propensities. The members of the three major religions, particularly Muslims and Christians are often involved in crises which have led to loss of lives and properties.

³ E. P. Lovejoy and P. A. Tokunbo Williams. 1997. *Displacement and the Politics of Violence in Nigeria*: Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

⁴ O.O. Familusi. 2011. *A survey of unhealthy Religious Relations in Nigeria* in Journal of Religious Studies, Department of Religious and cultural Studies, University of Uyo, Nigeria. ISSN 1119-9709. Vol VII. No 1. 74

⁵ J.S. Adekoya. 2015. *The Role of Theological Education in Witnessing to Muslim Neighbours in Nigeria*. Papers of Theological Conference and Consultation of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). Abeokuta: Crowther Theological Publications. 62

⁶ J.K. Ayantayo, 2015. *Rudiments of Research in Religious Studies*, Nigeria: Jaykay Publishers. 1:55.

⁷ O. Onabanjo (2011). "Religion and National Integration in Nigeria: The Role of the Church and Mosque." In Journal of Religion in Africa, 41(1), 87-110.

Amadu⁸ asserts that a wide range of perceptions suggest that series of religious clashes in Nigeria is attributable to the non-operation of true Federalism. A situation that has brought about regional insurgents; for example, the insurrection in the Niger-Delta over unfair or unequal distribution of resources, the MASSOB unsuccessful effort to resuscitate Biafra, the South-South request to gain control over its resources, the fresh Benue, Kaduna, and Adamawa herdsmen violence and all the current inter-religious crisis in several states throughout the country.

According to Elaigwu⁹ frequent crises in Nigeria, most especially the ones with religious undertone have dealt a blow to the progress and expansion of the public and societies while innocent Nigerians displaced and became homeless in their own land. The farmland is now abandoned by agriculturalists because of the crises; the artisans have ceased their craft due to a period of conflict and upheaval. Apart from the fact that the unrest has actually destroyed economic undertakings it has damaged ecological expansion. The repercussions of this disgusting state of affairs are visible in the level of poverty of the people, unemployment, unproductive, impoverished, and lack of infrastructure.

Bamgbose¹⁰ states that with estimate of about 250 million populaces, Christianity and Islam were estimated to be the main religious groups in Nigeria. The notable occurrence of religious crisis since the establishment of Fourth Republic in 1999 was prompted by purported desecration during an *Oro* festival, the cultists while outside their gnome, suspected a Hausa lady of peeping which is a taboo in the community. The aftermath crises became the first ethnic and religious disturbances experienced in July 1999. As a result, there were a few altercations, which ultimately resulted in a serious situation. Many individuals died, mostly from the Hausa and Yoruba tribes.

Given the scarcity of statistical data, the task has become extremely challenging to approximate the accurate number of religious crisis in Nigeria and their resulting death toll; the broad supposition is that the prevalence of religious crises has skyrocketed ever since the coming back of democracy in 1999. The history and discoveries on religious disputes throughout the country nevertheless indicate that 90 percent of them happened in the northern part of the nation state.

Considering the ongoing religious strife among the adherents of Christianity and Islam in Nigeria, there exist pervasive atmospheres of mistrust including hostile competition stuck among them. Nigerian constitution of sections 38 and 10 ensure respect for the rights of religious affiliation in addition to proscribing the affirmation of an official religion, but very unfortunately this has done diminutive to mitigate the occurrence of religious war, as state support and respect of the two major religious groups has aided in intensifying the point out tensions and enmity. Consequently, the apparent detestation amid adherents of these two religions, have regularly exhibited in inter-religious predicament. Most of these watersheds had contributed to loss of lives and damage of belongings predominantly in the Northern part of the nation. Trade and industry merchandises valued millions of naira are every so often shattered in this process in that way restraining socio-economic growth and peaceable environment.

Historical Context and Contemporary Crisis

Nigeria's interreligious tensions stem from the 1914 consolidation of the North and South protectorates areas with divergent religious, cultural, and governance traditions. The British colonial administration merged these territories for administrative convenience, ignoring deep-seated incompatibilities: the predominantly Muslim North adhered to Sharia law, while the Christian-majority South embraced Western legal systems. This artificial union bred mutual suspicion and competing "Northern" and "Southern" agendas, eclipsing a unified national vision. Post-independence, these divisions intensified through policies like the 1999 adoption of Sharia criminal law in 12 Northern states, which triggered violent protests and targeted killings of Christians. Today,

⁸ S. Amadu, (1989). "The Impact of Religious Conflicts on Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria." In Nigerian Journal of Sociology, 10(1), 45-60.

⁹ J. I. Elaigwu, (2005). Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria." In Journal of African Studies, 12(2), 15-29.

¹⁰ A. A. Bamgbose, (2024) Interreligious Relations among the Yoruba and the Hausa in selected communities in Southwestern Nigeria. An unpublished Thesis in the Department Of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan

Nigeria's near-equal religious split (50% Christian, 48% Muslim) fuels a volatile landscape where extremism, political marginalization, and economic inequity converge.

Economic Ramifications of Religious Conflict

The socio economic background of Nigeria is deeply influenced by the intricate relationship between religion and societal dynamics, particularly regarding interreligious relations between Christians and Muslims. As a nation with a rich diversity of ethnicities and religious affiliations, Nigeria grapples with persistent challenges stemming from unhealthy interactions between these two major faith communities. These challenges often manifest as religious intolerance, violence, and socio-economic disparities, which collectively hinder national development and social cohesion.

Religious conflicts have become increasingly common in Nigeria, often fueled by basic social and solidarity economy issues for example, impecuniousness, and redundancy in addition to illiteracy. The historical roots of these tensions can be traced back to colonial times when missionary religions were introduced, fostering competition and antagonism among different faith groups as opined by Alegbeleye¹¹. This environment of distrust has led to violent clashes and a pervasive culture of intolerance that undermines efforts toward national unity and progress.

The implications of these unhealthy interreligious relations extend beyond immediate violence; they permeate the socio-economic fabric of Nigerian society. For instance, religious intolerance can deter investment in regions plagued by conflict, stunting economic growth and exacerbating poverty¹². Additionally, the inability to foster peaceful coexistence between religious groups has resulted in a fragmented society where access to social services and opportunities for development is unevenly distributed. This fragmentation affects individuals' quality of life and impedes collective efforts to achieve sustainable development goals.

Moreover, lack of effective dialogue mechanisms between religious communities perpetuates stereotypes and misconceptions about different faiths. This situation is further complicated by political manipulation of religious sentiments, where leaders exploit religious differences for personal gain, entrenching divisions within society. Therefore, it is crucial to address the socio-economic implications of unhealthy interreligious relations in Nigeria through a comprehensive approach that promotes dialogue, tolerance, and understanding among Christians and Muslims.

Direct Costs: Infrastructure Destruction and Productivity Losses

Interreligious violence has devastated Nigeria's physical infrastructure and economic output. Attacks by Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, and sectarian militias have destroyed 18,500 churches, 2,200 Christian schools, and 1,100 Christian communities since 2009. In the North-central region alone, farmer-herder clashes have displaced 1.3 million people, crippling agricultural production in Nigeria's breadbasket. The resulting food insecurity exacerbates inflation, which reached 34.19% in 2024, with food prices soaring over 40%. Petroleum infrastructure in the Niger Delta—where movements like MEND protest resource exploitation—faces recurrent sabotage, reducing crude oil exports by 30% and depriving the treasury of vital revenue.

Indirect Costs: Investment Flight and Human Capital Depletion

Investor confidence dwindles amid persistent violence. The World Bank estimates that religious and ethnic conflicts drain 2–3% of Nigeria's annual GDP growth. Foreign direct investment (FDI) has declined sharply due to security risks, Kidnapping of expatriates and attacks on commercial facilities.

Operational instability: Fuel subsidy removal in 2023 triggered nationwide protests and transport disruptions, raising business costs.

¹¹ A. Alegbeleye. (2014). "Ethno-Religious Conflicts and National Development in Nigeria." *Journal of African Studies*, 3(2), 45-60.

¹² A. Adebayo, (2010). "The Impact of Religious Conflicts on Economic Development in Nigeria." *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 4(5), 203-210.

Brain drain: Professionals and graduates emigrate to escape violence, depriving the economy of skilled labor. Over 200,000 students graduate annually, but unemployment exceeds 24%, partly due to conflict-disrupted industries.

Causes of Interreligious Tensions and Conflicts

Religious conflict may well be illustrated concisely as the menace which has possible aptitude to wreak bodily or mental damage on individual or a collection of people for religious culminations. The agents of religious conflict usually symbolize or work according to their religious beliefs. Religious conflict remains, unambiguously, ferocity which is encouraged or in response to religious principles, scriptures, or creeds. This consists of aggressiveness alongside religious traditions, general public, things, at the time the conflict is enthused towards a certain point by a number of religious feature of the aim or principle of the aggressor. Religious conflict doesn't state entirely to acts dedicated by religious groups, but also comprises performances of irreligious sets in contradiction of religious assemblies.

The reasons of religious fierceness vary from one environment to another. In Nigeria, definite unbroken causes rear and develop religious conflict by means of clear costs on the constancy demand of the people. Considering the above, a range of influences can be determined to be the causes accountable for persistent religious crises in Nigeria, such as.

- i. All religions have structured belief system and philosophical underpinnings that characterised many religions such as creed, doctrine, dogma, theology, and articles of faith. Each item has multiple works of literature believed specifically as sacred which encompass ancient resources through which the authority of the principles are linked including their methods of propagation. On the other hand, due to insufficient knowledge, complete unawareness, misconstruction or mischievousness, religious writings have been provided quirky and fickle explanations headed for prearranged conclusions. These measures frequently triggered sentiments and brutality amongst the members of the different religions in Nigeria. In such cases, missionaries have a duty to make a distinction between religious service and conversion work for the reason that religious spread is being reformed by societal and partisan changes and most significantly by universal psychological upheaval.
- ii. Religious bigotry is gullibility and obsessed and lack of confidence on religious conviction as well as tenets that are antagonistic to valued principles and practices. Such lack of confidence continually becomes obvious in intense burst that slick over the dogmatic and financial lives of the people. The lack of ability to identify and embrace observations and sentiments of others is for that reason, the main bases of religious conflict in Nigeria. Nigerian believers, specifically Muslims and the Christians have confirmed prejudiced approaches to result to conflict.
- iii. Faith-based violence and zealotry. Religious zealots demonstrate too much unreasonable fanaticism to protect their religious conviction in Nigeria as a result turn out to be negative agents of religious dissonance in the general public. The members of Christianity and Islam are many at times prejudiced by extremism to result to fierce hostility.
- iv. The traditional function of the media in any civilization is to enlighten, keep amused and instruct. On no occasion is the journalists projected to unlawfully report to, amuse and teach people. The journalists should be cautious about information on delicate subjects that may possibly creep up stable system in general public. In Nigeria, it has become clear that communication industry, news commentary including articles are proficient at playing ambivalent roles in the interplay between followers of religions, especially in Islam and Christianity contingent on the objective and perspective of press officer involved. Consistently, the activities or responses of the Muslims to Christian's deed or conversely are shaped by press reports. Print media several times in Nigeria had stirred-up discord through gutter press and attention-grabbing titles. Remarkably disparaging and tabloid journalism and media commentary every so often generate religious conflict.

- v. Corruption and Sectarian Favoritism: Nigeria's corruption epidemic exacerbates religious inequities. Political elites exploit sectarian loyalties to allocate resources, jobs, and infrastructure preferentially. The Federal Character Commission, designed to ensure equitable representation, fails to prevent Muslim-dominated Northern states from receiving disproportionate appointments and projects. Such favoritism erodes trust in institutions and fuels separatist movements like IPOB in the Christian-majority Southeast.
- vi. Complicity and Ineffectiveness of Security Forces: State security agencies face allegations of religious bias. Under ex-President Buhari, military and police units underwent "Islamization," enabling atrocities by Fulani herders and Boko Haram. In 2024, airstrikes in Kaduna killed 85 civilians during counterinsurgency operations, reflecting reckless targeting and impunity. This institutional partiality discourages civilian cooperation and prolongs conflicts.
- vii. The pains of living in abject poverty, most importantly in the metropolitan area ostensibly stand for the greater part of crises (whether tribal or religious) as a result of various problems such as joblessness, insufficient accommodation, bodily and societal arrangements. The recent depression in the economics of Nigeria must have deteriorated the issue of poverty, in so doing moderately accountable for the formation of religious conflict. Furthermore, poverty produces societal glitches principally when a lot of people cannot meet the expense of their needs like housing, outfit and feeding. Meanwhile, Nigeria lacks basic economic policies to provide for its enormous populace hence, the level of poverty in the land which consequently resulted into societal glitches. There is nothing every poor populace cannot do in order to endure themselves. Therefore, the underprivileged youths popularly called *Almajiris* in Northern Nigeria are influenced with insignificant sum of money to cause religious disorder.
- viii. The teachings on doctrine and principle of each religion are different from one another, which are the reason for adherents of these religions being taught differently based on their religious faith. But in a case where incorrect approaches are used in instructing believers of a certain religion, what usually follows is religious fixation which eventually leads to religious war. Religious affiliation is common among Nigerians. But a significant portion of the population lacks formal schooling, since the people are unquestioning adherence; it is very easy for them to be manipulated for their leaders' selfish ends.
- ix. Religious leaders' selfishness is very obvious in spite of their calling. They utilize wrong means to carry out religious crises with the notion that they will be consulted by the Government to look for the way of bringing about peaceful co-existence in the society. Consequently, this will bring them closer to the corridor of power.
- x. There's a general sense of mistrust amongst Nigerians. Despite the fact that a number of Muslims argued that Christianity is a representative and instruments being used by American and European domination, some Christians also consider Muslims as having connections with Saudi Arabia. The two religions are said to be receiving monetary aids from these countries.

Impact of unhealthy Interreligious Relations on economic development

It is incontestable fact that religious turbulences as a recurrent problem in Nigeria has demoralizing effects on the citizens. The havoc that religious conflicts have made happen cannot be enumerated. The recurrent skirmishes that exploded because of this had caused myriad of suffering on adherents of the religions considering the number of lives lost besides possessions and on the Government inclusive when consider the provisions of necessities as relief for victims of this religious insurgency. However, there happen to be several penalties of religious conflict, but the greatest clear repercussion is human losses and destruction of properties. Religious aggressiveness has the possibility of causing large-scale dislodgment in addition to enforced moving of people, relatives

and groups from their abode to elsewhere. The rate of this outbreak of religious clashes over the last thirty years has definitely led to wavering amounts of internally displaced persons.¹³ Challenging the existing structure, the divisive and harmful nature of the violence led to a breakdown of social cohesion and harmony, which negatively impacts the country's reputation most especially among the comity of nations. The frequent religious upheaval made some nations to warn of travel risks to their citizens from travelling to Nigeria due to unending religious hostility that can arise between different religious groups. It is a fact that this kind of warning notices does not mean well for the country's stability, therefore, the need for peaceful co-existence among adherents of the major religions. It remains an indelible emotional distress to individuals who saw the massacre of their relations, and destruction of their belongings. The consequence of all this is the joblessness of many.

The persistent nature of clashes in Nigeria have influences of nurturing social criminal and lawbreakers who through their illegal right to use arms of war develop into terrors not only to their immediate environment but to the larger public. It is usually become problematic to recover such arms back for the reason that majority of these miscreants had no job when they were first recruited; the only solace they often found is in terrifying the public. Likewise, the failure of the security agents to put a stop to this religious conflict in advance until they worsen to the level of cruel damage and massacre uncover the feature (in terms of information, willingness, capability and tools.

Challenges to social cohesion and integration

Generally, the role of religion in social interrelation in Nigeria rests as multifarious procedures that religion takes in the nation. Neither Islam nor Christianity is uniform units. Intra-religious differences can occasionally be fair as boring as inter-religious ones. The growing division of home political affairs alongside the religious rift, which also corresponds with the physical North-South division and become estranged to the Hausa tribal assemblage from the Igbo and half of the Yoruba, fakes most important experiment for nationwide accord.

Marginalization and Inequality across religious lines in Nigeria

Nigeria is characterized by a complex interplay of religious identities, primarily Islam and Christianity, which significantly influences social dynamics, governance, and individual rights. The state is approximately alienated into a mainly Muslim northern and a mostly Christian south, leading to systematic marginalization and inequality across religious lines.

Religious discrimination is prevalent in Nigeria's employment sector, particularly affecting young graduates participating in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). Reports indicate that corps members often face rejection from job placements due to their religious beliefs. For instance, some individuals have been denied positions because they requested to practice their faith openly, highlighting a lack of awareness regarding their constitutional rights against such discrimination.¹⁴ Despite the Nigerian Constitution guaranteeing freedom from discrimination and the right to practice one's religion, many individuals experience significant barriers in both educational and professional settings.¹⁵

The marginalization and inequality experienced across religious lines in Nigeria are profoundly entrenched in chronological complaints, trade and industry, religious differences, and partisan dynamics. Addressing these issues requires concerted efforts from both governmental bodies and civil society to promote inclusivity, protect individual rights, and foster dialogue among diverse religious communities. Without significant intervention, the cycle of discrimination and violence is likely to persist, undermining national unity and stability.

¹³ I. Jibrin. (1989). Politics of Religion in Nigeria: The Parameters of the 1987 Crisis in Kaduna State. *Review of African Political Economy* 45/46: 62 - 82.

¹⁴ Press Pen UDUS, *How Nigerians cope with pervasive religious discrimination*: Published in African Digital Democracy Observatory

¹⁵ C. Nwonwu, (2021) *Nigeria election: Dangers of being religious in a religious nation*. BBC News, Lagos.

Measures for Alleviating Unhealthy Religious Relations

In an era where media serves as both a mirror and a molder of societal dynamics, the intersection of religion and communication has become increasingly significant. Religion, once perceived as a private domain, now occupies a prominent space in public discourse, amplified by the pervasive reach of traditional and digital media. This medialization of religion not only shapes how faith is practiced and perceived but also influences interreligious relations in profound ways. While media has the potential to foster understanding and dialogue among diverse religious communities, it also risks perpetuating stereotypes, misinformation, and divisive narratives. As scholars like Hjarvard have noted, the media's influence extends beyond mere representation to actively shaping religious beliefs, symbols, and agency. In this complex landscape, the need for responsible media practices becomes paramount to mitigate unhealthy religious relations and promote harmony in increasingly pluralistic societies.¹⁶

Interfaith dialogue

In Nigeria, the complex interplay between religion and society often leads to unhealthy religious relations, manifesting in conflicts and tensions between different faiths communities. However, interfaith dialogue has developed as a prevailing instrument for bridging these divides and fostering peace. This essay explores the role of interfaith dialogue in mitigating unhealthy religious relations in Nigeria, highlighting key initiatives and figures that have contributed to this effort.

According to Bidmos in his work "Inter religious dialogue the Nigeria experience" states that at the heart of interfaith dialogue in Nigeria is the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC). This council has been instrumental in organizing meetings and dialogues between Christian and Muslim leaders, with the aim of addressing differences, rebuilding trust, and fostering mutual understanding. Prominent leaders such as Cardinal John Onaiyekan and Sultan Muhammad Sa'ad Abubakar III have played significant roles in promoting peaceful coexistence through this platform. Their commitment to dialogue has helped to reduce tensions and promote a culture of peace among diverse religious groups.¹⁷

Socio-economic development

Nigeria's socio-economic landscape is characterized by significant challenges; including poverty, inequality, and unemployment, which often exacerbate unhealthy religious relations. Socio-economic development can play a crucial role in mitigating these tensions by addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering a more inclusive and prosperous society.

Investing in critical infrastructure is essential for economic growth and job creation, which can help reduce tensions between religious groups. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2025 aims to achieve significant economic growth by investing in sectors like power, alternative energy, rail, roads, and housing. By creating jobs and improving living conditions, this plan seeks to lift 35 million people out of poverty and create 21 million full-time jobs by 2025 (National Planning Commission, 2021).¹⁸ Such economic progress can reduce competition over resources and alleviate some of the socio-economic pressures that contribute to religious conflicts.

Conclusion

Nigeria's interreligious strife is not merely a cultural or theological issue; it is a structural impediment to prosperity. The annual loss of \$10 billion to conflict, alongside generational trauma from violence, demands urgent, holistic solutions while challenges persist notably, extremist

¹⁶ S. Hjarvard., (2016). *The Mediatization of Religion: Theorizing Religion, Media, and Social Change*. In *Media and Communication* (Vol. 4, Issue 1, pp. 42–53

¹⁷ Bidmos, M. A. (2017). *Inter-Religious Dialogue: The Nigerian Experience*. Publisher

¹⁸ National Planning Commission. (2021). *National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2025 Volume I*. Retrieved from National Planning Commission website. 01-02-2025.

ideologies and political corruption opportunities exist in Nigeria's resilient civil society and untapped interfaith solidarity. By anchoring development in equity, justice, and dialogue, Nigeria can harness its religious diversity as an engine for innovation and growth.

Unhealthy interreligious relations between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria have far-reaching socio-economic implications that hinder the nation's peace, stability, and development. Religious conflicts, often fueled by mutual distrust, intolerance, and political manipulation, have resulted in the loss of lives, destruction of property, displacement of communities, and the erosion of social cohesion. These crises disrupt economic activities, deter investments, and deepen poverty, particularly in conflict-prone regions. Additionally, they exacerbate political instability and undermine national security, creating an environment of fear and mistrust.

The persistent nature of these conflicts is rooted in systemic issues such as inequality, marginalization, poor governance, and the manipulation of religious sentiments for political gain. The unequal distribution of resources further fuels grievances among religious groups, while low literacy levels and poverty make individuals vulnerable to extremist ideologies. The media's role in sensationalizing religious issues also contributes to escalating tensions.

Recommendation

To address the socio-economic implications of unhealthy interreligious relations in Nigeria, a comprehensive set of recommendations is essential. Below are key recommendations drawn from insights

1. **Strengthen Interfaith Dialogue Platforms**

Interfaith dialogue remains a critical tool for fostering understanding and reducing tensions between Christians and Muslims. Initiatives like the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) and the Interfaith Dialogue Forum for Peace (IDFP) should be expanded to include more grassroots participation.

2. **Implement Inclusive Education Programme**

Education is a vital instrument for promoting tolerance and reducing ignorance that fuels religious conflicts. The government should prioritize inclusive education policies, such as integrating marginalized groups like *Almajiri* children into mainstream education systems through initiatives like the National Commission for *Almajiri* and Out-of-School Children Act (2023). Schools should incorporate curricula that teach religious tolerance, shared values, and conflict resolution skills to foster peaceful coexistence from a young age.

3. **Promote Socio-Economic Development**

Poverty and unemployment is major drivers of interreligious tensions. The government must invest in job creation, infrastructure development, and equitable resource distribution to reduce economic disparities between regions.

4. **Encourage Responsible Media Practices**

The media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of religion. Journalists must be trained to report on religious issues sensitively and avoid sensationalism that exacerbates tensions. Media outlets should promote stories of interfaith cooperation and highlight successful peace-building efforts to counter divisive narratives.

5. **Expand Peace-building Efforts**

Civil society organizations like the Global Peace Foundation (GPF) should continue organizing peace-building workshops and interfaith forums in conflict-prone areas. These programs should focus on building trust among communities by addressing misconceptions and fostering collaboration on shared challenges.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can address the socio-economic implications of unhealthy interreligious relations while fostering national unity, stability, and prosperity for all its citizens.

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