



Strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of recurring religious conflicts in Southern Kaduna

Ashafa Emmanuel Ishaku*, Dauda Kajang Vivian, Paul Abraham Sambo

Department of Christian Religious Studies, Kaduna State College of Education, Gidan Waya, Nigeria

Abstract

Southern Kaduna, a region in Nigeria, has experienced recurring religious conflicts, resulting in loss of lives, property damage, and communal tension. This study aimed to investigate strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of these conflicts. A survey of 800 people, with 100 participants from each of the eight local government areas in Southern Kaduna, was conducted. The results showed that interfaith dialogue, economic empowerment, education, and community-led peace initiatives are key strategies to address the root causes of these conflicts. Additionally, strengthening legal and political frameworks, promoting cultural understanding, and addressing socio-economic grievances are crucial in promoting sustainable peace. The study recommends a multi-faceted approach, involving community leaders, religious leaders, government, and civil society organizations, to implement these strategies and promote a culture of peace and coexistence in Southern Kaduna.

Keywords: Religious conflicts, interfaith dialogue, economic empowerment, community-led peace initiatives, sustainable peace

Introduction

Religious conflicts are a major security challenge worldwide, and Nigeria is particularly affected. The work of [9] shows that Africa, including Nigeria, is plagued by ongoing conflicts and security issues, many of which stem from social, ethnic, cultural and religious differences. These challenges are exacerbated by deep inequalities in the distribution of power, wealth and resources, creating an environment where power cannot be contained. Many ethnic-religious conflicts lead to instability at different levels, from countries to governments and local governments, especially in Africa. These conflicts involve serious violations of human rights, including genocide and crimes against humanity. In addition, they contribute to economic decline, weak governments, environmental crises and population movements such as refugees. The results of civil wars are characterized by loss of life, massive human suffering and massive destruction of property. The concept of ethnicity itself has been the subject of debate among anthropologists and anthropologists. It includes various characteristics such as language, religion, identity, national origin and skin color. People can be used to strengthen the division of the nation, to establish political power over certain groups. In practice, the term "ethnicity" is widely used to refer to characteristics and relationships within a group [9]. The history of ethnic and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial period when the various ethnic groups of the northern and southern states were united into a single entity called Nigeria in the 1914. Between 1952 and 1966, the country's political landscape changed and these three regions became separate political entities. This change reduced the struggle for independence to the struggle for people's sovereignty [10]. The multi-ethnic and multi-religious diversity of Nigeria is similar to the North-South divide, with Muslims ruling the North and Christians ruling the South. This situation has created a country-religious identity, religion and conflicts that appear as a threat to the country's security [16].

Kaduna state is a multi-ethnic state with over 60 ethnic groups and the largest population of the three religions in

Nigeria. For several decades now the State has been witnessing an upsurge in ethno-religious conflicts. There is a consensus of opinion among researchers and observers that the issue of ethnicity and religion in the State are so interwoven to the extent that conflicts between groups in the state tend to be quickly interpreted as ethnic or religious conflicts [2]. The re-occurring conflicts in southern Kaduna provide one of the best cases of ethno-religious conflicts in the State. Since the Zango Kataf crisis of May 1992 between the Hausa and the Kataf (a predominantly Christian ethnic group), initially sparked off by a dispute over the relocation of a market [1], the State has become a re-occurring flashpoint of one form of ethno-religious crisis or the other. Ethno-religious conflicts in Kaduna State have created instability and insecurity of the citizens and have remained a constant threat to peaceful co-existence and educational attainment in the State and Nigeria society at large. These ethno-religious conflicts were characterized by violent attacks and killings, loss of business investments, and properties and destruction of public infrastructures, like schools which affects the social and economic activities, of the State. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2019 stated that the loss of human life; destruction of infrastructure, human capital, and institutions; political instability; and greater uncertainty associated with conflicts (ethno-religious) can impede investment, education and socio-economic growth; not only during conflict but also afterward, making it difficult to escape the conflict trap [3]. Ethnicity comes from the Greek word "ethnos" which refers to a community of the same race. Civil wars are a serious threat to international peace and security. Ethnicity refers to people who share the same customs, traditions and characteristics related to their origin. Tribal discrimination occurs when tribal members are discriminated against based on specific criteria [19]. Ethnicity is a complex and relatively new concept that appeared in the literature less than half a century ago [8]. It involves grouping people based on common characteristics such as national origin, language or culture [11]. Fawole and Blue explains that religion has different meanings for different people. Emile Durkheim's

definition of religion as "the common practice of believing in and working for sacred things" is cited. Religion can be seen as a set of specific beliefs and practices that distinguish it from other social organizations. In Nigeria, religion exists alongside the people and is divided into three main groups; Christian, Muslim and traditional. Traditional religions include the worship of many gods and goddesses, while Christians and Muslims have played a significant role in religious diversity and religious conflicts in Nigeria. Conflict is considered a major social problem in all human societies. According to [6], the underlying causes of conflict include religious beliefs and practices, ethnicity, territorial disputes, land and resource competition, poverty, marginalization, unemployment and underdevelopment. Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has experienced many conflicts, including ethnic divisions, political conflicts, economic conflicts, religious conflicts and class differences. The emergence of ethnicity in the Nigerian state has led to the formation of ethnic identities that have contributed to conflicts and the marginalization of individuals [13] identifies three main effects of ethno-religious conflicts on youth and society: social, political and educational. Socio-economic consequences refer to negative effects on the economic and social well-being of individuals and society. Political implications include the impact of ethno-religious conflicts on politics and governance. Education outcomes include the disruption of educational institutions and the restriction of educational opportunities for the affected population.

The nature of socio-religious conflicts in the society

The nature of socio-religious conflicts in society is characterized by tension, anger and violence arising from ethnic, religious differences, in the combination of the two. These conflicts can include conflicts between different ethnic or religious groups, where individuals and local communities perceive their own identity, beliefs, values and interests as threatened, or humiliating others. One of the most important aspects of the nature of ethno-religious conflicts is the social divisions that contribute to the coexistence of communities. These divisions are often due to historical grievances, territorial disputes, power struggles, or competition for resources. This conflict arises from feelings of inequality, discrimination, marginalization or exclusion of certain groups, resulting in anger and hatred. The role of colonial rulers in the growth of ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria is significant [14]. Ethnic identity is a factor that fuels ethnic conflicts. It refers to loyalty, attachment to one's people, whether as a social, political and economic group, or as a cultural community. Ethnic awareness means promoting the interests of one ethnic group to others.

Religion and ethnicity are often used as important markers of identity and sources of social cohesion in societies. But in conflicting situations, these symptoms can be powerful triggers for separation and stress. Religious groups or political actors who attempt to exploit religious differences and ethnic conflicts can rekindle the cycle of bloodshed and exacerbate social unrest. The history of religious conflicts in Nigeria can be traced back to the time of independence in 1960. Before that, there were three main religions in Nigeria: traditional African religions, Islam, and Christianity. Relations between followers of these religions were generally cordial and peaceful. However, religious

conflicts have emerged in the country since independence, mainly among ethnic and regional groups, driven by the desire to gain political and economic power over the country's infrastructure. To solve socio-religious problems, it is necessary to address the basic and motivational issues.

Nature of ethno-religious conflict in the society

Some researchers believe that competition for scarce resources is a common cause of ethnic conflicts, especially in some parts of Africa. Ethnic groups fight fiercely for property, rights, jobs, education, language, social inclusion and proper health care in many countries like Nigeria. There are many causes of socio-conflicts in society, and they often result from the interplay of factors that interact and exacerbate tensions between ethnic groups and religious groups. Understanding these issues is critical to managing and preventing these conflicts. Below are some of the important variables that contribute to ethnic-religious conflict:

- a) **Differences in identity and group:** Ethnic and a religious identity shape an individual's and group's identity. Differences in culture, beliefs, values and customs can create an "us versus them" mentality, leading to historical divisions and grievances
- b) **Historical events:** Historical events such as colonialism, disdain, degradation, or prejudice, can be instigated between groups. Conflicts that perpetuate past animosities are passed down through generations, reinforcing group consciousness.
- c) **Socio-economic inequality:** Socio-religious tensions are exacerbated by economic divisions, competition for resources and unequal access to space. A problem arises when some groups are thought to be neutral or disadvantaged in relation to socio-economic development. Those situations can cause feelings of injustice and resentment.
- d) **Political manipulation:** Political actors can use divisive language and mobilize support along ethnic or religious lines to their advantage. This erosion of identity and interests tends to reinforce divisions and conflicts within society.
- e) **Competition for power and resources:** Ethnic-religious conflicts are often motivated by competition for political influence, control of resources, or access to profitable employment opportunities. Competition for scarce resources will exacerbate existing problems and fuel violent threats [20]

Research methodology

This study used qualitative and objective research to study strategies to reduce the impact of religious conflicts on the development of the southern Kaduna region. Research sources include primary and secondary data, and in-depth interviews to generate data.

Study area/population and sampling

The study area for this research is Kaduna South Senatorial District of Kaduna State, which consists of eight (8) Local Government Areas. The population sampled consisted of a total population of eight hundred (800) taking hundred (100) from each of the LGA. The target groups in this community

cut across gender, and other spheres of life within a given community and participants for the focus groups were selected at random to arrive at a just analysis.

Data collection

The quantitative data collection method for this study was done using various methods such as semi-structured questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion. A qualitative data collection method involves collecting and analyzing the respondent's experiences of a situation in his or her own language. Conducting interviews allows the researcher to ask relevant questions and have the opportunity to understand the situations and experiences in religious conflicts.

Data analysis

The method explored for data analysis in this study was qualitative and used content analysis. The data are presented

in tables and comments while being guided by the thematic presentation of the purpose of the research. The instrument used for the survey consisted of four choice answers to indicate the degree of feeling each person had about the question. Answers vary from one to another as shown below:

- a. Strongly Agreed = SA
- b. Agreed = A
- c. Strongly Disagreed = SD
- d. Disagreed = DA
- e. Undecided = UD

Analysis of research questions

Research question: What are the strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of recurring religious conflicts in Southern Kaduna, which have disrupted economic and social progress in the region?

Table 1

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	Promoting interfaith dialogue among religious leaders will help reduce religious conflicts in Southern Kaduna	289	237	93	95	86
2.	Increased government intervention through policy enforcement and peacekeeping will significantly mitigate religious violence in the region	351	200	82	74	93
3.	Empowering local communities to manage conflicts at the grassroots level can help prevent violence in Southern Kaduna.	296	245	96	84	79
4.	Introducing peace education in schools is a crucial step in reducing the occurrence of religious conflicts.	287	300	73	77	63
5	Improving economic opportunities and reducing poverty will lessen the likelihood of religious violence in Southern Kaduna."	282	256	79	89	94
6	Improving the capacity of security agencies to manage and prevent conflicts will reduce religious tensions in Southern Kaduna.	238	298	76	96	92

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Interpretation of findings

The result presented in item 1 shows that 526 respondents (SA + A) agree that promoting dialogue between religious leaders is an effective strategy to reduce religious conflicts. The advocacy effort reflects a belief in the importance of communication and cooperation between different religious groups. However, the large number of 93 undecided responses and 181 negative responses indicate that there may be concern or doubt about the impact of such communications without concrete action.

Item 2 was strongly supported, with 551 respondents agreeing (SA + A) that greater government intervention through policy implementation and peacekeeping would significantly reduce religious violence. The high level of strong agreement of 351 indicates that many respondents believe that the government plays an important role in maintaining peace and harmony in the region. The low undecided 82 and combined disagreement 167 indicate a strong consensus regarding the necessity of government action.

In item 3, a total of 541 respondents (SA + A) agree that giving local communities the power to handle problems at the grassroots level is an effective prevention strategy. This reflects the belief that local participation and sovereignty in resolving conflicts can be decisive for building sustainable peace. The median number of negative responses of 96 indicates ambivalence among respondents, while the overall negative response of 163 indicates that indigenous efforts may not be sufficient without support.

In addition, item 4 shows strong support with 587 respondents (SA + A) agreeing that the introduction of peace education in schools is necessary to reduce religious conflicts. The split between strong agreement at 287 and broad agreement at 300 reflects widespread belief in the role of education in promoting understanding and tolerance among young people. The low number of 73 undecided answers and 140 negative answers reinforces the idea that respondents see education as an important tool for preventing conflicts.

In item 5, 538 respondents (SA + A) believe that improving economic opportunities and reducing poverty can reduce the risk of religious violence. Advocacy demonstrates an understanding of the relationship between economic stability and social well-being. The median number of negative responses of 79 indicates a lack of agreement, but the overall disagreement of 183 suggests that while many people see economic improvements as positive, they may recognize that other factors and face religious problems.

Finally, in item 6, most respondents agree that improving the capacity of security institutions can reduce religious conflicts. The strong approval of 238 compared to the approval of 298 reflects the belief that while safety improvements are necessary, there may be concerns about effectiveness and lack of community involvement and confidence building techniques. 76 linked answers and 188 arguments illustrate this difficulty.

Discussion of findings

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of community dialogue and peace building programs to reduce the impact of religious conflicts in southern Kaduna. Encouraging local dialogue between community members promotes understanding and reconciliation, ultimately reducing conflict and violence. [17] stated that, grassroots discussion programs can serve as an effective forum for conflict resolution, where community members can express their concerns and work together on issues and solution.

In addition, the implementation of poverty alleviation programs is necessary to deal with religious problems in the region. Research has shown that socio-economic empowerment reduces the risk of conflict and increases access to education. Promoting religious exchanges among religious leaders is another important strategy to reduce religious conflicts in Southern Kaduna. When religious leaders engage in positive dialogue, they can help dispel misunderstandings, promote mutual respect, and build a shared commitment to peace.

Interfaith programs have been found to reduce gang violence by promoting a culture of tolerance and understanding [7]. Increased government intervention, particularly through the implementation of peacekeeping policies and procedures, is critical to reducing religious violence in the region. Public works can create a safe environment for communities and educational institutions. According to [21], the effective implementation of laws and policies plays an important role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and the visibility of the government can enforce the local communities and encourage sustainability.

Empowering local communities to manage conflicts at the grassroots level is critical to curbing violence in Southern Kaduna. By equipping leaders and community groups with conflict resolution skills, communities are better able to resolve problems before they turn violent. According to [12], regional conflict resolution mechanisms are often more effective and sustainable than external ones because they take into account the unique dynamics of society.

Finally, governments need to be empowered to facilitate dialogue among stakeholders to address conflict-related and educational challenges. Participatory approaches that involve government, faith-based institutions, and community groups are needed to develop comprehensive solutions. The findings suggest that effective collaboration between governments and religious institutions is essential to create long-term solutions to educational challenges and to create a peaceful and productive environment for all members of society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research on strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of recurring religious conflicts in Southern Kaduna highlights the complexity and depth of the issue. The findings suggest that a multi-faceted approach is necessary to address the root causes of these conflicts and promote sustainable peace in the region.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made to mitigate the negative impacts of recurring religious conflicts in Southern Kaduna:

1. Establish an Interfaith Dialogue Forum: Create a platform for religious leaders and followers to engage in regular dialogue, fostering mutual understanding and respect.
2. Economic Empowerment Initiatives: Implement programs that address socio-economic grievances, such as job creation, skill development, and economic inclusion.
3. Strengthen Legal and Political Frameworks: Ensure effective law enforcement, judicial processes, and policy reforms to prevent conflicts and promote accountability.
4. Community-Led Peace Initiatives: Support grassroots efforts and local leadership in developing context-specific solutions.
5. Education and Cultural Exchange: Promote cultural competency and challenge stereotypes through education and cultural exchange programs.

By implementing the aforementioned recommendations, stakeholders can work towards reducing the negative impacts of recurring religious conflicts in Southern Kaduna and promoting a more peaceful and harmonious coexistence.

Acknowledgements

This research was fully sponsored by TETFUND through the Institutional Based Research (IBR) intervention, and we gratefully acknowledge their financial support from the inception to the completion of this project. We appreciate the trust and confidence reposed in us by TETFUND and the IBR committee, and we are thankful for the opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge in our field.

We also extend our sincere appreciation to the management of Kaduna State College of Education, Gidan Waya, for their unwavering support and cooperation throughout the duration of this research. Their commitment to promoting research and academic excellence is commendable, and we are grateful for the enabling environment and resources provided to us.

References

1. Akin A, James W, Muhammad A. Zangon Katag Crisis: A case Study, in Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation, Onigu Otite and Isaac Olawale Albert (eds.). Ibadan: Academic Associates Peace works, 1999.
2. Alemika E, Okoye F. Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Democracy in Nigeria: Challenges. Kaduna, Human Rights Monitor, Print, 2002.
3. Collier P, Elliott VL, Hegre H, Hoeffler A, Reynal-Querol M, Sambanis N. Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy. Washington, DC: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2003.
4. Dokubo C, Oluwadare AJ. Nigeria's Role in Conflict Resolution: A New Paradigm. Journal of Alternative Perspective in the Social Sciences, 2011;3(3):551-580. Available at www.japss.org
5. Eckhardt J. Socio-economic empowerment as a tool for conflict prevention. Journal of Conflict Resolution, 2017;61(5):1045-1067.
6. Ekpenyong. The Social and Political Roots of Conflict in Nigeria: The Role of the Church. American Journal

- of Social Issues and Humanities,2011:1(2):117-136 Nov (ISSN: 2276 - 6928).
7. Esposito JL, Mogahed, Z. Who speaks for Islam? What a billion Muslims really think. Gallup Press, 2007.
 8. Fawole OA, Bello ML. The Impact of Ethno-Religious Conflict on Nigerian Federalism. International NGO Journal,2011:6(10):211-218, October 2011 Available online at <http://www.academicjournals.org>
 9. Iruonagbe TC, George T. Conflicts and Intergroup Relation in Nigeria What Way Forward. Journal of Arts and Education, 2007, 2(2). Available at www.eprints.covenantuniversity.edu.ng
 10. Jacob RI. A Historical Survey of Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria, 2012. Available at www.ccsenet.org
 11. Kassah V. The Impact of Ethnicity on Entrepreneurial Intention among Undergraduate Student in Kaduna State; FUW-International Journal of Management and Social Sciences,2016:1(2-3):183-195.
 12. Lederach JP. Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies. United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997.
 13. Magu AY, Goni I. Ethno-Religious Conflict in Taraba State and its Implications on Socioeconomic, Political and Educational Development of Youths. International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Reviews,2013:4(3):149–155. (ISSN: 2276-8645)
 14. Nazhat F. Religious Violence in Nigeria and their Impacts on Social Life. Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences,2014:2(4):15-19. Available at www.ea.journals.org
 15. Okuntade TF. Causes and Effects of Conflict in the Nigerian Construction Industry. International Journal of Technology Enhancements and Emerging Engineering Research,2014:2(6):7-16. Available at <https://semanticscholar.org>
 16. Onah NG, Diara BC, Uroko FC. Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Implications on Women. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences,2017:8(5):61-78.
 17. Salawu A. Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria: A challenge for national development. African Journal of Political Science,2010:5(2):25-40.
 18. Salawu B. Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposals for New Management Strategies. European Journal of Social Sciences,2010:13(3):345- 353
 19. Sambians N. Do Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Civil Wars have the Same Causes? A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry. 2001. Part 1. World Bank.
 20. Terwase IS. Religious Violence in Nigeria: Causal Diagnoses and Strategic Recommendations to the state and Religious Communities, 2012.
 21. Zartman IW. The role of government in preventing conflict. Journal of Peace Research,2001:38(5):537-556.