Inter-Faith Dialogue, Peace Building and Conflict Transformation in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria as a nation with diversity has religious plurality as one of its integral parts. Living in diversity surely is a formidable task. Such religious diversity has been a source of violent conflict owing to seemingly irreconcilable religious ideologies of the different faiths. This often makes it difficult for their adherents to look beyond their differences and search for common grounds upon which a shared community life can be built. Inter-faith dialogue is a peace-building activity which is carried out in an atmosphere of openness, quest for truth and reciprocal respect. It builds trust, clarifies misunderstandings, removes negative perceptions and stereotypes, and transforming enemy images and reconciliation which transform conflict from confrontation to cooperation. The challenges of interfaith dialogue are lack of focus by interfaith dialogue practitioners, proselytization by some participants, religious hegemony and religious extremism.The study recommends that the emphasis of citizenship Rights, poverty alleviation schemes, peace education,restorative justice system. The study concludes that the capacity of a society to continue to exist despite prevailing conflicts depends on its ability to devise the means of curbing the negative impact of such conflicts.

KEYWORDS: Inter-faith, Dialogue, Peace-building, Conflict, Transformation

'There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions, and there will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among religions' Hans Kung

Introduction

The world is like a home where the diversity lives in. Religious plurality is one of the integral parts of it. Living in diversity surely is a formidable task. Thorough history we learn that religious diversity might contribute into violent or even bloody conflicts. In this context, we realize that diversity can be both a blessing and a challenge. On the one hand, the positive

interface between the cultural practices and faith traditions of the community's diverse inhabitants can enrich community life. But on the other hand, the seemingly irreconcilable religious ideologies of the different faiths can often make it difficult for their adherents to look beyond their differences and search for common grounds upon which a shared community life can be built. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, differences in religion have been cited as a factor in conflicts between or within states. It is a paradox that historically religions have often been implicated in violence and conflict, either as a direct cause or as an associated factor, but have also contributed to building peace.

Nigeria has for years been embroiled in violent conflict with attributed factor of religion. The consequence of manipulating religion for political purposes in the country is both self-evident and alarming. In a nation where religion, ethnicity and politics differences form a basis for intolerance, crises, unresolved political differences, perceived social and economic marginalization. The insecurity phenomenon in the Nigeriaerodes trust among the various religious groups. In some cases, suspicion, intolerance and the uncompromising disposition of communities in their social relations with people outside their group identity have further reinforced conflict and distrust, resulting in the spontaneous outbreak of civil disorder with untold sufferings and loss of lives and properties.

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria(as amended) guarantees freedom of worship and religion, freedom of association, freedom from discrimination-chapter IV, Section 38, 40 and 42 in that sequence. The constitution further spells out the secularity status of Nigeria-chapter II, Section 10.In a large and complex country with a population

consisting of more than 250 different ethnic groups, divided between Christians and Muslims, finding common ground and allaying the fears of majority and minority groups is paramount.Both Christians and Moslems in Nigeria are human beings. As rational beings, they are expected to be rational in their thoughts and actions. It is rational and human to preserve life than to take away life. All the religions of the world, both Islam and Christianity, value life so dearly. Every rational human person values life. Religious dialogue, therefore, becomes a means of expressing humanness by respecting the stronger points of view people of different religious foundations engage in religious discussions.

Scriptural and historical records revealed the early cordial interactions between Muslims and Christians. This was practically demonstrated by the Abyssinian Christians through the good leadership and non-discriminatory qualities of Neguswho gave warm reception to the Muslim refugees persecuted in Makkah (Hitti: 1970) The Holy Qur'an describes the early Christians as friends of Muslims:

> ‘You will find that the people most violently hostile towards those who believe are the Jews and those who associate (others with God): while you will find the most affectionate among them towards those who believe are those who say; we are Christian. That is because some of them are priests and monks, they do not behave Proudly’ (Qur 'an 5:82).

A survey by the Pew Forum shows that more people in Nigeria than in any other African country believe that religion is a major source of conflict (Marshall, 2013). As a concept and practice, religion holds much weight in Nigeria and, mostly among the elites, has become a powerful tool in claiming political privileges, opportunities and advantages (Danfulani, 2006 p.

19). In addition to ethnicity, religion also comes to the fore in conflicts over resources and political control. These two variables are at the heart of many of the conflicts that have plagued Nigeria, particularly in the north, since the return of the country to civilian rule in 1999.

Various violent religious conflicts have occurred in Nigeria and each occurrence bifurcatesNigeria along religious fault-line. Thus, the pillar of harmonious relationship in Nigeria lies in its understanding and reconciliation, which are achievable through peace-building or inter-faith dialogue activities. The fact of dialogue is concerned with the exchange of ideas and opinions being an encounter that takes place on equal grounds with mutual confidence, frankness and without ulterior motives (Abdul-Ismail, 2006, p.23).

Religious dialogue is an activity that is carried out in an atmosphere of openness, thirst for truth and mutual respect. It has to do with "give and take". Osam (2009, p.12) opines that religious dialogue presupposes the existence and relevance of other points of view and a readiness to accept the truth wherever it may be found. In religious dialogue, no party should claim superiority over the other as this will hinder the objective of dialogue. It must be observed that the objectives of religious dialogue include deeper understanding of other religions and also fostering better human relationship. Religious dialogue is not a period of confrontation. It is not a period of counting religious differences.

Inter-faith dialogue

Smock (2002, p.12) aptly emphasizes that "a dialogue is not a debate." Debate implies an intention to win the argument, to prove one side right, or to change the views of the opponent. Dialogue does not aim to eliminate differences of opinion and conviction, but to gain an

understanding and acceptance of those differences (Abu-Nimer 2007, p.19). Inter-religious dialogue aims at enrichment, trust, respect, and the creation of a sense of "us/we" through increased understanding.

Inter-religious dialogue does not aim at undermining belief, either. On the contrary, an inter-religious dialogue is more constructive when people who participate are firmly grounded in their own religious traditions, allowing them to take seriously the practices and beliefs of others (Cilliers 2002, p.90).

Inter-religious dialogue taps into the spiritual resources of the religious traditions, creating opportunities for connecting participants at a deeper spiritual level. Using spirituality as a main source of commitment to social change is what distinguishes inter-religious dialogue from other forms of dialogue (Abu-Nimer, 2002, p.104).

Peace-building

Peace-building is defined as a "whole host of activities and modalities of intervention designed to bring about a state of peaceful relations by conflicting parties" (Bercovitch&Kadayifci 2002, p. 39). Peacebuilding is a complex and dynamic process of changing relationships, perceptions, attitudes, behaviors, interests, and underlying structures that encourage and perpetuate violent conflicts. Engaging multiple levels of society (i.e. high, mid and grass-roots), peacebuildinginvolves addressing the root causes of the conflict through long-term economic and social justice provisions, the reform of political structures of governance, strengthening the rule of law, and healing through reconciliation. It also refers to mechanisms and structures that can prevent a conflict, terminate it, transform it, or resolve it.

However, Peacebuilding is a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation. This consists of a set of physical, social, and structural initiatives that are often an integral part of post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Conflict Transformation

In the words of Weathered, conflict transformation is an approach that seeks to transform the very systems, structures andrelationships which give rise to violence and injustice.It is a long-term, gradual process which must involve wide-ranging and comprehensive actions and actors across different sectors of society as they work together to develop strategic goals for change. Conflict transformation involves:

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i. engaging in processes that lead to long-term change

ii.working on changing relationships (particularly looking at power dynamics)

iii. interpreting society holistically – attitudes (how individuals feel or understand a situation), behaviours (visible and can be articulated as violence) and structures (religious institutions for example), (Responding to Conflict).

iv.conflict actor mapping, historical analysis and local-national multi-level analysis.

The ABC triangle analysis used in the conflict transformation approach is based on the premise that conflicts have three major components: the context or situation, the behaviourof those involvedand their attitudes. These three factors influence each other. For example, a

context that ignores thedemands of one group is likely to lead to an attitude of frustration, perhaps even anger, which could eruptinto violence. Work that is done to change the context (by making sure that demands are acknowledged), to reduce the level of frustration (by helping people to focus on the long-term nature of their struggle) or toprovide outlets for behaviours that are not violent will contribute to reducing the levels of tension (UNDP et al).

Conflict transformation is a comprehensive approach, addressing a range of dimensions (micro-to macro-issues, local to global levels, grassroots to elite actors, short term to long term timescales). It aims to develop capacity and to support structural change, rather than to facilitate outcomes or deliver settlements. It seeks to engage with conflict at the pre-violence and post-violence phases, and with the causes and consequences of violent conflict which usually extend beyond the site of fighting.

An Overview of Religious Conflict in Nigeria

The interactions between Muslims and Christians at socio-political level in therecent time have been influenced by mutual suspicion and competition. These often lead to unabated religious conflicts such as sporadic religious crises which continue to engulf the Northern part of Nigeria in the recent time.

However, the first religious crisis experienced in Nigeria was the revolutionary activities (Jihad) of Uthman Dan Fodio in 1804 in the old Hausa Fulani Empire (Adekunle & Adegbaike, 2010). The revolution was launched to fight against syncretism rampant during the time. The Jihad was aimed to restore the prestine Islam.

The scenario of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria has left indelible psychological trauma and mistrust among the Nigerian citizenry. Carnage, arson and physical assaults were

recorded in the past crises and these continue to threaten the corporate existence of the Federal polity. The first military coup in Nigeria was 1966. The coup was mutinous and calamitous because it had ethno-religious undertone. It was led by young lgbo revolutionist military officers. The coup was masterminded by Major ChukwumaNzeogwu and the bloody coup led to the murder of Sir AbubakarTafawaBalewa (the first Prime Minister of Nigeria) and Sir Ahmadu Bello; the Sadauna of Sokoto. A counter coup was staged by Hausa young military officers and this led to the assassination of Major J.I.U AguiyiIronzı(Ovwasa, 1993). The coup can be deemed to be religio-ethnic conflict due to the vengeance that occurred in the Northern part against the Igbo people living there.

The Maitatsene religious crisis of February 1980 was the first sectarian crisis that led the country into confusion. The religious mayhem extended to Yola in 1984, Bauchi and Borno in 1985 respectively while the infiltration of the sectarian militancy engulfed Kaduna in 1986. The causalities recorded were more than ten thousand people who were Muslims and Christians (Adekunle, 2010).

The following summary of religious conflicts as recorded by Tell Newspaper (August 10, 2009) and corroborated by Adegbai and Adegbaike (2010) had negative effects on nation building in Nigeria:

December 1980: Maintaseini riot in Kano, 1982: Bulumkutu's religious violence. February 1984: Religious crises in Jimeta in Gongola state December 1998: Protest and violence over imposition of Christian religious. In Nigeria, there are religious crises in most parts of the country. Wherever particular faith adherents are in the majority, the majority tends to have

advantage over the minority when there is an outbreak of religious conflict. Thereturn to civilian rule in 1999 gave some governors from northern Nigeria the opportunityto prove their allegiance to their religion. They did this through the implementation of theSharia legal system in their States regardless of protests against it by civil societyorganizations (Ostien& Dekker, 2010). Some Muslims saw the governors as heroes of a long-awaited effort that came a little late.

However, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), an umbrella body of Christians in the country, opposed such a move, reasoning that Nigeria is a secular State. The constitution of the country allows for the establishment of sharia courts to entertain cases brought to it by Muslims who want to be tried under Islamic law. However, the constitution did not approve full implementation of Sharia law in a State or the country (Ostien& Dekker, 2010). The Sharia controversy was resolved when the Supreme Court pronounced that such implementation can only take place in a State where Muslims are in the majority, and Christians should not be subject to such laws. The ruling of the Supreme Court was violated in some States where some Christians were prosecuted in Sharia courts, with the excuse that other parties in the cases were Muslims (Ohadike, 1992). This happenstance was abhorred vehemently by CAN in some States in Northern Nigeria.

February 2000: Riot over Shari' ah issue in Kaduna. April 2000: Saki Oyo State and Iwo had religious violence as a result of the preaching of one Alfa Mofoye (an Islamic scholar) against Christianity. November 2000: The people of Offa in Kwara State witnessed religious riot following the demolition of the ancient Moremi shrine. The second religious mayhem was recorded between 26" and 30 October 1982. The religious uprising was championed by Maitatsine disciples at Bulumkutu on the outskirts of Maiduguri, Borno State and Kaduna.

Kaduna State experienced another inter-religious violence at Kafachan in 1984 during the preaching session of a Muslim convert; Pastor Bako who's preaching infuriated Muslims due to his sacrilegious utterance to Islam. The mayhem further widened the animosity between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria.

There were more successive inter-religious riots between the Muslims and Christians which further broadened the socio-religious cleavages among the citizens of Nigeria and even geo- political zones of Nigeria. Such inter-religious conflicts included the March 10, 1987 Kafachan religious riot which ensued fromthe preaching of Bello Abubakar, a Muslim convert. There were other subsequent religious violence in 1991 in Bauchi, in 1992 ZangoKataf episode had a colossal destruction of human life and property on April 28h 2000. (Tell, August 10, 2009, p.37).

In 2001, over 2,000 people were killed and thousands displaced in religious violence that spread across the Middle-Belt states of Benue, Plateau, Taraba, and Nasarawa (Christian Solidarity Worldwide 2012). An article titled: "The World at their Feet" on Miss World Beauty 2002 Pageant erupted national violence. The article was written by Isioma Daniel and published in "This Day", a Nigerian Newspaper on the 26 November, 2002 some parts of the article were considered denigrating to Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) because of the following statement:

> *'The Muslims thought it was immoral to bring ninety-two women to Nigeria and ask them to revel in vanity. What would Muhammad think? In all honesty, he would probably have chosen a wife from among them' (This Day, 2002).*
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> However, "This Day" management tendered an unreserved apology to the Muslimsin the subsequent editorial series of the newspaper.

Book Haram came into existence in the 1960s but visibly became a threat in Nigeria in the year 2002. The name of the sect was derived from "Book" (Western education). The sect is critical of western civilization and its philosophy. Thereforemembers of the sect decide to pursue their angol-phobic philosophy to re-shape the socio-political thoughts of Nigeria (Abimbola, 2011). Some social analysts have observed that the evolution of Boko Haram can be attributed to the social malaise and absence of involvement of youths in the civil service employments and other important social realms in Nigeria. They rake havoc on people with high death toll.

Apart from the perennial unhealthy religious interactions between the Nigerian Muslims and Christians, there have also been series of hot conflicts between Muslims and adherents of traditional religion in the South-West Nigeria in the colonial and post-colonial periods. According to Doi (1969), Islamic missionary activities at embryonic stage were met with stiff opposition by the adherents of traditional religion in Yoruba land. There were attacks on Muslims as they were practising Islam openly and establishing a new social order. The new social drive was conceived by the Afrelists as a threat to their cherished conservative cultural heritage.

The spread of Islam in Yoruba land was largely based on voluntary efforts of somescholars and societies "Egbe". Because of the circumstances surrounding theacceptance of Islam by some yoruba people, there were syncretic practices in their religious disposition. This inevitably gave rise to another form of religious wrangle which led to the evolution of some Islamic reformers in Yoruba land. (Adelowo, 1986)In the 1980s, such reformers included AbdulAzeezAjagbemokeferi, a versatile Islamic preacher from Esa-Odo in Osun State. He was critical of cult activities and idolatry practices. He had terrific encounters with cultists and

Oloolu masquerades in Ibadan (Adelowo, 1986:70). His persuasive preaching sessions converted many Ogboni cultists and other Afrelists.

Offa, an Ibolo community of Yoruba land in Kwara States which fosters an ideal hitch-free Muslim-Christian interactive community also experienced religious violence in November 2000 when the young Muslim youth revolutionists pulled down the ancient Moremi shrine in Offa. The crisis was justified by the concerned Muslim youth revolutionists on the basis of the proximity of the shrine to Offa Jumat Mosque and involvement of some Muslims in the Moremi annual festivity (Tell August 10, 2009).

Interfaith Dialogue and Peace-building in Nigeria

The government of President Babangida in 1987 initiated the first interfaith dialogue at the national level with 12 representatives each from Christianity and Islamic faith traditions (ACRA Act, 1987). However, this body was ineffective because according to Igwara (2007), there was not much success achieved by the body. The outbreak of religious conflicts in 1999 prompted President Obasanjo to inaugurate an interreligious body at the national level known as the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council – 'NIREC' (McGarvey, 2009). The religious conflicts in northern Nigeria have succeeded in dividing the people on religious line, and the need to rebuild the trust among the people is one effort that is championed by interfaith advocates (Kukah&McGarvey, 2013).

Religious conflicts have caused Nigeria economic, political and social consequences. That is why religious organizations are involved in peace-building in the country and have helped to resolve conflict of many kinds. An interesting scenario worthy of mention here is the effort of two former combatants who were archrivals and religious leaders in their communities.

They now use their religious teachings to promote peace in the country and some countries in Africa (Griswold, 2010). According to Little (2007), Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa were former archrivals and leaders of the youth wing of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and National Council of Muslim Youth Organization (NACOMYO) respectively. Wuye was believed to be the leader of a Christian youth militia group that killed Imam Ashafa's spiritual mentor. In turn, Ashafa's militia's group attacked James Wuye's; during the confrontation, Wuye lost his right hand (Ashafa&Wuye, 1999). Little (2007) states that these two warlords had the privilege to meet during an immunization program organized by UNICEF in 1995 as representatives of their various religions. The event took place at the Kaduna State Governor's office. During a coffee break at the forum, a friend held them by their hands and remarked, "The two of you can pull this nation together, or you can destroy it. Do something" (p.261). After series of meetings, the two archrivals finally accepted to forgive each other. While regretting their past actions, Ashafa remarks, "We planted theseed of genocide and we used the scripture to do that" (Griswold, 2010. p. 67). They both embraced peace and seek forgiveness from each other; they later on established the Interfaith Mediation Center (IMC) in Kaduna. IMC played prominent role in interfaith education in Nigeria (Griswold, 2010).

In an interview with Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University, Bishop Joshua Idowu-Fearon whois an advocate of interfaith dialogue in northern Nigeria,remarks that "The Anglican position on Christian-Muslim relations is based on 'Generous love,' a booklet that states clearly our theological rational on relating to our ministry to our Muslim neighbors". Idowu-Fearon emphasized that his mission is to educate his fellow Christians about Islam. He stressed further that there is the need to promote understanding and

graceto live together in peace. Idowu-Fearon established the 'Bridge Builders' an interfaith organization of the Anglican Diocese of Kaduna. In 2013, the Archbishop of Canterbury awarded him the Cross of St. Augustine for his effort on interfaith dialogue. According to the Archbishop of Canterbury (2013), "he has worked indefatigably on Christian Muslim relations, displaying extra ordinary courage and vision in often most difficult of circumstances".

Critical-Dialogic Framework

Zúñiga et al. (2002) articulates a critical-dialogic model for practicing intergroup dialogue that could be incorporated in co-curricular interfaith dialogue programs. The based their four-stage model and guiding principles on a pedagogical foundation that they enhanced after a decade of conducting research and synthesizing empirical data on the subject. Special focus was paid to identities of participants, both individual and intersecting identities, while acknowledging the privilege and power that are systematically reinforced in societal structures.

Zúñiga et al. (2002, p.8) asserts that in order to engage dialogue across difference, a model was needed that "incorporates sustained communication, consciousness-raising, and the bridging of differences". Foundational pieces were woven into exploring differences, exploring and dialoguing about hot topics, and action planning and alliance building and maintaining a social justice. The Nigerian experience can only have a positive outcome in the engagement of inter religious dialogue when it's directed at achieving social justice, tolerance and alliance building.

Challenges of Interfaith Dialougue

The practitioners of inter faith dialogue are bereft of common purpose and focus. They mostly work at cross purposes. This is one major challenge that affect interfaith dialogue. The cardinal pointpractitioners focus on is to reduce the impact of conflict. Another challenge is the

issue of proselytizing by participants. Some of the participants see interfaith dialogue as an avenue to convert others to their religion. Also, some religious traditions usually find it difficult to accept the position of others. Some individuals are of the opinion that accepting to learn from or about another religion through dialogue shows a sign of weakness. Issues such as this, increase the hostility towards interfaith dialogue. Abu-Nimer argued in this direction stating the fear of the Muslims when it comes to interfaith dialogue. The author remarks that one other fear of some Muslims is that non-Muslims who participate in interfaith dialogue are actually missionaries trying to improve their evangelization efforts.

Some religious leaders tend to preach about the supremacy of their faith thereby encouraging their followers towards that direction. Many religious leaders feel their faith is the most perfect while others are adulterated and cannot learn anything from such faith. One of such scholars is Sanaullah (2014, p.88) who states that because "Islam is a missionary religion", the preference for Muslims should be missionary activities rather than interfaith dialogue. The author went further to list certain impediments of interfaith dialogue to Muslims such as the assumption that all religions are equal and point to the same truth. According to Sanaullah, "Islam is a complete religion…". The author relied on a Qur'anic verse to stress this point "…I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" (Q. 5:3). The author also listed certain issues like compromise, which is not accepted in Islam since interfaith dialogue may involve compromising one's beliefs and practices. Also, interfaith dialogue may be a barrier for mission work, since Muslims will not be allowed to embark on missionary endeavor (Sanaullah, 2014, pp. 89-90). To such misconceptions, Abu-Nimer posits that by continuous misinterpretation of various parts of the

Qur'an, some Muslims believe that interfaith interaction is only designed to expand the politics, military control, economic might, and cultural influence of the Western world.

Kilpatrick (2014) once criticized Cardinal Dolan of New York for addressing the Muslim community of Tompkinsville on Staten Island as his friends. The author went further to inquire if the church in the U.S has finally succumbed to the charms of Islam. Kilpatrick tried to draw a distinction about the two faiths by questioning the statement by Cardinal Dolan as to worshipping the same God with the Muslim Allah. He is of the opinion that the concept of common values and beliefs of Muslims and Christians as stated by Cardinal Dolan is misleading. These misconception or misrepresentation according to Abu-Nimer prompted the different interpretation and understanding of interfaith dialogue.

Another major challenge interfaith dialogue face is the challenge of convincing some religious leaders to be part of the process. These leaders believe their authority will be questioned if they engaged in interfaith dialogue, they prefer to maintain the status quo. According to Moraes (2003) Gramsci advanced further with Marxist philosophy of bourgeois dominance in the society. He is of the opinion that a few individuals often use their position within the society to create a 'class', which translate to hegemony, thereby dominating others. The religious leaders prefer to maintain the hegemony within their religious faith; any counter-hegemony is resisted using any force available. For them, interfaith dialogue may challenge or question their ideology. However, inter-religious dialogue becomes almost impossible if the religion of the other is termed demonic. Financial challenge is another aspect that has been a source of concern for practitioners of interfaith dialogue since adherents would not donate their

money for interfaith work. In addition, international NGOs that are involved in interfaith work are few, as such funding is always hard to come by.

According to Omari (2015), religious extremism is another challenge from the two faith traditions. Many adherents are totally against engaging in dialogue or in support of people from their faith to be involved in dialogue. Such people are of the belief that their religion is the only true and right way and thus engaging in dialogue with the other is of no use but a betrayal to their faith. Ramadan (2004) also remarks that those who engage in interfaith dialogue are often left alone without support from members of their faith. As Ramadan puts it, they end up moving from one interfaith conference to another without the support of their faith tradition. This, according to the scholar is one of the disturbing challenges confronting interfaith dialogue.

The Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) is of the opinion that self-sufficiency, the inability to allow other people know more about one's religion sometimes leads to defensive and aggressive attitudes. Also, the lack of conviction by religious adherents about interreligious dialogue that sometimes is left for the specialists alone. The lack of forgiveness and wrong interpretation of other people's beliefs or practices; and intolerance, which in some cases are believed to have link with political, economic, racial and ethnic struggles are some challenges interfaith practitioners encounter (Declaration and Proclamation, 1991).

This prevailing situation has brought about a change in the dynamics of the city with people clustering based on such factors as religion, ethnicity, language and culture. Many communities have been displaced, religious organizations have suffered destructions and damaged and the previous harmonious inter-ethnic and inter-religious relationship have been

severely strained and battered. The situation is pathetic as shops outlets, market places and residential domiciles are now based on religious affiliations. Whenever there is interfaith conflict, it creates mutual distrust. Trust deficit sets in between the people. Interfaith intolerance can only breed unfriendly disposition between the adherents of the faiths. Their approach in relating is mostly hostile to each other. Owing to the deep seated hatred, enemy is made out of persons from other faith.

Conclusion

The capacity of a society to continue to exist despite prevailing conflicts depends on its ability to devise the means of curbing the negative impact of such conflicts. The attempts made by the Civil Society Organizations and other faith and community-based organizations in promoting peaceful co-existence in Nigeria positive outcome. There should be a frantic efforts by the government to engage the youth in meaningful job. This could be done by robust skill acquisition schemes for the teeming youth. With the high youth bulge Nigeria skill acquisition will get them off the streets and being ready for hire to commit religious violence.

Imbuing tolerance, forgiveness culture into the psychic of our children should be a matter of priority. Peace education should be given a paramount space in educational curriculum from pre-primary to tertiary level. By this, the children will grow up with tolerance, forgiveness, understanding and cherishing peaceful co-existence. Peace building should involve the parties in inter faith conflict as critical stake holders of the parley or engagement. The community should be allowed to draw up strategies for peace building rather than having statutory agencies doing such on their behalf. This has always come with a backlash as the dynamics, positions, interest, needs and fears of the belligerents may not be understood and could have been factored in

drawing up of the template for peace building. This way restorative justice can be attained and achieved. Finances are critical in inter faith dialogue as it requires hiring of halls, travelling, engagement of facilitators, publicity, accommodation, training.Government should earmark a special fund for such activities. The Press has an important role to play in fostering peaceful inter-religious co-existence in Nigeria. They should maintain mediatory and reconciliatory reportage and those found fanning the embers of religious violence should be sanctioned.

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