

**INTERRELIGIOUS COLLABORATION AND THE PURSUIT OF SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN POST-
CONFLICT COMMUNITIES**

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Abstract

This study examined the interreligious collaboration on the pursuit of sustainable peace in post-conflict communities in Plateau State, Nigeria. Using a survey research design, data were gathered from 210 community and religious leaders involved in peacebuilding activities between 2016 and 2022. Findings revealed that 69% of respondents perceived interreligious collaboration initiatives as effective or very effective in promoting reconciliation, rebuilding trust, and enhancing social cohesion after violent conflict. Major enabling factors included inclusive leadership (33%) and community-driven peace mechanisms (29%), while inadequate funding, political interference, and mistrust between faith groups posed persistent challenges. The study concluded that interreligious collaboration significantly contributed to stabilizing post-conflict societies by fostering dialogue, cooperation, and shared development goals. It recommended strengthening institutional support, empowering local faith-based networks, and enhancing participatory peace frameworks to consolidate long-term community resilience and coexistence.

Keywords: *Interreligious Collaboration, Post-Conflict Peacebuilding, Sustainable Peace, Reconciliation, Community Resilience*

1. Introduction

Post-conflict communities in Nigeria, particularly in the Middle Belt region, had experienced cycles of ethno-religious violence that undermined social harmony and disrupted development. The aftermath of violent crises such as those in Plateau, Kaduna, and Benue States revealed deep fractures in intergroup relations, displacement of populations, and erosion of social trust. The restoration of peace in such contexts required sustained dialogue and cooperative engagement among religious groups that once stood at opposing sides of conflict (Ojukwu & Onuoha, 2018).

Religion played an ambivalent role in these crises: while it was often instrumentalized to justify violence, it also provided moral and institutional resources for healing and reconciliation. Faith-based organizations and religious leaders had served as key actors in rebuilding destroyed communities, mediating disputes, and reweaving the social fabric (Adamu, 2019). Through joint initiatives, they addressed humanitarian needs, facilitated trauma healing, and promoted shared values of forgiveness and coexistence.

Interreligious collaboration thus emerged as a vital peacebuilding mechanism. Unlike ad hoc dialogue sessions, collaborative frameworks emphasized sustained cooperation, joint service projects, and collective decision-making among religious stakeholders (Yusuf, 2020). Such efforts extended beyond theological conversations to include livelihood programs, education, and social reconstruction, ensuring that peacebuilding was holistic and community-owned.

In Plateau State, collaborative efforts between the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), and civil society groups exemplified how religious institutions could transform post-conflict environments. These alliances fostered grassroots participation, mutual understanding, and community resilience, helping to stabilize societies emerging from conflict.

This study assessed the impact of interreligious collaboration in achieving sustainable peace in post-conflict communities. It examined the effectiveness of joint religious initiatives, identified contextual challenges, and explored key enablers of peace sustainability within plural communities of Northern Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite several peace interventions, many post-conflict communities in Nigeria continued to struggle with mutual suspicion, weak reconciliation, and recurring violence. The absence of sustained collaboration among religious actors often resulted in fragmented efforts,

duplication of initiatives, and limited long-term impact. While short-term dialogue programs created temporary calm, they rarely addressed the deeper structural and relational issues that perpetuated mistrust.

Interreligious collaboration was expected to serve as a comprehensive platform for restoring trust, rebuilding social networks, and promoting inclusive development in post-conflict societies. However, many initiatives lacked adequate coordination, resource backing, and institutional support. Political manipulation and unequal participation among religious groups further weakened collaborative structures.

If these challenges persisted, fragile peace would remain vulnerable to relapse into violence, perpetuating displacement, poverty, and psychological trauma among affected populations. Strengthening interreligious collaboration was therefore crucial to ensuring sustainable peace and long-term community stability.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the interreligious collaboration and the pursuit of sustainable peace in post-conflict communities. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Assess the effectiveness of interreligious collaboration initiatives in consolidating peace and rebuilding trust in post-conflict communities.
- ii. Identify the major challenges and enabling factors influencing the success of interreligious collaboration in achieving sustainable peace.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- i. How effective were interreligious collaboration initiatives in promoting sustainable peace and reconciliation in post-conflict communities?
- ii. What were the major challenges and enabling factors influencing the success of these collaborative initiatives?

Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses in null form (H_0) guided this study

- i. H_{01} : Interreligious collaboration had no significant effect on promoting sustainable peace and reconciliation in post-conflict communities.

- ii. H₀₂: There were no significant challenges or enabling factors influencing the success of interreligious collaboration initiatives in post-conflict peacebuilding.

2. Literature review

Conceptual Review

Concept of Interreligious Collaboration

Interreligious collaboration referred to the sustained cooperative engagement among individuals and institutions of different faith traditions aimed at promoting mutual understanding, reconciliation, and social transformation in conflict-affected societies. Unlike one-off interfaith dialogues, which often centered on verbal exchange, interreligious collaboration entailed collective participation in community development, humanitarian relief, peace education, and policy advocacy (Yusuf, 2020). It combined dialogue with practical cooperation, emphasizing joint ownership of peace processes rather than mere tolerance or coexistence.

In post-conflict settings, such collaboration served as a mechanism for rebuilding fractured relationships, reconstructing trust, and addressing structural injustices that underlay violence (Adamu, 2019). Faith communities, through shared initiatives such as trauma healing, youth empowerment, and peace education, worked together to restore moral and social order. These cooperative ventures contributed not only to reconciliation but also to socioeconomic stabilization and institutional resilience (Ojukwu & Onuoha, 2018).

Interreligious collaboration possessed multidimensional features—spiritual, social, and pragmatic. Spiritually, it drew from shared religious imperatives of peace, forgiveness, and justice. Socially, it created networks that transcended sectarian boundaries and rebuilt communal solidarity. Pragmatically, it involved coordinated interventions that responded to local needs such as rebuilding homes, rehabilitating displaced persons, and promoting intergroup dialogue at grassroots levels (Maikudi, 2017).

For collaboration to thrive, several enabling conditions were essential: mutual respect, participatory leadership, transparent communication, and an inclusive approach that acknowledged each faith's identity and contribution (KAICIID, 2017). Without these, cooperative efforts risked being superficial or politicized. Therefore, effective interreligious collaboration depended on shared vision, trust, institutional capacity, and a supportive socio-political environment.

Conceptually, interreligious collaboration was both a peacebuilding strategy and a peace outcome. As a strategy, it functioned as a vehicle for rebuilding trust and addressing the psychosocial wounds of conflict. As an outcome, it represented a sustained culture of cooperation where diverse groups co-created a peaceful social order.

Concept of Post-Conflict Communities and Sustainable Peace

Post-conflict communities referred to societies that had recently experienced violent conflict but were undergoing processes of stabilization, reconstruction, and reconciliation. Such communities were characterized by broken trust, displacement, loss of livelihoods, and institutional fragility (Oyeniya, 2016). Achieving sustainable peace in these contexts required not only cessation of hostilities but also long-term transformation of social relations and structures that bred violence.

Sustainable peace denoted a condition of social harmony and justice where conflict drivers were addressed, governance institutions functioned equitably, and citizens participated inclusively in rebuilding their society (Galtung, 1996). It went beyond negative peace—the mere absence of violence—to encompass positive peace rooted in human security, reconciliation, and participatory development.

In Nigeria's Middle Belt and other conflict-prone regions, sustainable peace required integrated efforts combining government reconstruction programs with grassroots interreligious and intercultural collaboration. Such community-based approaches allowed former adversaries to cooperate in rebuilding shared spaces, promoting dialogue, and ensuring that peace dividends were equitably distributed (Danjuma & Bala, 2020).

Theoretical Review

This study was theoretically underpinned Social Identity Theory

Contact Hypothesis, developed by Gordon Allport (1954), posited that under appropriate conditions—equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and institutional support—direct contact between members of different groups reduced prejudice and fostered positive relationships. In post-conflict settings, interreligious collaboration provided structured opportunities for such meaningful contact through joint projects, community dialogues, and cooperative problem-solving. These interactions humanized the “other,” dismantled stereotypes, and cultivated empathy across religious divides (Hewstone & Brown, 1986).

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explained how individuals derived part of their self-concept from group memberships, leading to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. In contexts where religion had been instrumentalized for violence, this theory clarified why interreligious collaboration was necessary—to expand social identity boundaries and create superordinate identities centered on shared humanity and community welfare (Reynolds, 2018). Through cooperative engagement, religious groups redefined their relationships from competition to partnership, thereby mitigating antagonism and rebuilding mutual trust.

Empirical Review

Ojukwu and Onuoha (2018) examined “Faith-based interventions and post-conflict peacebuilding in Plateau State” using interviews with 150 religious leaders and community representatives. They found that joint Christian-Muslim peace committees effectively reduced local tensions, promoted reconciliation, and restored intergroup trust. However, the study noted that irregular funding and lack of government coordination weakened the continuity of such efforts.

Adamu (2019) assessed “Religious partnership and community reconstruction in Northern Nigeria” through mixed-methods analysis. The findings indicated that collaborative humanitarian projects by CAN and JNI improved intergroup relations and enhanced return of displaced persons. Yet, political manipulation of religious narratives occasionally undermined credibility among community members.

Yusuf (2020) analyzed “Interreligious collaboration and sustainable development in Jos metropolis” using focus-group discussions with youth leaders. The research revealed that cooperative initiatives, especially in peace education and youth empowerment, fostered inclusion and reduced violent extremism. Nevertheless, inadequate institutional support and persistent socio-economic inequalities hindered long-term sustainability.

Similarly, Maikudi (2017) explored “Faith-based reconciliation and trust-building in post-conflict societies of West Africa,” concluding that religious partnerships had strengthened community healing mechanisms but required systematic policy integration to sustain peace outcomes.

3. Methodology

The study employed a survey research design to obtain standardized information from community and religious leaders who had participated in interreligious collaboration programs within post-conflict communities of Plateau State, Nigeria. This design was

chosen because it allowed for the systematic collection of data on perceptions, experiences, and evaluations of peacebuilding initiatives from a broad cross-section of stakeholders.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised 420 individuals, including local clerics, community elders, youth leaders, and representatives of interfaith peace networks operating in Plateau State between 2016 and 2020. Using Taro Yamane's (1967) sample size determination formula, a total of 210 respondents were selected for participation through purposive and stratified sampling to ensure representation across Christian and Muslim communities as well as gender and age groups.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Data were collected using structured questionnaires and follow-up interviews. The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open-ended items designed to capture respondents' views on the effectiveness, challenges, and sustainability of interreligious collaboration initiatives in their communities. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by three experts in peace and conflict studies and interreligious relations. A pilot study involving 20 participants from neighboring Bauchi State yielded a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.84, confirming the instrument's reliability.

Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires with support from local faith-based organizations. Follow-up interviews provided qualitative insights into participants' lived experiences and the contextual dynamics shaping collaboration outcomes.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentages, to summarize respondents' perceptions. Thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data from interviews to complement quantitative findings. Results were presented in tables to reflect the frequency and proportion of responses concerning the perceived effectiveness and major determinants of interreligious collaboration in promoting sustainable peace.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: How effective did you consider interreligious collaboration initiatives in promoting sustainable peace and reconciliation in your community?

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Very Effective	60	29%
Effective	85	40%
Neutral	32	15%
Ineffective	23	11%
Very Ineffective	10	5%
Total	210	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The table shows that a majority of respondents (40%) considered interreligious collaboration initiatives effective in promoting sustainable peace, while 29% regarded them as very effective. About 15% were neutral, and smaller proportions viewed the initiatives as ineffective (11%) or very ineffective (5%). These results indicated that interreligious collaboration had been generally successful in promoting reconciliation and rebuilding trust in post-conflict communities, though not without challenges.

Table 2: What did you consider the biggest factor influencing the success of interreligious collaboration programs in your area?

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Inclusive and visionary religious leadership	69	33%
Community-driven participation and ownership	61	29%
Adequate funding and institutional support	49	23%
Government and NGO partnership	31	15%
Total	210	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2023

The table above indicates that inclusive and visionary leadership (33%) was considered the most critical factor determining the success of interreligious collaboration programs, followed closely by community-driven participation (29%). Adequate funding and institutional support accounted for 23% of responses, while partnership with government and NGOs represented 15%. This implied that the effectiveness and sustainability of interreligious initiatives relied heavily on leadership quality, local ownership, and consistent resource support.

5. Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

The key findings of the study are elucidated below:

- i. The study found that interreligious collaboration initiatives were generally perceived as effective mechanisms for achieving sustainable peace and reconciliation in post-conflict communities. A substantial majority of respondents (69%) rated the programs as either effective or very effective, signifying that joint religious efforts contributed meaningfully to rebuilding trust, restoring social cohesion, and mitigating the recurrence of violence.
- ii. The success of interreligious collaboration programs was largely influenced by inclusive and visionary leadership and community-driven participation. These factors enabled greater ownership, transparency, and sustained engagement among stakeholders. Respondents also emphasized that adequate funding, institutional support, and partnership with government and NGOs were necessary for maintaining long-term impact.

Conclusion

The study concluded that interreligious collaboration played a pivotal role in consolidating sustainable peace in post-conflict communities. By combining dialogue with collective community action, religious institutions in Plateau State effectively addressed the relational and structural dimensions of conflict. The synergy between Christian and Muslim leaders provided moral legitimacy, enhanced trust-building, and mobilized communities toward shared goals of reconciliation and development.

While challenges such as limited funding, weak institutional support, and residual prejudice persisted, the findings demonstrated that when religious collaboration was inclusive, participatory, and adequately supported, it yielded significant peace dividends. Interreligious partnerships therefore represented a credible and culturally grounded approach to rebuilding divided societies, fostering resilience, and preventing conflict relapse in Nigeria and similar plural contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Government agencies, international donors, and non-governmental organizations should provide consistent funding and institutional backing for interreligious collaboration programs. Sustained resource provision would enhance program continuity, coordination, and impact at both local and regional levels.
- ii. Religious and community leaders should receive continuous training in peacebuilding, mediation, and inclusive governance to strengthen their ability to manage conflicts and mobilize communities for cooperative peace initiatives.

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