

JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (JPIR)
RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: NIGERIA AND
GHANA COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Religious pluralism implies a diverse variety and multiplicity of faiths found to exist simultaneously in a given society. The beauty of these religions in their respective distinctiveness, even as they uphold and teach variegated divine sparks of the incomprehensible Supreme Being (God), is seen when they inclusively work together in one purposeful and concerted effort to unfold (de-envelope) the naturalness which humanity must conquer in order to be termed: developed. The platforms and bridges of religious inclusivism, ecumenism and tolerance lead naturally to greater freedoms, self-actualization, civilization and peace which are critical components of sustainable development. Religious pluralism has inherent integrative powers to transform the society positively. However, historical experiences reveal that societies which tie political battle for supremacy, socio-economic dominance and cultural superiority complex to their religions breed developmental crises. One example of such a specimen is Nigeria and Ghana. The interactions between the three dominant religions in both countries, namely: Christianity, African Traditional Religion and Islam have been largely governed by divisiveness, hatred, bigotry and violence. The consequence is developmental deficits. This study explores the impact of religious pluralism on national development of both Nigeria and Ghana using a comparative case study approach (Nigeria and Ghana as case study) using qualitative method adopting document analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research. The findings suggest that while religious pluralism presents challenges, it also offers opportunities for national development. Ghana's accommodative approach to religious diversity is associated with greater social cohesion and economic growth, whereas Nigeria's more fragmented approach exacerbates tensions and undermines development. The study recommends policies that promote interfaith dialogue, education, and inclusive governance to harness the benefits of religious pluralism for national development.

Key Words: National Development, Religion, Religious Pluralism

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INTRODUCTION

Religious pluralism is one of the types of pluralism. It is the coexistence of multiple religions within a single society, is a ubiquitous feature of modern societies. Nigeria and Ghana, two West African countries with significant religious diversity, provide an interesting case study for examining the impact of religious pluralism on national development of both countries.

Religious pluralism is a piece of beauty. There is beauty in variety. Variety is the spice of life. Variety is diversity. Diversity protects freedom to choose from possible alternatives. The ability to make choice is a blessing which the rational human person enjoys from his/her faculty of volition. Religious pluralism is a blessing in diversity (and not a burden) but only when religious leaders and adherents work together in a collective path and co-responsibility in order to unfold the vast potentials innate in the human person and tap into his natural given, the enormous resources found in his environment. This achievable and actionable project for the survival of the human beings and their common home, the planet has other critical features of space and time. Nigeria and Ghana which are the local context of this work, have three dominant religions; namely: Christianity, African Traditional Religion and Islam. Both countries did not adopt any religion as a state religion. Hence, they understood as

a secular nation as entrenched in their constitutions.

There is freedom of religious affiliation on the platform of religious pluralism protected under her laws. Without prejudice to the secularity of the nation, These countries are under both constructive and destructive influences of religious pluralism. Human progress attained through religions speaks for the former, while the evidences of the latter arise from unhealthy interactions between the afore said religions that breed developmental deficits. The thesis of this paper is the impact of religious pluralism on national development of Nigeria and Ghana.

This study employed a comparative research design, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The study also analyzed secondary data from reputable sources, including the African Journal, the Pew Research Center and other related materials.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Pluralism refers to the coexistence of multiple groups, cultures, religions, or ideologies within a single society or community. It involves the acceptance and recognition of diversity, promoting inclusivity, tolerance, and mutual respect.

Religion is a complex and multifaceted concept that can be understood in various ways. It is a system of beliefs, practices, and values that individuals and

communities use to make sense of the world, their place in it and their relationship with the divine, sacred, or transcendent.

It is also the belief in the existence of a supreme being. Religion is as old as the existence of man. The creation of man and its attending theories point to the fact that a supreme being was involved in creating and shaping the world as it is today. No wonder humans are naturally affiliated or aligned with a religion in honor and worship of the god perceived to be their creator. Little (2013), opines that religion is defined by its unique ability to provide individuals with answers to the ultimate questions of life, death, existence and purpose. As ardent faithful of a particular religion, answers should be provided to questions that borders on who we are, why we are alive, what powers our existence, what would be our purpose while alive, how can this purpose be fulfilled, on what parameters should fulfillment of purpose be measured and ultimately, what becomes of us when we cease to exist? It is the answers provided to these questions that shape the way man comports himself and relates with others in the society. Religion according to Rexach-Rivera (2014), is an organized collection of beliefs, cultural systems, and world views that relate humanity to an order of existence. Adherents to particular religions tend to behave or act in accordance with specific cultural practices, like the way they dress, speak, act in public and the festivals or 30

I. W. Yakubu, C. O. Akoja & B. I. Nomor ceremonies they celebrate. For instance the teenage Muslim girl is expected to dress appropriately in public places by wearing clothes that cover all parts of their bodies. Christians ladies are expected to put on head coverings in most assemblies at their times of worship.

However, understanding religion in the broad sense highlights the following important points about it in society: it plays a crucial role of giving a person cultural identity, by way of involvement in festivals, traditions, mythologies which form a part of the tangible and intangible heritage of the country. It helps in creating an ethical framework and also a regulator for values in day to day life, thereby building character of a person. Religion acts as an agency of socialization. Thus, religion helps in building values like love, empathy, respect, and harmony. It also plays a crucial role in establishing our connection to the divine and developing the belief that there is a supreme energy that acts as a regulator in our day to day lives. Thus, the components of prayer, chants, hymns, etc. create the spiritual bond. According to Sherwood (2018), 84% of the world's population identifies with a religious group. This has created a large base of ardent followers and faithful for the world's major religions. In Nigeria, the three major religions are Christianity, Islam and traditional worship.

Religious Pluralism implies a diverse variety and multiplicity of faiths found to exist simultaneously in a given society. For Onah (2014, p.2) it connotes “the existence of many religions in a particular society”. The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion defines “religious pluralism” as “the problem and opportunity of the simultaneous presence of different religious traditions within a single society”. There are some synonyms which can help one understand the meanings of religious pluralism. These include: “religious diversity”, “religious inclusivism”, “religious tolerance” and religious ecumenism”. Eck throws more light thus: “...Pluralism is not the sheer fact of plurality alone, but is active engagement with plurality. Pluralism and plurality are sometimes used as if they are synonymous. But plurality is just diversity, plain and simple... splendid, colourful, maybe even threatening. Such diversity does not, however, have to affect me. I can observe diversity as the cliché goes. But I have to participate in pluralism... pluralism requires the cultivation of public space where we all encounter one another” (Robinson (2004, p. 2). Fazel (1995 p.1) held that “Philosophically, religious pluralism is the theory that the great world religions constitute varying conceptions of, and responses to, the one ultimate, mysterious divine reality”. In other words, it is “...an affirmation of a set of values beyond (one’s) traditional allegiances” (Williams, 2007). Religious pluralism exists on the

need for harmonious co-existence between different faiths and the promotion of some level of unity, understanding, love and mutual respect between different religious bodies and their adherents. McLennan (2011, p. 5) agreed with Patel (2007) thus: Religious pluralists hold that people believing in different creeds and belonging to different communities need to learn to live together. Religious pluralism is neither mere coexistence nor forced consensus. It is a form of proactive cooperation that affirms the identity of the constituent communities while emphasizing that the wellbeing of each Afrev Vol.13 (1), S/NO 53, January, 2019 Copyright© International Association of African Researchers and Reviewer (IAARR), 2006-2019 www.afrevjo.net 30 Indexed African Journals Online: www.ajol.info and all depends on the health of the whole. It is the belief that the common good is best served when each community has a chance to make its unique contribution. The world needs these contributions made through inter-faith harmony and cooperation on the platform of plural-religious-partnership for sustainable development.

However, religious pluralism refers to the coexistence of multiple religions within a single society or community. It involves diversity which is the acceptance and recognition of different religious beliefs, practices, and traditions, promoting

inclusivity, tolerance, mutual respect and dialogue and cooperation.

Development: Any country that trivialises the development of its economy, is heading for a downward turn and poverty of its citizens. Education of citizens is one of the main drivers of development in any society. When educated, skills and knowledge acquired are utilized to create goods and services for economic development. According to Sid (2018), development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components. The purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population, and the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. Society is dynamic, thus the goal or objective of any country is to seek economic development as much as possible. According to Akah (2016), religious pluralism has inherent integrative powers to transform the society positively; however, historical experiences reveal that societies such as Nigeria which tie political battle for supremacy, socio-economic dominance and cultural superiority complex to their religions breed developmental crises. Whenever bigotry and divisiveness exists as in the case of Nigeria, there is development deficit. Development in Nigeria to a large extent has been stalemated because of the aftermaths of

religious pluralism. Due to the fact that Nigeria is a multi-religious nation, all regions and zones of the country have been affected by the consequences of religious pluralism. In the last decade there have been several cases of killings, kidnappings and bombing of public buildings and places, this has stalemated development in Nigeria.

Methodology

Comparative politics is a field of political science characterized by an empirical approach based on the comparative method. The study of comparative politics depends on conscious comparisons in the field of political experience, behaviour and processes. Arend Lijphart (1971) argued that there are four basic research designs and methodologies for the social sciences—experimentation, statistical analysis, case studies and the comparative method. Comparative politics has consciously moved out of its old frame of simple compare and contrast approach to analyze political phenomena in a larger matrix of relationships (Mohanty, 1975; Blondel, 1999; Beyme, 2008). qualitative approaches clarify the variations in kind. They try to map attributes, nature and pattern in the subject of study. They frequently consider the characteristics or various features of the subject of investigation.

The comparative method also requires detailed understanding of the cases that

are selected, especially if methods such as process-tracing are employed in the analysis of the cases. However, if those conditions can be met, then these comparisons can yield very rich insights into the causes of comparative method has been seen as studying similarities and differences as the basis for developing a 'grounded theory', testing hypotheses, inferring causality, and producing reliable generalizations. Many social scientists believe that research should be scientifically organized. The comparative method, they believe, offers them the best means to conduct 'scientific' research i.e., research characterized by precision, validity, reliability and verifiability and some amount of predictability. The American political scientist James Coleman, for example, often reminded his students, 'You can't be scientific if you're not comparing'. Swanson similarly emphasized that it was 'unthinkable' to think of 'scientific thought and all scientific research' without comparisons.

Comparative Research Design involves comparing two or more cases to identify similarities and differences, often used to understand social phenomena across different contexts or time periods. Hantrais and Mangen (2021). It centre on comparing two or more cases, whether its across different groups, countries or time periods. The primary goal is to identify and analyze the similarities and differences between the cases under

study. Qualitative research design was adopted as a method in this paper using document analysis for better understanding of the study.

Historical Antecedents of the Major Religious Groups in Nigeria and Ghana

African Traditional Religion

African traditional religion is the indigenous belief system that has been handed down from one generation of Africa to another by their forefathers. It originated from the African soil. It is a tolerant, accommodative and peaceful religion that fights those who attack it. Onyeidu (1999) collaborates the above view when he observed that the Traditional Africa Religion is a tolerant and non-missionary religion. Its adherents were not converted but members of the society born into the religious propaganda or bigotry. Before the advent of Islam and Christianity, the traditional religion had sustained Africans for generations. Some common features of African Traditional Religion include: belief in God (theism), a system of worship (cult) prayer, sacrifices and the clear distinction between the holy (sacred) and unholy (profane). In the traditional African society, instruments of social control include: taboos, vows, secret societies and the meticulous observation of customs and traditions.

Christianity

The word Christianity was first used in the New Testament at Antioch where the disciples of Jesus were first called Christians meaning the followers of Christ (Acts 11:26). Christianity is based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The first contact of Christianity in Nigeria was through the activities of a set of missionaries from Portugal in the 15th century (Ryder 1969), and was first preached in Benin and Warri (Okon, 2012). Unfortunately, the attempt failed partly because of the introduction of Atlantic slave trade. The Second attempt to plant Christianity in Nigeria “took place after the abolition of slave trade in 1807 by the British parliament. Immediately after the abolition, some ex-slave from Britain, America, Brazil and Nova Scotia were taken to Sierra-Leone for resettlement. From there some of the ex-slaves who were already Christians found their way to Badagry and other towns in hinterland” (Okon, 2012). According to Ajayi, (2000) “the year 1841 was particularly remarkable in the history of missionary enterprise in what is today called Nigeria. It was the year of the first Niger expedition which marked the beginning of the missionary movement to re-establish Nigeria”. In spite of all the difficulties encountered by the missionaries,” by the beginning of the 20th century, Christianity has been planted in most parts of Southern Nigeria” (Okwueze, 1995). The tenets of Christianity are recorded in the book of

Christians called the “Holy Bible”. The arrival of Christian religion like the Moslem religion in Africa has a far-reaching effect on the society. Thus, the successful planting of these two foreign religions brought in different cultures and values to Nigeria and Ghanawhich interrupted the existing socio-cultural order.

Islam

Islam as a religion was brought by Prophet Mohammed (Anyacho, 2005:221). Islam was introduced first into the kingdom of Kanem-Borno about the 10th century and to Hausa land about 14th century. The propagation of Islam was peaceful from inception through commercial activities and Muslim Cleric. The situation “changed in 1804 as Usman Dan Fodio, a Fulani Muslim Cleric came with the idea of purifying the religion. He waged a successful war known as Jihad from 1804-1810 which led to his conquering and Islamizing the Hausa states. The consequence was that it brought great changes which had far reaching effect on the religious, cultural, social, political and economic lives of the people (Onwubiko, 1973). Islam is both a religion and a culture, it claims total control of all aspects of life of its adherents both as individuals and as a group (Akah, 2016). The word “Islam” means submission to the will of God. The tenets of Islam are written in the holy book called Quran/ Koran.

IMPACTS OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA AND GHANA

Religious Pluralism and the Challenge of Development in Nigeria Religion and being religious is an integral part of human relations and social activities. Religious belief make people align with people of same belief and perpetuates the tenets of their belief and cultural systems. For this reason, the way humans relate and carry out social and economic activities may be affected positively or negatively by religion. According to Lee and Park (2015), while the positives enhances the political and economic development of nations, the negatives may impede development. For example, bilateral trade relations are strengthened among nations with cordial relationship on religious basis. Diplomatic ties are also strengthened, giving rise to concessions and other incentives that can strengthen the economic development of member nations, like less stringent measures in immigration policies, which allows citizens of member nation to move, live, study and work with less restrictions. There can also be bilateral exchange of expertise, professional and technical knowhow 34 I. W. Yakubu, C. O. Akoja& B. I. Nomor for industrial development. (Lee & Park, 2015; Apuwabi, 2018 or industrial development. (Lee & Park, 2015; Apuwabi, 2018) However, there are also negative consequences of religion on

human relations and economic development.

Firstly, countless wars and conflicts have had an overt or covert religious dimension throughout history right up to the present day. In the past few years, we've seen Islamic extremists waging war in the Middle East, a power struggle between Sunni and Shia across the region, the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar (Sherwood, 2018), the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria to mention a few. In Nigeria, the attendant conflicts of religious pluralism have continued to create division, hatred, unhealthy rivalry between peoples, making their coming together difficult. According to Akah (2016), the two main religions in the country- Islam and Christianity have not been able to co-exist peacefully for decades. This situation has led to the division of Nigerian Christians and Muslims as most of the Christians live in the South and Muslims in the North. This is enough to question the effectiveness of our religious belief. The overbearing effect of religious pluralism has continued to lead to decrease in investment opportunities from private individuals and other countries. No foreign investors or corporations would want to do business in an unreceptive environment. Every investor would like to do business where there is security of lives and property. But in the case of Nigeria, religious pluralism often generates violence in form of sporadic fighting, killings, destruction of

properties, looting of business private businesses and burning of public or business buildings. These will pose great loss to investors who are profit driven. This undoubtedly poses a challenge to development in the country (Gbadegesin & Adeyemi-Adejolu, 2016).

Again religious pluralism may be a threat to social integration because of the rigid stance of some fundamentalists. For instance, Christian fundamentalists believe that the only meaning of the bible is the literal meaning of the words and do not accept any alternative interpretation. Such a position becomes dangerous to the society when it turns into religious fanaticism. In this case, religious pluralism can hinder social cohesion and threaten social stability, as has been the case in Nigeria and some other parts of the world. The Christian approach to converting unbelievers, especially in southern Nigeria, has often led to religious riots – although riots have occurred in other parts of Nigeria as well. In a clear case of infringement of the fundamental human right of non-adherents, a particular Christian faction set ablaze the shrine of the traditional worshipers in Anambra State. They gathered and burned priceless artifacts, which have served as idols for the indigenous religions for centuries (Ndayambaje, 2013). This led to riots and social unrest. The Boko-Haram religious sect, a group opposed to Western education and values in place of full implementation of the Sharia law is

another good example of negative effect of religion. The mixing of religion with politics as experienced in Nigeria has not really helped the cause of governance. At the national level, many of Nigerian political officials are selected or elected on the basis of religion, not character and integrity. A good number of the electorates vote not on the competence of those vying for political offices but on religious sentiments. One of the reasons that made some persons vote for the former and incumbent President of Nigeria Goodluck Johnathan and Muhammadu Buhari was religion (Banjo, 2016). Political leaders have continued to exploit the country's religious and regional diversity to consolidate political base of support. The result is that Nigeria today is a deeply divided society in terms of religion and ravaging in gross underdevelopment, as seen in the standard of living of the citizens.

Religious Pluralism and National Development

One, guided by history, can positively affirm that the trends of de-secularization swooping across the world in the present era give much premium to the vital roles of religion in the society and in the lives of individual persons. It is sincerely clear that humanism, secularism and the atheists' world organized without God could not take the human person to the mirage paradise they promised humanity. In like manner, the philosophy of consumerism which wanted to thingify

the human persons also failed because man is more than a thing. Man is more than mere matter; he transcends “feelings” which atheistic psychologists summarize him to be. Man is a person created in the image of God (imago Dei); he is a religious being. The true unfolding of the human being and his environment must go the way of religion. Therefore, religion can bring about sustainable development in many ways.

First, religion has great multitude of adherents whose lives are shaped or directed by her tenets and teaching. Sustainable development is all about people, planet and prosperity. With the large populations that subscribe to religion for sound ethical living, religions can, with effortless ease, impact positively on the world’s clamor for sustainability. The large numbers that constitute memberships of different religions are already living agents that can transform human persons and the planet through the needed obedience to their leaders and doctrines. Recent examples are the synergy between religious leaders and the civil governance especially the health sector in the recent outbreak of Ebola in Nigeria. The adoption of hygienic principles against Ebola virus by the Catholic Church for instance, helped in a great measure to save lives. In the North, the imams’ teaching on the need for children’s immunization against polio was understood more readily than the clarion call by the political class.

Second, in her various ethnic nationalities, conflicts and wars have been avoided through instruments of conflict resolution in traditional societies such as oath-taking and covenant making. Peace is fundamental to sustainable development. Both Christianity and Islam preach peace. Peace goes beyond the absence of war to include those structures and systems that support authentic human existence. Religious leaders in the three religions are seen as conflict mediators; they enjoy special confidence among their followers. Consequently, they are able to influence their visions and actions. World peace can be achieved with the co-operation of religious leaders. There can be no development without peace. AFRREV VOL.13 (1), S/NO 53, JANUARY, 2019 Copyright© International Association of African Researchers and Reviewer (IAARR), 2006-2019 www.afrevjo.net 32 Indexed African Journals Online: www.ajol.info .

Again, one of the challenges of sustainable development in more countries than one is corruption. Corruption in its various forms and shapes are found in economy, political life, and culture and so on. When Nigerian citizens and specifically those in the political class take anticorruption doctrines of their religious affiliations seriously, moral decay would belong only to history books. Basically, all religions inspire people towards spiritual excellence and foster the common good of all. Common good for all is a key

ingredient in social stability and sustainable national development (Onah 2014, p.7). Another name for corruption is moral depravity. Morality is essentially fostered by religion. As Narayanan (2013) wrote: national development based as it is on an overtly moral call, is most likely of all development concepts to be empirically open and responsive to collaboration with religion. Religion is undoubtedly one of the major global authorities and arbiters of morality, and dialogue with sustainable development is not only possible but necessary to enable the humanitarian and ecological work that preoccupies both equally. Sustainable development is not enough... religion must be appreciated as one of its important partners to provide the moral force that it needs (p. 133). In addition, Religions go beyond the Church, mosque or shrine to meet the needs of human person. Auza (2015, pp. 8-9) testified to this thus: "Religions and its institutions care about the whole of the human person: striving for authentic human development, they do not compartmentalize development, but work for a well-rounded flourishing of each human person. Because human progress is an integral part of their vision and mission, besides erecting places of worship they also construct community-building centres, hospitals, schools and universities". He stressed that Religions work to protect life and to empower the weak and the oppressed. They help populations develop their natural

resources responsibly and protect them from the exploitation of powerful economic and political interests. These Religions, he emphasized, are creative in lifting the poor out of poverty in all its forms, in particular in helping those who are trying to escape the ravages of hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance. They are not afraid, even to the point of great sacrifices, to fight for justice and raise awareness among the powerful and the rich on the social ends of power and wealth and the universal destination of the goods of the world. He concluded that locally rooted, religious leaders and members, have first-hand knowledge of the many forms of poverty and inequalities.

Universally networked, they are effective advocates of causes dear to the United Nations and to the human family as a whole, like the eradication of extreme poverty and the promotion of sustainable development respectful to the environment. In Nigeria, the successive civilian governments have failed in many respects to fulfill their electioneering campaign promises and deliver the democracy dividends to the people. The military regimes that suffocated development agenda in many ways remain the darkest chapters of Nigeria's history.

Nigeria

Religions in Nigeria have contributed immensely to progress in various spheres

of the national life. These contributions to education, justice and peace, health services, rule of law, environmental preservation, etc were not done by religions to supplant the national rulership, rather by doing so, they were fulfilling their divine mandate. Nigeria is a country with a diverse religious landscape, comprising of Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. While this diversity can foster tolerance and understanding, it also poses challenges. Historically, the interactions between these religions have been marked by divisiveness, hatred, and violence, leading to developmental deficits. As Yinger (1970) observed: Even in the healthiest and wealthiest and most rational of societies, however, secular responses cannot eliminate the problems of suffering, evil and hostility. Realizing the gap between their hopes and the realities of their existence, men everywhere seek to AFRREV VOL.13 (1), S/NO 53, JANUARY, 2019 Copyright© International Association of African Researchers and Reviewer (IAARR), 2006-2019 www.afrevjo.net 33 Indexed African Journals Online: www.ajol.info close it by a leap of faith that says: this need not, this will not, be true; sometime, some place, somehow, suffering and evil will be defeated (p. 10). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and its vision to eradicate those conditions which rob the human person of dignity got some boost of achieving its targets with the contributions of religions

and faith-based organizations. With the expiration of the MDGs in 2015, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 and 169 associated targets were recently adopted in the meeting of the United Nations (UN) held at its headquarters in New York from 25 – 27 September, 2015 by the Heads of State and Government and High Representatives. President Mohammed Buhari of Nigeria and representatives of Religious bodies attended the meeting. The new agenda and targets was to come into effect on 1 January, 2016 and will guide integrated actions for the realization of all sustainability dimensions for the next fifteen years. The agenda focus on people (to end extreme poverty), planet (to protect it from degradation), prosperity (to ensure prosperous life for all), peace (to foster just and inclusive societies free from fear and violence) and partnership (to mobilize the means necessary for the successful execution of the agenda)

Ghana

Ghana, on the other hand, provides an exciting context to explore the dynamics of religious pluralism. The country's accommodative nature has shaped religious pluralism, promoting societal cohesion, interfaith relations, and religious freedom.³ Ghana's experience suggests that religious pluralism can be a positive force for development when managed inclusively.

Religious, social, cultural, and political barriers hinder effective communication and collaboration among different religious groups, leading to tensions and conflicts as well as exclusivity and intolerance resulting in some religious groups in Ghana exhibit exclusivist tendencies, leading to intolerance and discrimination against other groups.

Divisiveness and Conflict

In Nigeria, the interactions between Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion have been marked by divisiveness, hatred, bigotry, and violence, leading to developmental deficits.

Intra- and Inter-Religious Conflicts

Ghana experiences more intra-religious conflicts, whereas Nigeria faces more inter-religious conflicts. These conflicts can lead to social unrest, displacement, and economic losses.

Exclusivity and Intolerance

Religious pluralism can sometimes lead to exclusivity, where one religion is prioritized over others, fostering intolerance and discrimination. This can hinder social cohesion and national development.

Politicization of Religion

In Nigeria, religion has been politicized, leading to the manipulation of religious sentiments for political gain. This can

create social tensions and undermine democratic institutions.

In Nigeria, the challenges are more pronounced

1. Divisiveness, hatred, bigotry, and violence: The interactions between Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion in Nigeria have been marred by these negative factors, leading to developmental deficits.

2. Politicization of religion: Religion has been used as a tool for political gain in Nigeria, leading to social tensions and undermining democratic institutions.

3. Intra- and inter-religious conflicts: Nigeria experiences frequent conflicts between different religious groups, as well as within the same religious group, leading to social unrest, displacement, and economic losses.

Findings

Religious pluralism exists on the need for harmonious co-existence between different faiths and the promotion of some level of unity, understanding, love and mutual respect between different religious bodies and their adherents. However, the study found that Ghana's accommodative approach to religious diversity, which emphasizes interfaith dialogue and cooperation, is associated with greater social cohesion and economic growth. In contrast in Nigeria, religion has been politicized, leading to

the manipulation of religious sentiments for political gain. This has created social tensions and undermine democratic institutions. Nigeria's more fragmented approach, which often prioritizes the interests of one religious group over others and Intra- and inter-religious conflicts led to frequent conflicts between different religious groups, as well as within the same religious group, leading to social unrest, displacement, and economic losses and overall exacerbates tensions and undermines National Development.

Conclusion

Overall, religious pluralism is actually essential for building inclusive, diverse, and vibrant societies by promoting mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation. It also has tendencies of addressing social, economic, and political challenges and can actually be leveraged as a tool for national development in several ways.

This study however, highlights the complex impacts of religious pluralism and national development in Nigeria and Ghana. While religious diversity presents challenges, it also offers opportunities for growth, cooperation, and peace. To harness these benefits, policymakers in both countries should prioritize interfaith dialogue, education, and inclusive governance. However, more than ever, religion is in dialogue with science and structures that promote human prosperity

and planet's futuristic survival. Since religion has a lot to offer human beings in their physical, social and spiritual dimensions, I think religion should be called permanently to some partnership with the public sectors for sustainable national development of both countries that can lead man to himself, to his neighbor, to his environment and ultimately to God. This, Religious pluralism can achieve through the platforms and bridges of ecumenism tolerance and mutual respect.

Recommendations

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society organizations to promote interfaith dialogue, understanding, and cooperation.

However, it is essential to address such challenges as Conflicts and Tension, Inequality and Discrimination and Social Fragmentation to ensure and promotes peaceful coexistence, social cohesion, and national development in Nigeria and Ghana.

It is therefore recommended that:

1. Government should Establish Interfaith Dialogue Platforms: Governments and civil society organizations should establish platforms for interfaith dialogue and cooperation, bringing together leaders and representatives from different religious groups.

2. Promote Religious Education: Educational institutions should incorporate religious education into their curricula, promoting understanding, tolerance, and cooperation among students from different religious backgrounds.

3. Foster Inclusive Governance: Governments should prioritize inclusive governance, ensuring that policymakers and officials represent diverse religious backgrounds and perspectives.

4. Encourage Community Engagement: Community-based initiatives should be encouraged, promoting interfaith cooperation and social cohesion at the grassroots level.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria and Ghana can harness the benefits of religious pluralism, promoting national development, peace, and stability.

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