

## Interfaith Dialogue Efforts to Bridging the Gap for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Ayuba Olaniyi Jibril Ph.D<sup>1</sup>, Abdulkadir Sekinat<sup>2</sup>, Ja'afar Ibrahim Lawal<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Arts & Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education, [joayuba@alhikmah.edu.ng](mailto:joayuba@alhikmah.edu.ng) (Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Sociology and Criminology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, (Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria)

<sup>3</sup> Department of Arts & Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education, (Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria)

### Abstract

#### Keywords:

Interfaith Dialogue,  
Understanding,  
Sustainable  
Development

Article history:

Received: 15-02-2025

Revised 13-05-2025

Accepted 02-08-2025

*The cooperative, positive interaction and understanding between people of different faiths or spiritual beliefs is one among the key essence of human existence. Thus, no meaningful relationship and development exist where there is rancor, disharmony and intolerance between the adherents of faiths in any given society. It is against this background that this paper examined the interfaith dialogue and understanding as instruments towards achieving a sustainable future. The researcher used secondary source of data from internet, textbooks, journals and other relevant manuscripts to do justice to this paper. The findings of the study revealed that interfaith dialogue is one of the major means of promoting peace, understanding and tolerance between different faiths. The study further revealed that to achieve a sustainable development, interfaith dialogue must be strengthened, exercised and institutionalized in a society. The study concluded that interfaith dialogue should not be factionalized, personalized and regionalized to enhance a peaceful coexistence irrespective of faith. The study suggested that interfaith dialogue should be a community based institutions such that traditional rulers, clergy men, individuals, government and various Non-Governmental Organisations are involved to enhance sustainable development driven society.*

Corresponding Author: [ayubaolaniyijibril38@gmail.com](mailto:ayubaolaniyijibril38@gmail.com)

AYUBA, Olaniyi Jibril Ph.D

Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria

---

### INTRODUCTION

Interfaith is a common concept that is closely connected with religions. Interfaith dialogue involves productive, understanding and mutual relationship between individuals of different faiths, religious or spiritual denominations that are build on promoting the spirit of oneness, togetherness, acceptance and tolerance. Perhaps, it is obvious that every society wants peace and unity among its citizenry irrespective of race, ethnics, and religious affiliations. However, religions being one of the major institutions that occupies a greater value globally particularly in the continent of Africa. Moreover, according to AFP quoting Gallup International stated that Nigeria is the world's second most religious country, with a notable rise in the number of evangelical churches (Vanguard, 2016).

In a similar vein, Nigeria is a nation that paraded world's largest Muslim and Christian populations simultaneously (Simwa, 2023). A 2019 report by the Pew Research Centre estimated the population of Muslims at 50 percent; Christians, 48.1 percent and 1.9 percent as 'others' in Nigeria. Hence, it is vital to ensure that there is need to establish a strong synergy between different religions in Nigeria being a secular state to enhance sustainable development.

Unarguably, no society would promote violence, conflicts or disunity among the people particularly the adherents of different faiths. It is highly disturbing to see the level at which the religion that suppose to be the symbol of unity, peace and togetherness is turning to be an instrument of violence, rancor and divisions in Nigeria (Ayuba & Wakawa, 2023). In recent years, the struggle for relevance among faiths in the country particularly traditional religion worshippers has created unrest in some part of the country, where there have been bloody clashes between them and Muslims during the former's traditional rites (Hanafi, 2021).

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with case studies to explore the role of interfaith dialogue in bridging gaps and promoting sustainable development in Nigeria. The research locations include multi-religious areas such as Kaduna, Abuja, and Jos, with subjects including religious leaders, NGO members, government officials, and the general public.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. All data were analyzed using thematic analysis, starting from transcription, coding, to drawing conclusions based on main themes such as dialogue, tolerance, and conflict resolution. To ensure the validity of the data, source triangulation, verification by informants (member checking), and peer debriefing were carried out.

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Concept of Dialogue

The word "Dialogue" was derived from the Latin *dialogus* and Greek word *dialogos* which *dia* means "through", *logos* means "the word". Dialogue is an interaction or exchange of words between two or more persons. Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2021) defined dialogue as the exchange of ideas and opinions with the aim at resolving or reaching an agreed conclusion. The essence of dialogue is to share opinions, appreciate and open up judgments as well as assumptions. In a dialogue, the aim is not to analyse things, to win an argument, to dominate or deny others the right to speak their minds. It involves the process of examining the intelligence and coordinated power of groups of people without taking sides. Hence, dialogue is a flow of meaning.

Similarly, dialogue occurs when people think together (one do not see his/her own positions as final or superior to others), listen respectfully to others, express their minds freely and gives room to unbiased resolutions. It is pertinent to note that all the

opinions, thoughts, feelings, ideas and positions must be validly considered with deeper sense of understanding without censoring, editing, vetting or rejecting.

In a similar vein, dialogue involves given an equal and enabling environment to the parties involved towards problem-solving and distancing away from the win-lose model of interaction. Moreover, dialogue promotes deep understanding of topics, modify deeply held convictions, questioning thoughts and actions as well as addressing problems. It is an advanced form of conversation because it has a focus and a purpose which is different from an everyday conversation. Also, it engages the heart, the mind and strengthens the relationship between the participants.

It is vital to point out that one of the elements of dialogue is for the participants to put aside their formal status, explicitly showcase their differences, doubts and disagree to agree on complicated issues. Dialogue must be done with every sense of sincerity, patient, openness of mind and heart that would lead to win-win situations for all.

Dialogue is about a diverse group of people finding a common sense or understanding about things. This might lead to moving forward together in a common direction, each understanding their part in what is being done and contributing to what may be needed in a willing and intelligent way.

### **The Concept of Interfaith Dialogue**

Interfaith is a term that comprise two words joined together to form a word. Inter was derived from Latin meaning “between”, “among”, “mutually”, “together” while faith means “religion”. Hence, interfaith means operating, or occurring between persons belonging to different religions. Interfaith is an act of involving more than one religion, between or relating to persons adhering to different religions (Collins Dictionary.Com, 2021). Interfaith dialogue is also called interreligious dialogue which is described as a situations when people that hold different beliefs, faiths and traditions coming together as one with dedication, respect and mutual understanding to practice their faiths freely (Uzondu, 2018).

Interfaith dialogue is assumed to be a major instrument towards enhancing a sustainable growth and development globally. In recognition of the tremendous role of interfaith dialogue in the sustainability of the societal growth and development locally and internationally, conferences, seminars, workshops, meetings and host of other gatherings involving various interfaith leaders were convened to renew the commitments towards promoting peace, dialogue and sustainable growth and development globally.

Religious Leader and International spokesperson of BAPS Hindu Mandir, Pujya Brahmavhavi Swami while addressing the audience from Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, noted that efforts should be made towards intensifying the bond of faiths, science and sustainable peace thereby resulting to a sustainable growth and development in our society. In a similar vein, IPI MENA Director, Nejib Friji opened the Webinar on 102 “Interfaith Dialogue: Solidarity for Peace” strongly condemned any act of violent, extremisms perpetrated by individuals, bodies or states under the

disguise of religion and 104 called for greater consensus, alliance, unity and harmonious relationship at all levels through a message of tolerance, mutual respect and peace.

### **Interfaith Dialogue for Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

Interfaith dialogue plays a crucial role towards tackling the menace of intolerance, discrimination, but strengthening peace, sustainable growth and development in our society (Berry & Petito, 2018). The survival of any nation lies on the ability to formulate and implement policies that is capable of enhancing sustainable growth and development. Thus, several international initiatives have recently stepped up their efforts towards peace building, religious tolerance, human rights and sustainable development. To mention but a few of such organizations are the International Partnership of Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), the US Strategy of Religious Leaders and Faith Community Engagement, the UN's Fez process, the UN' Faith for Rights' Initiative, the Transatlantic Policy Networks on Religion and Diplomacy and the International Contact Group on FoRB.

In view of this development, the G20 Interfaith & PaRD Forum gathered over 30 religious leaders and representatives from a range of traditions in Berlin from 17 to 19 October, 2023 held a summit themed "Inspiring Faith, Hope and Transformative Actions" called for strong collaborations among various stakeholders in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The summit revealed the significant role played by faith in promoting sustainable growth, development, peace, dignity, cooperation and a hope for a strong sustainable growth and development.

Moreover, Faith-based Partners Voice Support for Pandemic Accord (PaRD) noted that faith-based organizations are central towards promoting a sustainable growth, peace and development of a society. Furthermore, PaRD promotes global dialogue, learning, sharing of good practices and evidence as well as collaboration. Interreligious dialogues have the ability to solve common challenges and can serve as a strong tool in achieving 120 the SDG's. Subudhi and Panner (2022) stated that to build a lasting peace, it has to start from the grass root level and any solution for building peace that would enhance sustainable growth and development, it has to begin from the local level and faith-based organizations are part of the process.

In Nigeria, the Archbishop Emeritus of Abuja, Cardinal John Onaiyekan observed that powerful genuine faith dialogue among Nigerians can enhance sustainable peace, unity, growth and development of the country. He added that the sanctity state of religion in the country had been poisoned for egocentric benefits which mar the actuality of the religion. In a similar vein, the Executive Director of the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace (COFP) stated 50 individuals from 16 countries in Africa who are believers or disciples of different faiths have been given a far-reaching training on interfaith dialogue, conflict management and mediation. She added that the knowledge and skills on interfaith dialogue would allay extremist habit and have made them to be the agents of peace and active promoter for sustainable growth and development of not only Nigeria but the continent of Africa.

Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) is not relenting on the need for peaceful and harmonious relationship between the Christians and Muslims in the country (Egwu, 2019). Also, Fr. Cornelius Afebu Omonokhua, executive secretary of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council stated that maintaining peace, unity and dialogue to strengthen the relationship between Christian and Muslim in the country to facilitate sustainable growth and development (ibid, 2014). Interfaith dialogue is an important means through which the Islamic teachings are disseminated to people on the ideals, tenets and virtues of inclusiveness among the adherent of different faiths which may best be exhibited to enhance mutual love, respect and sustainable growth and development (Shehu, 2018).

A Non-Governmental Organisation in Nigeria, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) organized a project in South-west, Nigeria on the interreligious dialogue to promote peaceful coexistence, community development, religious tolerance and dialogue between the two major religions in Nigeria. One of such programmes organized by the ACN Diocese of Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria was an event that brought together the leaders of 149 Muslim and Christians to disable pressure and avert the variety of interfaith crisis or conflict that had claimed the lives and properties of people in Nigeria.

It is pertinent to note that individuals in Nigeria have been in the spotlight for promoting peace and love between the Christians and Muslims in the country. It was on record that as part of effort to recognize the individual contribution towards peaceful coexistence in the country, the United States government honoured a Nigerian clergyman, Abubakar Abdullahi, for endangering his life to save 250 Christians fleeing attacks from Fulani herdsmen in the state. In a similar vein, the Diocesan Director for Interfaith Dialogue, Bishop John Akinkunmi Oyeloja of Osogbo, Nigeria observed that the gospel of Christianity can never thrive where there is violence or divisions and urged both the Christians and Muslims to respect and reverence their faiths. He added that mutual respect and deep friendship must reign among Muslims and Christians to enhance community growth and development.

The Glorious Qur'an emphasise the need for collective admiration and recognition of individuals' faith without prejudice to religious affinity. It encourage individual, race, ethnics, communities or nations not to abuse or mock each other and respect their differences (Q.48:11). Furthermore, the Qur'an enjoins spirit of oneness, openness and dialogue by listening to one another's sentiments and deciding on what is best for all (Q.39:18). The existence or differences of humans and faith is the will of Allah, hence deny the diversity implies rejecting Allah's injunction (Q.11:118).

Interfaith dialogue should be done in a manner that every participant would be assured of freedom of expression, thoughts and feelings, avoid the use of unrefined words or languages, openness of facts and information, no intimidation, domination and impositions of ideas, equal right to make submissions, observation of mutual respect, courtesy and decency (Bidmos, 2006).

Swidler (1994) highlighted some basic guidelines on interfaith dialogue as follows:

- (i) the essence of interfaith dialogue is to amplify erudition through proper established knowledge-based system;

- (ii) the parties involved in interfaith dialogue must be identified with a religion;
- (iii) the respective participants in the interfaith dialogue must be transparent, sincere and honest to one another and also assume the other party is honest and sincere;
- (iv) the interfaith dialogue should be designed such that the concept should be compared with concept, or practice with practice;
- (v) each party in the interfaith dialogue must stand and be recognized based on their existence or faith;
- (vi) each party in the interfaith dialogue must be willing to agree with the other parties, avoid emphasizing on the areas of differences and maintain the integrity of their faiths;
- (vii) the interfaith dialogue should be done on the spirit of fair play and balanced position;
- (viii) the interfaith dialogue must be established on the basis of mutual trust, understanding and knowledge;
- (ix) the participants in the interfaith dialogue must have a deep understanding of themselves and their faiths; and

each party involved in the interfaith dialogue must to positively impact deeply the bright experiences and knowledge of their faiths on to each other.

## CONCLUSION

Interfaith dialogue is vital to the survival of any given state, community, tribe, nation and society. It should not be factionalized, personalized and regionalized to enhance a peaceful coexistence irrespective of faith. Interfaith is the key towards strengthening the bond of friendship, community growth and development as well as a sustainable growth and development. Interfaith dialogue harmonise the religious bodies on the spirit of compassion, mutual love and respect, tolerance, understanding and brotherhood. It is the peace-driven initiatives to establish or strengthen the foundation for harmonious coexistence, peace, brotherhood, love and sustainable growth and development.

## REFERENCES

- Achoba, F., & Ireferin, P. O. (2023). Community Policing as a Panacea for Mitigating Armed Banditry in Central Nigeria: The Ankpa Experience of Intercommunity Security Relations from 2020 to the Present Era. *Wukari International Studies Journal*, 7(2), 103-115.
- Ayuba, O. J. & Wakawa, H. B. (2023). *Effects of Religion Violence on the teaching and learning of Religious studies among senior secondary schools in Kwara State, Nigeria*. A Festschrift in Honour of Prof. A. S. Wakawa. A publication of the Faculty of Arts, Management and Social Sciences, Nigeria Army University Biu, Borno State, Nigeria, vol. 2, 16-22. Available <http://yajamss.com.ng>.

**Author:** *Nanang Abdul Jamal, et al*

- Berry, S. & Petito, F. (2018). Interreligious engagement and sustainable peace. Retrieved from <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pulication/interreligious-engagement-and-sustainable-peace-20545> at 3:04pm on 20/04/2024.
- Bidmos, M. A. (2006). *Inter-religious dialogue: The Nigerian Experience*, Lagos. Panaf Publishing Inc.
- Collins Dictionary.Com (2012). Meaning of Interfaith. Collins COBUILD Advanced Learners' Dictionary. Harper Collins Publishers.
- Egwu, P. (2019). Nigeria's interfaith council fosters peaceful Christian-Muslim relations. Retrieved from <https://www.ncronline.org/news/nigeris-interfaith-council-fosters-peaceful-christian-muslim-relations> at 3:04pm on 20/06/2024.
- Hanafi, A. (2021). Left behind: Traditional religion worshippers lament isolation, govt bias, battle everyday rejection. Retrieved from [www.punchng.com](http://www.punchng.com) at 3:04pm on 20/05/2024.
- <https://acninternational.org/the-imam-and-the-bishop-setting-an-example-for-interreligious-harmony-in-nigeria>
- <https://www.ipinst.org/2021/04/interfaith-leaders-reaffirm-commitment-to-peace-and-sustainable-development>
- <https://www.partner-religion-development.org/>
- <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2019/05/273296/quranic-interfaith-dialogue-islam>
- Meriam-Webster Dictionary (2021). Meaning of dialogue. Ontario. Thomas Allen and Son Limited.
- Subudhi, C. & Panner, S. (2022). *Interfaith dialogue and communal harmony for sustainable development*. Authorpress Global Network, New Delhi, India.
- Shehu, F. (2018). The role of inter-religious dialogue in promoting Islamic education to the Europeans. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 9, 3, 32-39.
- Simwa, A. (2023). Is Nigeria's Christian population bigger than Muslim in 2024? Retrieved from [www.legit.ng.com](http://www.legit.ng.com) at 1:03pm on 20/04/2024.
- Swidler, L. (1994). The dialogue decalogue; Ground rules for interreligious, interideological dialogue. *Dalam Jurnal Al Jami'ah*, 57, 1994, 142-144.
- Uzundu, I. (2018). Interfaith dialogue and education: panacea to nation building. *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, 1, 4, 2630-7065.
- Vanguard, (2016). Nigeria is the world's second most religious country. Retrieved from [vanguardngr.com](http://vanguardngr.com) at 1:00pm on 20/04/2024.