

## **Religio-Cultural Contributions to Peace and Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

*Nigeria has over the years lacked peace and consequently economic growth which are important for sustainable development. Nigeria is a country with high religious consciousness, and as such, one will think that this will boast the moral lives of the citizens and bring about peace and sustainable development. But the reverse seems to be the case in Nigeria. It is quite disheartening to know that, Nigeria has been bedeviled by all sorts of religiously cum politically based restiveness and insurgencies thereby truncating all efforts and policies geared towards sustainable development in Nigeria. Nigeria is a pluralistic society. This is evident in ethnicity, religion and culture; the three concepts that are intertwined and yet different. The objective of this paper is to explore the Religio-cultural contributions to peace and sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper adopted descriptive phenomenology as its method. This is because not much empirical studies have been carried out on religion and sustainable development dialectics. The study reveals that different religions in Nigeria have ethical standards and bequeath principles of good behaviour to their adherents. Thus, when religious and ethical values of religion are well harnessed and disseminated in the society, an enabling ground would be put in*

*place for sustainable development. The study concluded that the study of religion and culture is indispensable for sustainable development in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Religion, Culture, Peace and Sustainable development.

### **Introduction**

According to Oduaran (1996), war, hatred, bitterness, rivalries, carnage, conspiracy and treacherous plots are some of the most conspicuous alternative concept of peace. Peace is desirable in creating the harmonious relationship needed to ensure meaningful sustainable development. Peace is considered a desirable goal for everyone. It is a great idea that the world has continued to dream about. Peace enable us develop in people a set of dynamics and purposeful attitudes which assist the beneficiaries to search for and uphold the value of justice and human rights. Hence, there has been frantic effort aimed at discerning the world and promoting world peace.

The greatest threat to world peace arises from the fact that conflict is an inevitable part of life. Ogonor (2004) observed that it is a part of human nature to disagree. However, it is important and instructive to note that it is the management of conflict rather than its occurrence that has been the bane of effort aimed at promoting peace as well as attaining developing a peaceful environment needed to ensure proper sustainable and meaningful development in the world as a whole and in Nigeria in particular. This explains why Jegede (2000) said that the United Nation came into existence to stabilize international relations and give peace a more sense of foundation. Nigeria is a pluralistic society. This is evident in ethnicity, religion and culture; the three concepts that are intertwined and yet different.

The role of religion in society is definitely a dynamic one. The relationship between both religion and society is always changing. Religion

affects different societies in different ways and different forms, causing the forms of society to change according to a change in religion. Religion regulates man's conduct and promotes good relationship between man and his fellow man and between man and the supernatural being. Thus, religion can be a driving force in society, but as a reactionary rather than in a radical way.

Religion (especially, Christianity) provides control on the use of coercive power. According to Uche (2011), religion does not only raise values to the position of ultimate concern but also serve as an evaluative factor in politics. And, by emphasizing common values, religion may reduce the sharpness of tensions that result from the pursuit of scarce values. It is quite disheartening to know that Nigeria has been bedeviled by all sorts of religiously cum politically based restiveness and insurgencies thereby truncating all efforts and policies geared towards sustainable development in Nigeria. The truth is that religion is not a tool of intolerance and instability. Rather, it has been wrongly applied and manipulated by their leaders for their selfish interests and ends. Suffice to observe that peace is a necessary condition for sustainable development hence religion have a crucial role to play in this regard by inculcating in their adherents the values of violent conflict pervading the Nigerian society and the world in general as the states:

It is now widely accepted that violent conflict is the major hindrance to the development of the African continent and Nigeria in particular. It inflicts human suffering through death, destruction of livelihoods, constant displacement and insecurity. Violent conflict disrupts the process of production, creates condition for pillage of the country's resources and diverts their application from development purposes to servicing war.

Traditionally, religion is so woven into the cultural fabric of the society. Like many social phenomena, religion is not a static and pre-ordained given. On the contrary, it is such a complex and relative phenomenon that it hardly makes sense to discuss it outside specific socio-historical contexts. The close linkage between religion and culture implies that changes in the later may occasion shift in the nature, character and composition of the former. Thus, this work shows the factors that can contribute to peace and sustainable development in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **1. Religion**

Ugwu (2002) stated that a definition of religion that would include every aspect of religion both past and present is really difficult to find. Again, Agha (2012) posited that religion has been defined in various ways and some scholars have gone a step further to classify the definitions according to various schools of thought. As a result of this, different disciplines have defined religion according to their world view. In this regard, religion could be defined as a total outlook on life and conduct based on a system of beliefs or convictions that a Supreme Being exist as the source of all that is (Mason, 1996). For Thouless (1961) religion is the belief in an ever living God, that is in a divine mind and will ruling the universe and holding moral relations with mankind. Durkheim in Scharf (1970) said that religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a church all those who adhere to them. Idowu (1973) asserted that the term religion came from European word. It refers to the transcendental reality of faith, the inner reality of faith, rituals and ceremonies through which the adherents communicate with the Deity. Okwueze (2003) opined that religion is a means of regulating a pattern of life of a group of people, which also

embraces experience, beliefs and knowledge of man that helps him to understand himself in relation to others, his social, physical and metaphysical worlds. Lastly, Gbenda (2006) saw religion as man's experience, awareness, attitude, recognition, conception, and understanding of the experience of the deity or the multiplicity of spiritual beings and his interaction with them. These definitions of religion will show in the work its contributions to peace and sustainable development in Nigeria.

## 2. Culture

According to Udu (2002) the term culture is broader. For human beings to build houses, cultivate farms, construct bridges, dams or electricity generating plants, provide qualitative formal education, manage successful businesses, control population growth, prevent or cure sicknesses and diseases, ensure social trust, good governance, law and order, they need an established albeit critically receptive body of ideas and beliefs, designs, techniques and methodologies, rules and regulations which is culture. But for culture, with globalization, information and communication technology, men would have lost all knowledge of even the basic means of survival such that within a short time the entire species would disappear forever. Having stressed the need for culture, Ayandele (2005) sees culture as what man interposes between himself and his environment in order to ensure his security and survival. Ukeje (1992) sees culture as the totality of people's ways of life as deduced from material and non-material aspects of their lives such as clothing, values, beliefs, thoughts, feelings and customs. The word culture is so rich and all-encompassing that both sociologists and anthropologists have defined in multifarious ways. Adamson (1972) describes cultures as the integral system of learned behaviour patterns which are the characteristic of the members of a society and which are not the result of biological inheritance. In other words, culture does not come from human genes, but rather it is

learnt and taught. This bears with the etymology of the word culture as colere, which means 'to cultivate' or 'to practice.' The human person is therefore the author and architect of culture. He does not participate passively in the shaping and transmitting of culture, it is an active participation. Culture in this work will show its contributions to peace and sustainable development in Nigeria.

### 3. **Peace**

Uche (2009) asserts that, peace is a household name in the family, Christian church, non-Christian bodies and societies. Peace can be seen as harmonious relation, freedom from disputes and absence of mental stress and anxiety. Peace can also be seen as a state of reconciliation between parties of variance. To be at peace is to be quiet, undisturbed, not in a state of war or commotion and to live well. According to Ibeanu (2007), peace is a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and in the wider international community. Iwe (1991) asserts that "peace is the resultant effect of balance and harmony among the constituent elements and forces of an organism for man as an individual moral being; it is the price of righteousness and goodwill. Thus, peace may be seen as the highest political good which tends to consist in the harmonious operation of the forces of social life. Peace remains an empty word except it rest upon that order that is founded on truth; built upon justice, nurtured and given life by charity and brought into functional effect under the auspices of freedom. In this work, it will be shown how religion and culture contributes to peace and sustainable development in Nigeria.

### 4. **Sustainable Development**

In an attempt to define sustainable development, some scholars have focused on various aspects of sustainable development. Sustainable development basically refers to meeting the need of the present generation

without compromising the needs of future generations. According to Human Development Report (1991) sustainable development is that development that is participatory and people centered, where men, women; and children must be the center of attention with development woven around people, not people on development. This shows that development must be participatory, that is, it must involve local people in decision that affect their lives which must improve healthcare, education, and social wellbeing. According to Ibe (2003), it is a form of development that enables nature's gifts to be used without resulting in overexploitation. Ntamu, Abia, Edinyang and Eneji (2014) sees it as a process of and ideologies where national government implement and develop policies and programme that are lasting and continuous which are beneficial to the present generation while still being useful to the generation yet-unborn. Thus, sustainable development centers on the ambitious agenda that aims to end poverty, promote prosperity and protect the environment. In this work, the contributions of culture on sustainable development in Nigeria will be viewed.

## **Religio-Cultural Contributions to Peace and Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

### **1. Religious Leaders and Institutions**

Religion can contribute to sustainable development in Nigeria through mediation and peacemaking by religious leaders and institutions. For example, the World Council of Churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches mediated the short-lived peace agreement in Sudan. In South Africa, various churches were at the vanguard of the struggle against apartheid and the peaceful transition. Today, the field of religious peacemaking is also maturing. With more sophisticated reflections of its growing experience, a body of knowledge is developing. Proudly in Nigeria, there are keys of success in interfaith dialogue as a mechanism for resolving violent conflicts. This lifts up the unique elements of religious

peace building, with a particular focus on apology and forgiveness, and also emphasizes the importance of keeping issues of social justice front and centre, so that religious peace building does not merely make the participants feel better.

## 2. **Cultural Logic**

In order to re-establish social solidarity in war-affected communities, a key step would be to find a way for members of these communities to “re-inform” themselves with a cultural logic that emphasizes sharing and equitable resource distribution. This, in effect, means emphasizing the importance of reviving progressive cultural attitudes and values that can foster a climate within which can flourish. An integral part of the process of achieving positive peace is the need to promote social solidarity. In an important sense, peace is not just the absence of violence, but the presence of social solidarity. Achieving social solidarity means that members of the society once again begin to recognize each other as fellow human beings and being to share a concern in the common welfare and wellbeing of each other. Social solidarity makes sense because only by ensuring the security, safety and wellbeing of other people can people hope to secure our own security, safety and wellbeing. Of course, to emphasize the need to foster social solidarity is to recognize the inter-connectedness of each human being.

## 3. **Culture**

According to (UN, 1999) culture in development means actions that foster a culture through education, to the promotion of sustainable economic and social development, promotion of respect for all human rights to ensuring equality between women and men, democratic participation, understanding, tolerance and solidarity, support of participatory communication and the free-flow of information and knowledge to promote international peace and security.

Therefore, if culture is placed at the heart of our strategies, it is a condition for sustainable development, and a powerful driving factor for its achievement. As Udo (2004) noted, it is practically impossible to pursue development in any sphere of human experience without thinking and acting culture. This is partly responsible for the disconnection between culture and development in Nigeria. As many cities today use cultural heritage and cultural events and institutions to improve their image, stimulate urban development and attract visitors as well as investment to their economies, if Nigeria will adhere to these measures, the country will remain the giant of Africa and also on the global success story of development.

#### 4. **Religious Consciousness**

The basic trait of African societies and Nigeria in particular is high religious consciousness. This reality is expressed in a complexity of rituals and symbols which together pervade the entire field of human existence. Referring to this religious consciousness of Africans, Mbiti (1960) stated thus: it is religion, more than anything else, which colours their understanding of the universe and their empirical participation in the universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon. To be is to be religious in a religious universe. That is the philosophical understanding behind African myths, customs, traditions, beliefs, morals, actions and social relationships. In other words, religion has a lot of influence on Nigerians and Africans as a whole. In recognition of this, Nigerian government has always recognized the importance of religion in her educational policies. For instance, the first government policy that recognized the importance of religious training and moral instruction was the 1925 Memorandum on Education in British colonial territories (Fafunwa, 1974). According to Fafunwa, number three of the twelve memoranda states that "Religious training and moral instruction should be regarded as fundamental to the development of a sound education and

should be accorded complete equality with secular subjects.” Thus, religious consciousness in Nigeria is a factor for peace and sustainable development in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria has over the years lacked peace and consequently economic growth which are important for sustainable development. Although there are many factors inhibiting the contribution of religion and culture to peace and development in Nigeria, they are still important agents for sustainable development. This is so because there are a good number of Nigerians identifying themselves with religions and cultural groups that abound in the country. On the other way round, in Nigeria there are indigenous traditions for peace building which can teach us a lot about healing and reconciliation, and create the basis for re-establishing social solidarity. Therefore, what is required is to find a way to combine the best lessons that tradition through culture can offer with progressive modern norms and standards for the protection of human rights. To enable culture and religion to begin to play a significant role in the reconstruction of Nigeria, it will be necessary to establish education and training programmes for government officials, civil society actors and other citizens. Therefore, all players in the polity and the economy should utilize religious- cultural settings for peace and sustainable development in Nigeria.

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