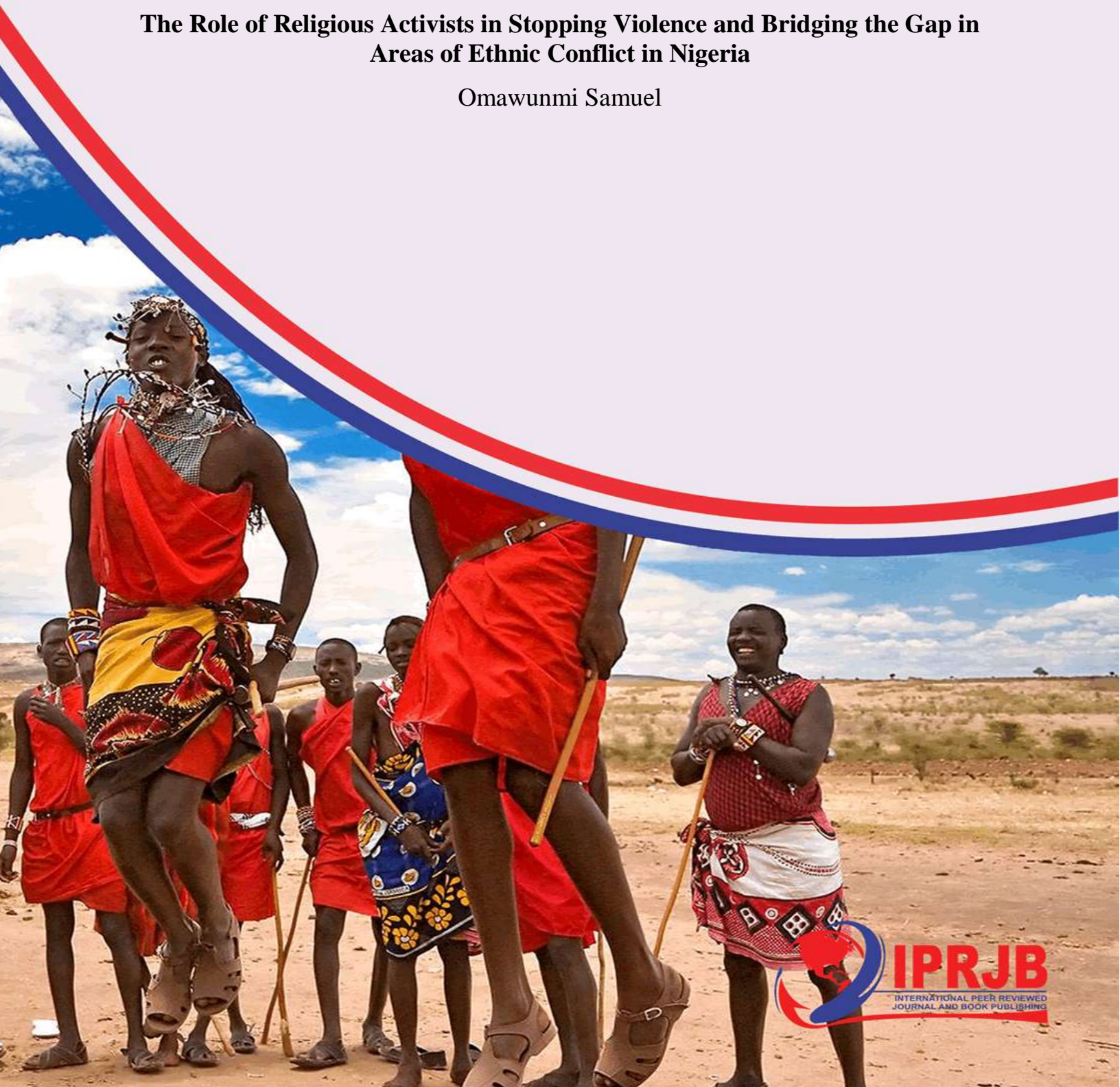



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**The Role of Religious Activists in Stopping Violence and Bridging the Gap in
Areas of Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria**

Omawunmi Samuel



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 ^{1*} Omawunmi Samuel

University of Lagos, Nigeria
Corresponding Author Email: journals@iprjb.org

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to evaluate various approaches used by the religious peace makers and organizations and factors which hinder their effectiveness in peace building and reconciliation in Nigeria.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Results: The results revealed that there exist conceptual and contextual gaps relating to the study on various approaches used by the religious peace makers and organizations and factors which hinder their effectiveness in peace building and reconciliation in Nigeria. Preliminary empirical review reveals that, religious methods such as problem solving workshops, mediations and negotiations and confessions have been very effective in peace building and reconciliation. However, the study established that the religious approaches are not applied continually so as to promote peace and reconciliation.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Human needs theory and reconciliation theory, may be used in peace building and reconciliation. The results of this research will enrich the canon of writing on conflict resolution and rapprochement already present in West African universities' Departments of Philosophy and Religious Studies.

Keywords: *Ethnic Group, Ethnic Conflict, Peace, Reconciliation, Religion Approaches.*

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INTRODUCTION

Religion, via its ethical rationales that go beyond the confines of traditional diplomacy, provide decisive sources and resources for limiting war or bringing an end to ethnic conflict. The promotion of peace in regions plagued by ethnic violence has been attributed to its success. Since more than two-thirds of the global population identifies with a religion, religious peacemakers should expect to have a significant impact. Author John R. Appleby states, "Religion is a source not only of non-violent conflict transformation, the defense of human rights, integrity in government, and reconciliation and stability in divided society" (Appleby, 2020) Religious beliefs and practices are an integral part of both individual and societal ideas of what constitutes a peaceful life. This is due to the fact that it deals with fundamental questions about the nature of human existence, such as the nature of free will, the nature of inevitability, the nature of fear and security, the nature of right and evil, and the nature of the sacred and profane. As a result, the potential for religion to play a role in bringing about peace and healing is highlighted (Smock, 2021). Religion plays a one-of-a-kind part in the peacemaking process due to the fact that its normative and explanatory frameworks can be put to use in the service of fostering harmony. Religious approaches to peacemaking, such as the increased participation of religious leaders and religious institutions in peacemaking and peace building in places like Israel/Palestine, Iraq, Macedonia, Nigeria, and Sudan, are examples of the social dimension that allow religions to bring people together, discuss matters that affect their lives, and develop processes to address issues and concerns (Appleby,2020).

Appleby (2020) argues that religion is a force for peaceful conflict resolution, human rights protection, governmental honesty, and social harmony in fractured society. This empowers them to foster and promote attitudes of forgiveness and reconciliation. As mediators and peacemakers, religious people and groups can be an effective resource when it comes to resolving conflicts and fostering harmony. A religious normative system offers the opportunity to enhance and foster a shared framework of peacemaking by recognizing and enhancing a normative commitment accepted in a transcendental framework that implies long-term commitment. Since more than two-thirds of the global population identifies with a religious tradition, religious peacemakers have a sizable audience to which they might appeal. Reconstruction in post-apartheid South Africa and the peaceful overthrow of totalitarian regimes in East Germany, Poland, and the Philippines are only two examples of how religion has played a role in peacebuilding (Appleby, 2020)

Christians believe that God brought about reconciliation when he sent Jesus to die on their behalf. Christianity places a premium on a culture of peace, with the belief that forgiveness and unity are at the heart of the faith in Jesus Christ. As far as the Church is concerned, God the Father reconciles all things to himself through Christ. Since Christian reconciliation hinges on forgiveness, the victim must take the first step since forgiveness precedes conversion (Appleby, 2015). For the sake of ecclesial and social reconciliation in Christ, our Peace and the source of real justice for the entire African continent, the Church is relentless in her proclamation of the Good News, as commanded by Jesus Christ. Evangelization, the primary duty in the command of the Divine Master, is inseparable from the Church's commitment to becoming Samaritans to the many brothers and sisters who are asking for help and compassion, and to aid so many people who are poor and in need of human warmth so that they may bear witness to God's love. Through the proclamation of

the Gospel, programs of education at all levels, and numerous charitable institutions, the Church is becoming increasingly involved in promoting dialogue, peace, and justice in the renewal of African society, which is moving confidently toward the integral development of the African people.

Peace building and reconciliation, as described by Lederach (2020), is an all-encompassing term that encompasses, generates, and sustains the complete spectrum of processes, approaches, and phases necessary to turn conflict into more sustainable, peaceful partnerships. Dialogue, coordination, reconciliation, participation, training, advocacy, networking, facilitation, negotiation, mediation, and problem-solving workshops are all tools used in the peace-building and reconciliation process. On the other side, reconciliation is the process of mending fences and repairing relationships between communities (Lederach, 2020).

So, it seems clear that religion can be a force for peace in Nigeria. This study built on this knowledge by analyzing the strategies used by religious groups in Nigeria to promote peace and reconciliation, with an eye toward assessing their relative success and failure in addressing the root causes of Nigeria's periodic escalation of ethnic violence.

According to Schreiter (2020), religious peacemakers are guided in their work toward peace and reconciliation by the Biblical ideals of revealing the truth, forgiving wrongdoing, and pursuing peace and justice. These ideas are also present in Lederach's 2017 work. According to his definition of reconciliation, it entails finding the truth about what happened, admitting it, making amends for the harm done, seeking redress, forgiving the offender, and moving forward. The concepts presented by Lederach (2017) and Schreiter (2020) were helpful in this research because they allowed for the identification of effective strategies for peace building and reconciliation in Nigeria. To forgive and be reconciled, the truth is a precondition. To achieve peace, it is essential to identify the wrongdoers and understand what led to the dispute, argues Chapman (2021). According to Chapman, victims and offenders can find peace after they face one other and discuss what happened. A victim-centered strategy, "truth-seeking" asks questions about what happened, why it happened, and who was responsible. This method relies on the victim's own words to get to the bottom of what happened. Thanks to Chapman's (2021) research, we now know more about the religious practices that can be employed to foster harmony and understanding among different groups.

Truth-seeking, as Lederach (2017) points out, allows individuals to share their experiences of loss, sadness, and rage in the face of pain and the recollection of wrongdoing with one another. Knowing the truth can stop a fight in its tracks and end cycles of violence and retaliation. Truth-seeking also aims to construct a common memory and a community narrative that are bigger than any one party's narrative by bringing divergent accounts into harmony. Sharing experiences and stories is the bedrock of a prosperous future. Truth is the cornerstone of recovery, responsibility, forgiveness, and reconciliation, all of which Lederach's (2017) work emphasizes. While pursuing the truth is admirable, it isn't without its flaws due to the fact that it places the focus on the victim and allows them to withhold information. Truth-telling is a vital tool in the pursuit of peace and reconciliation in war-torn regions, and so its inclusion in this research is very meritorious.

Both Lederach (2017) and Montville (2018) assert that acknowledgment contributes to the truth component of mending relationships. It is difficult to forgive and make amends, according to Montville, until the wrongs done have been admitted. For them, the recognition step is crucial in the process of making peace. That is to say, in cases when a large number of individuals were injured or killed as a result of mutually destructive communal violence, open and shared acknowledgment of the injuries and losses is a necessary requirement for reconciliation. However, some people may become even more upset and resistant to moving on from their pain if they admit that they have done so.

Without additional acts of concrete restorative justice, truth and acknowledgment also lack credibility in the long term. In this research, the principles of Lederach and Montville had a crucial role in advocating that acknowledgment be accompanied by other actions, such as justice.

Statement of the Problem

Large numbers of people in rural areas frequently gather around a common religious belief system, giving religion a significant place in their lives. Given the continuous significance and place of religious individuals and organizations in many rural communities, they play a crucial role in encouraging reconciliation among worshippers and creating sustained grass-roots reconciliation and communal cohesiveness. Her moral authority is the source of religion's power, and followers who consider the promotion of peace to be a central tenet of their faith have a strong foundation upon which to build their communities. When put into practice, these factors give religious leaders and organizations enormous potential as conflict managers and can lead to resolutions. Though the Church and other religious organizations have played a part in peace building and healing in Nigeria, ethnic hostilities occasionally flare up again.

Theoretical Review

Human Needs Theory

Burton (2020) human needs theory provides explanations of the causes of ethnic conflicts. Burton has explored the link between inter-group conflict and the realm of basic human needs, identity, recognition, and survival. He argues that inter group conflict is deeply rooted in unmet or inadequately fulfilled basic human needs of the parties and their individual members. According to Burton (2020), protracted social conflicts represents prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for basic needs such as security, recognition, acceptance, fair access to political institutions and economic participation. He stresses that many multi-ethnic society states emerge which are dominated by a single communal group. This group (or a coalition of groups) ignores the needs of other communal groups “thereby breeding exasperation and polarization.

Burton’s theory was useful to the study as it provides a plausible explanation of ethnic conflicts in Africa. According to Burton, where such needs are not easily met by undemocratic regimes by communal groups for basic needs such as security, recognition, acceptance, that many multiethnic society states emerge which are dominated by a single communal group. This group or a coalition of groups ignores the needs of other communal groups, there by breeding exasperation and polarization”.

Reconciliation Theory

Montville (2018) model brings out clearly the process of reconciliation in the case of ethnic conflict. According to Montville, reconciliation involves three steps; Acknowledgement by the oppressor of their wrongs, contrition which involves taking responsibility for the past action, to express regret and to directly request forgiveness and the last step is forgiveness where victim forgave the aggressor and both sides mourning their losses, establishing a new equilibrium and relationship of mutual respect and security that is peace.

Montville (2018) three steps of reconciliation were important in the study as churches echo the principle of Montville: an acknowledgment by the oppressor of the wrong and asking for forgiveness. The practice of repentance through the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) provides a spiritual source of restorative justice and healing for broken communities. Likewise, to Lederach (2015), the Eucharist presents a fundamental understanding of encounter and reconciliation with God and the community, represented in the form of the body, the community gathered. The confession that is the act of telling the truth is therefore, an important element used by the Church in peace building as the Church in the sacrament of reconciliation ask for God's forgiveness and seek by various means to repair their relationship with God, and with their neighbors. This is the same as Montville's steps of reconciliation which involve acknowledgment (confession) and asking for forgiveness.

Empirical Review

Obi, Bollen, Aaldering & Euwema (2021) investigated servant and authoritarian leadership, and leaders' third-party conflict behaviour in convents. The study investigates the relationship between servant and authoritarian leadership, and leaders' third-party conflict behaviors in followers' conflicts, thereby contributing to integrating knowledge on leadership styles and leaders' third-party conflict behaviors. This study aims to investigate leadership and conflict management in a context hardly studied: local religious communities or convents within a female religious organization. The authors collected quantitative survey data from 453 religious sisters, measuring their perception of leaders' behaviors. These religious sisters live in local religious communities within a Catholic Women Religious Institute based in Nigeria (West Africa) and in other countries across the globe. Results show that servant leadership relates positively to leaders' third-party problem-solving behavior and negatively to leaders' avoiding and forcing. Moreover, authoritarian leadership relates positively to leaders' third-party avoiding and forcing behaviors. This study expands theory development and practices on leadership and leaders' third-party conflict behaviors. The authors associate servant and authoritarian leadership with leaders' third-party conflict behaviors: avoiding, forcing and problem-solving, in followers' conflicts. The authors offer practical recommendations for religious leaders on servant leadership and leaders' third-party conflict behaviors.

Sumarna, Djubaedi, Fatimah, Mas'ud, Rosidin, & Hidayat (2021) conducted a study on multicultural value of education in forming the community's religious attitude. The diversity of society can be seen from the culture with diverse religious backgrounds. This study aims to show a portrait of community diversity which is reflected in the attitude of tolerance for religious

diversity and can be managed properly through a harmonious portrait of diversity. The method used is qualitative with a phenomenological approach. This type of research places the researcher as the main tile and instrument. Data was collected by observation, interviews and documentation studies. Data analysis uses data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing, strengthened by triangulation analysis. The results of the study show that differences in beliefs and/or religions are integrated with Sundanese culture as a binder of togetherness among the people. Multicultural values include: living in differences, mutual trust and understanding, mutual respect, open thinking, appreciation and interdependence, non-violent conflict resolution. Pluralism is God's law, so religion or belief in God should not be forced on anyone. This is reinforced by data on the index of religious harmony in three dimensions, namely perceptions of tolerance between religious believers (64.14% with an interval of 3.72); the attitude of equality between religious communities (65.71% with an interval of 3.80); and inter-religious cooperation (73.60% with an interval of 4.14).

Terepyschyi & Khomenko (2019) investigated the development of methodology for applying non-violent conflict resolution in academic environment. The paper considers the problem of non-violent approaches application to conflict resolution in the academic area. To perform that, the method of conceptualization, inductive method and method of comparative analysis have been used. The basic functions of the mediator as a person who helps to solve the contradictions of conflict situation and facilitates the process of peace-building have been substantiated. The article emphasizes the importance of UNESCO activity in global supporting and spreading the ideas of tolerance as well as humanism. The authors propose a technique of non-violent conflict resolution based on the analyzed concepts of Mahatma Gandhi, John Dewey, Emmanuel Levinas, Marshall Rosenberg and others. The authors represent key factors of successful dealing with conflict through direct influence of universities and scholars. This article is an attempt to describe the difference between the main goals of pacifism and nonviolence. It has been explained why people should stop perceiving education through the distorting lens of violence ideology and learn to see it in the mirror of the philosophy of non-violence. It has been discussed that violence against others is connected with violence against yourself as well as wrong strategies to meet personal needs. The sooner our society wants to understand the image of others, the fewer people will die for fake ideals. In this point there is a correlation between higher education, peace and conflict. Eventually it has been found that level of violence can be decreased through expression of empathy to all friends and haters in daily life and principled refusal from aggression.

Isaacs (2016) conducted a study on disentangling the relationship between religion and violence in armed conflict. Why are religious conflicts more violent than non-religious conflicts? Research has argued that religion pushes partisans toward violence. However, existing research suffers from widespread problems of measurement validity and fails to confront the possibility of endogeneity in the relationship between religion and violence. This article develops a more precise measure of the relevance of religion to conflict based on the use of religious rhetoric by political organizations. With this approach in mind, this article disentangles the causal sequence linking religious rhetoric and violence using annually coded data on the rhetoric of 495 organizations worldwide from 1970 through 2012. The analysis finds a strong general correlation between religious rhetoric and

violence. However, past use of religious rhetoric does not increase the likelihood that an organization will participate in violence or the overall intensity of conflict. On the contrary, previous participation in violence makes an organization more likely to adopt religious rhetoric for mobilization. Indeed, religious rhetoric becomes more likely as violence increases in intensity and conflict continues for longer periods of time. These findings suggest that violent actors adopt religious rhetoric to solve the logistical challenges associated with violence, including access to mobilizing resources and recruitment and retention of members. This article contributes to the study of religious conflict by providing evidence of endogeneity in the relationship between religion and violence and highlighting the need for temporally sensitive measures of religious mobilization.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

RESULTS

The results were grouped into various research gap categories namely as conceptual, contextual, and geographical.

Conceptual Gaps

Studies by Obi, Bollen, Aaldering & Euwema (2021), Sumarna, Djubaedi, Fatimah, Mas'ud, Rosidin, & Hidayat (2021), Terepyshchy & Khomenko (2019), Isaacs (2016) had a conceptual framework gap. The varied strategies employed by religious peacemakers and groups, as well as the barriers to their success in fostering peace and reconciliation in Nigeria, were not established by any of the research cited. The research did not provide a clear breakdown of the various methods for achieving peace. Because of this, the current work aims to fill in these conceptual holes.

Contextual and Geographical Gap

Studies by Sumarna, Djubaedi, Fatimah, Mas'ud, Rosidin, & Hidayat (2021), Terepyshchy & Khomenko (2019), Isaacs (2016) had geographical gap because they weren't actually done in Nigeria. This suggests that the findings may not be applicable in Nigeria due to the fact that the methods employed by religious peacemakers in each country vary. This study was undertaken with the intention of filling that void.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

People of religion and religious organizations will gain from the research, and as a result, they will be better equipped to play pivotal roles in mediating disputes, constructing lasting peace, and fostering understanding and forgiveness. During times of crisis, people in Nigeria have been able

to find safety in Nigeria's many religious institutions and facilities. According to the findings, the religious community can count on a substantial base of supporters to rally around the cause of encouraging more tolerant and accepting attitudes. Since they are mediators, the people put their faith in them to protect their interests.

The findings of this study are useful to the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies in Nigeria as this work will add to the existing literature on peace building and reconciliations. That way, knowledge gained might be used in its application to daily ethnic conflicts and its management.

Nigeria's religious community may also benefit from the study findings in that as people will be knowledgeable about the negative consequences of ethnic conflicts; they will try to create a culture of tolerance, understanding and forgiveness. This work also suggested effective approaches to curb the problem of ethnic conflicts. The use of effective approaches such as problem-solving workshops, dialogue, negotiations and mediations among others will prevent similar scenes in future. Further, the study will hopefully help the religious groups and leaders understand their role as peacemakers and how best they could use their resources towards building a peaceful Nigerian society through mitigating the effects of ethnic conflicts in order to live their mission.

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