

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES THROUGH INTERFAITH DIALOGUE FOR RESOLVING FARMERS-HERDERS DISPUTES IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA'S SELECTED COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

This study explores the farmer-herder conflict in Southwest Nigeria and the potential of interfaith dialogue as a novel approach to achieving sustainable peace. The paper argues that traditional methods of conflict resolution have proven inadequate and highlights the transformative potential of dialogue in fostering empathy, understanding, and collaboration between these often-antagonistic groups. Drawing on a multi-pronged methodological approach that combines secondary source analysis with primary data collected through interviews with key stakeholders, the research delves into the root causes of the conflict, including population growth, resource scarcity, and historical grievances. The paper emphasizes the devastating consequences of these clashes, including internal displacement, livelihood destruction, and loss of life. Through the lens of Leonard Swidler's Decalogue of Dialogue, the study outlines a framework for interfaith dialogue initiatives. This framework emphasizes open communication, mutual respect, a willingness to learn from each other, and a commitment to finding common ground. The research highlights the importance of addressing underlying grievances while also promoting innovative solutions such as sustainable cattle rearing practices and collaborative land-use policies. The study concludes that by implementing interfaith dialogue strategies alongside educational components, economic incentives for peaceful coexistence, and social interaction programs, stakeholders can cultivate a culture of peace and build a more prosperous future for all communities involved. This research contributes to the field of conflict resolution by advocating for a nuanced approach that acknowledges the religious dimensions of the farmer-herder conflict while emphasizing the importance of intergroup dialogue and collaboration. The emphasis on interfaith dialogue as a tool for peace-building offers a valuable addition to existing scholarship on conflict resolution in Southwest Nigeria. Limitations of the study include its focus on a specific region and the reliance on self-reported data from interviews. Future research should explore the long-term effectiveness of interfaith dialogue initiatives and investigate their applicability in diverse cultural contexts. By continuing to refine and expand the toolkit of interfaith dialogue, scholars and practitioners can make significant strides towards fostering peace and social cohesion in conflict-ridden regions.

Keywords Farmers-Herders Conflict, Interfaith Dialogue, Religious Ideology, Southwest Nigeria, Sustainable Peace-building, Empathy.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of dialogue, rooted in the Greek words "dia" (two) and "logos" (word or discourse), signifies the exchange of ideas and perspectives [1]. It's not simply talking, but a process of active listening and understanding across differences. As Arinze [2] suggests, dialogue is about seeking common ground through open communication. Swidler [1] further emphasizes dialogue as a two-way communication where participants explore differing viewpoints to uncover deeper truths. This fosters a crucial space for learning, change, and growth, ultimately leading to tolerance and peaceful relationships. This aligns with the established role of dialogue in conflict resolution. From Galtung [3] to Fisher et al. [4], scholars recognize dialogue's ability to facilitate open

communication and build trust, ultimately creating a constructive atmosphere for resolving disputes [5], [6]. Research by Pruitt et al. [7] even highlights its effectiveness in promoting cooperation and achieving mutually beneficial outcomes.

The case of the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria exemplifies the transformative potential of dialogue. The once peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders in Nigeria, particularly in regions like North-Central and South-Western Nigeria, has tragically eroded into violent clashes [8]. This shift from cooperation to conflict has deep roots, potentially linked to factors like population growth, increasing pressure on land resources, and historical grievances. These tensions have tragically escalated into open hostilities, as documented by Babalola et al. [8].

The consequences of these conflicts are far-reaching and devastating. Communities are shattered by internal displacement, as farmers flee destroyed farmlands and herders are forced to relocate due to violence. Livelihoods are destroyed, homes are displaced, kidnapping cases and sexual assaults have been reported, crops are trampled, and livestock are killed, plunging families into economic hardship. Most tragically, these clashes claim lives on both sides, leaving behind a trail of grief and vengeance that perpetuates the cycle of violence. Beyond the immediate human cost, the social fabric of these communities is at stake. Traditional trust and cooperation are eroded, replaced by suspicion and fear. This fractured social landscape hinders development and creates a breeding ground for further instability. The farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria is not merely a localized issue; it threatens the long-term peace and prosperity of the entire region.

This study aims to address this critical issue. It will delve into the background of the farmers-herders conflict in South-Western Nigeria, highlighting its profound impact on both communities. But most importantly, it will advocate for interfaith/inter-ideological dialogue as a key strategy for resolving this conflict. By fostering understanding, tolerance, and mutual respect among the diverse religious and ethnic groups involved, dialogue has the potential to bridge divides and build sustainable peace.

This paper underscores the importance of dialogue as a tool for conflict resolution. In complex social contexts like the farmers-herders conflict in Nigeria, dialogue offers a powerful path towards a more peaceful and harmonious future.

METHODS

The methodology employed in this study integrated both secondary and primary sources of data. Secondary sources such as newspapers, books, and academic journals were utilized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical context, underlying factors, and existing interventions related to farmers-herders conflicts in Southwest Nigeria. Primary data collection will involve interviews with stakeholders including farmers, herders, community leaders, and

interfaith representatives. These interviews aim to gather firsthand perspectives, experiences, and insights into the dynamics of the conflicts and the potential role of interfaith dialogue in conflict resolution.

This sets the stage for a deeper exploration into the background of the conflict, highlighting its importance and the rationale behind adopting an interfaith dialogue approach. By engaging religious institutions and stakeholders in meaningful discourse, we aim to foster understanding, reconciliation, and ultimately, sustainable peace between farmers and herders in Southwest Nigeria.

Literature Review: Overview of Farmers-Herders Disputes in Nigeria and Previous Approaches to Resolving Farmers-Herders Conflicts

Farmers-herders conflicts in Nigeria have a long and troubled history, marked by violence, devastating loss of life, and economic disruption. Early studies like Bala et al. [9] laid the groundwork by examining the central issue of resource competition, particularly between Fulani herders and settled farmers in Northern Nigeria. Their research highlights the importance of addressing this competition, alongside historical grievances, for any hope of effective conflict resolution.

Building on this foundation, Boone [10] delves deeper, exploring the political economy of land conflict across Africa. Here, the spotlight falls on the role of state institutions. Weak or corrupt governance can exacerbate tensions by failing to provide fair access to land or enforce regulations effectively. Boone also emphasizes economic marginalization, where limited opportunities fuel competition for scarce resources and create a volatile environment. These studies by Bala et al. [9] and Boone [10] offer valuable insights into the complex interplay of socio-economic and political factors that fuel these conflicts.

However, a complete understanding necessitates acknowledging the growing influence of environmental factors, particularly climate change. Studies like Boko et al. [11] illuminate the critical link between climate change and land-use conflicts.

Droughts, desertification, and unpredictable weather patterns all contribute to the problem. As traditional grazing lands diminish, herders are forced to migrate further south, encroaching on farmlands and intensifying competition. Adebayo [12] underscores the additional strain these conflicts place on food security and sustainable development efforts in the region. These studies by Boko et al. [11] and Adebayo [12] emphasize the urgent need for holistic approaches to conflict resolution. By integrating environmental considerations, such as developing adaptation strategies to climate change, alongside addressing socio-economic and political issues, a more sustainable path towards peace can be forged.

Understanding the farmer-herder conflict necessitates going beyond broad national narratives and delving into the complexities of local contexts and community dynamics. Studies like Bassett [13] offer valuable insights into the specific challenges faced in Nigeria's Middle Belt region. Examining nomadic pastoralism and traditional land management practices, Bassett highlights the need for integrated approaches that address the unique needs of these communities. Similarly, Ayayi and Alawa [14] provide crucial information on Nigeria's pasture and forage resources, emphasizing their significance for both farmers and herders. By understanding these local dynamics, interventions can be tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of each affected community.

Moving beyond understanding the local context, scholars like Osaghae [15] point towards solutions. Osaghae explores strategies for resolving inter-group conflicts in Nigeria, emphasizing the importance of inclusive governance frameworks. This suggests that ensuring all parties have a voice and feel represented in decision-making processes is crucial for building trust and fostering peaceful coexistence. Koné and Boserup [16] take a more specific approach, examining the potential role of pastoralist peace-building initiatives in West Africa. Their research highlights the value of empowering these communities to develop their own solutions. By fostering conflict-sensitive resource management strategies led by the farmers and herders themselves, a more sustainable peace

can be achieved. These studies by Osaghae [15], Koné and Boserup [16], alongside the work on local dynamics [13], [14], underscore the importance of both understanding the local context and empowering communities to be active participants in finding solutions.

From the above review we can agree here that a multitude of scholars have delved into understanding the root causes and consequences of these conflicts, offering insights into the socio-economic, political, and environmental factors at play. However, despite significant research efforts, effective solutions remain elusive. This study seeks to bridge existing knowledge gaps by proposing innovative approaches through interfaith and inter-ideological dialogue for resolving farmers-herders disputes in selected communities of Southwest Nigeria. Addressing farmers-herders conflicts in Nigeria requires a multidimensional approach that incorporates insights from various academic disciplines. By synthesizing existing research and proposing innovative approaches through interfaith dialogue, this study aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to resolve conflicts and promote peace and stability in Southwest Nigeria's selected communities. It is hoped that by bridging knowledge gaps and fostering collaboration between stakeholders, sustainable solutions can be achieved, ensuring a peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders for generations to come.

Communities in Southwest Nigeria Entangled in The Farmers-Herders Conflict.

In Southwest Nigeria, certain communities are deeply entangled in the farmers-herders conflict. This section will focus on selected communities in Southwest Nigeria affected by the ongoing conflict between farmers and herders. Specifically, we will examine areas within the states of Kwara, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti, where this conflict persists. We will look at specific communities which have received reports of these crises as case studies to delve deeper into the issue.

Kwara

In Odo-owa and Oke-ero communities within Kwara State, Nigeria, there are notable challenges

concerning conflicts between farmers and herders. It is reported that the main trigger for recurring violence between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Oke-Ero Local Government Area of Kwara State is the destruction of crops by livestock. To an extent, a report stated that cows frequently strayed into fields and consume crops belonging to local farmers. Despite the fact that governments have been recommended at all levels to establish designated areas for cattle to limit their movement, thus fostering sustainable agricultural development; the tension still persists.

As we are aware, cattle hold significant cultural importance for the Fulani people, with ownership serving as a status symbol. This most likely leads to significant tensions between Fulani herders and local farmers, particularly when farmlands encroach upon traditional cattle routes and watering spots. Analysts link this trend to the worsening desertification, which forces herders to migrate southwards in search of suitable grazing areas, often resulting in conflicts with settled farmers. Therefore, it is essential to understand the underlying factors contributing to these conflicts and address them effectively.

Given the severe consequences of conflicts, such as loss of life, displacement, and economic hardship, it is crucial to comprehend the principles of conflict resolution and identify appropriate strategies for peaceful negotiation. The intensity of the conflict in Kwara State underscores the urgent need for corrective measures to reduce the frequency of conflicts, which often lead to the displacement of farmers and loss of lives and crops. Media reports and documentaries highlight the longstanding divisions between farmers and herders along ethnic lines, indicating the necessity for comprehensive solutions, including the creation of grazing reserves and governmental intervention.

Osun

In the southwestern region of Nigeria, particularly in Osun State, a notable conflict has arisen between farmers and herders, severely impeding farmers' ability to engage in peaceful agricultural practices and livelihoods. The pinnacle of this conflict occurred in Osun State when a group of cow herders attacked a government-owned farm

settlement situated between Esa-Oke and Ijebu-Ijesa, resulting in the destruction of approximately 120 acres of economic crops. Additionally, significant damage to crops, valued at millions of naira, has been attributed to herders in two distinct communities within Osun State [17], [18].

According to a report by Nigeria Tribune dated Tuesday, December 5, 2023, over 6000 farmers from AgoOwu Farm settlement, located in the Ayedaade local government area of Osun, voiced their grievances at the state government Secretariat in Osogbo. They protested against the recurrent and violent attacks perpetrated by dangerous herdsmen on both themselves and their farmlands in nearby areas. Accusations were levied against a monarch for allegedly dispatching hooligans to intimidate local farmers. The protesters carried placards bearing various inscriptions, urging Governor Adeleke to intervene and prevent a potential crisis.

During discussions with journalists, spokesperson Mr. AdebaniObenbe highlighted that the farmers were allocated the land by the state government and diligently fulfill their tax obligations. He recounted instances where armed individuals, purportedly acting under the instruction of the monarch, forcefully harvested crops, leading to fear and distress among the farmers. Concerns were raised regarding the potential escalation of crises within the community if the actions of the monarch were not swiftly addressed by the government. Farmers implored Governor AdemolaAdeleke to protect them from ongoing assaults and intimidation while also addressing the encroachment of Fulani herdsmen on agricultural lands, which results in crop destruction.

In response, Oba Morenigbade denied involvement in orchestrating attacks on rural individuals and claimed to be abroad. He encouraged the farmers to direct their grievances to local law enforcement authorities. These incidents underscore the challenges faced by numerous farmers in Osun State as they endeavor to expand their agricultural activities amidst the encroachment of herders in their communities.

Ondo

According to Vanguard, the security organization in Ondo State, known as Amotekun, has reported a substantial decrease of 95 percent in conflicts between farmers and herders over the past two years across the state. Adeleye made this assertion during an interactive session sponsored by the state Correspondent Chapel of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), titled "The Platform". Within a two-week period, the organization received over 5,000 complaints concerning conflicts between herders and farmers. Farmers increasingly faced challenges in accessing their farms due to fears of harassment, abduction, injury, or even murder by herders [19].

Furthermore, it had become difficult for civilians to hail taxis in the city without the risk of being abducted, assaulted, or robbed, particularly during the day. Riding motorcycles (Okada) posed the most significant risk. Initially, Amotekun focused its efforts on addressing conflicts between herders and farmers. Adeleye stated, "We launched an extensive campaign to educate the public that farmers have the right to cultivate crops and herders have the right to raise cattle, but they must not encroach on each other's activities." Subsequently, meetings were held with the Miyetti Allah group at both the state and regional levels, where Amotekun conveyed its position. A deadline was set, and enforcement measures were announced.

During initial operations, it was discovered that over 500 cows were unlawfully taken from a widow within the Alagbaka GRA, where the government offices are located. Despite the widow's persistent efforts over the past five years to reclaim her cattle, she faced strong resistance from the herders, who even issued threats of violence against her.

In another report by Dataphyta, the Okeluse community mourned the abduction of Mr. Bola Ojo, the former Chairman of Ose Local Government, which left residents uncertain about what to expect. By evening, the community was eerily quiet, with grief evident throughout. At the time of reporting, Mr. Ojohad not been freed. Despite the agricultural nature of communities in Ose Local Government Area, with residents primarily

engaged in farming activities, including the cultivation of cocoa, plantain, yam, and cassava, incidents of robbery had disrupted their livelihoods. The presence of herders in the Okeluse community had resulted in significant loss of life.

Ekiti

Several studies have highlighted the significant impact of agricultural and grazing activities on Nigeria's land area. Crop cultivation occupies a substantial portion, approximately 43,778.60 square kilometers, while extensive grazing covers 21,913.75 square kilometers of the country's total land area. This increase in land use by herders has led to conflicts, as it encroaches upon farmers' land, which they perceive as integral to their social, economic, and spiritual identity. Land disputes, a common source of conflict in Ekiti, often arise between Fulani herders and farmers over grazing land [20].

The persistence of these conflicts can be attributed to various factors, including the failure of the state to address the issue of indigene versus settler status in the Nigerian constitution, unresolved disputes over grazing land and water sources crucial for the economic survival of both herders and farmers, and the implications of the Nigerian land tenure system on land acquisition by peasants and lower-class individuals. Additionally, criminal activities such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, and terrorism perpetrated by some Fulani groups exacerbate the situation.

Incidents such as the abduction of Chief Samuel Oluyemisi Falae by herders in September 2015, as well as attacks on farmers in various communities, further escalate tensions. These conflicts often result in loss of lives, displacement of villagers, and destruction of property. Consequently, political figures like Ayodele Fayose have taken drastic measures, such as enacting anti-grazing laws, to address the crisis. However, the effectiveness of such measures remains questionable, as evidenced by ongoing conflicts and the need for local initiatives, such as the establishment of anti-grazing marshals, to mitigate the situation. Despite efforts to resolve the conflict, misunderstandings and tensions persist, fueled by incendiary remarks and accusations against the

government's handling of the issue.

Aside of the general effects on loss of lives, animals, farm crops, there are soil erosion, poisoning of water and displacement of farmers and pastoral problems. There is usually counter attack in entirely unaffected places in reaction to the loss suffered in farmer's herdsman clashes elsewhere. The conflict between herdsman and farmers in Ekiti State has several facets. Until last twenty years, the disagreements between herders and farming communities used to be resolved by negotiations and the baale and herder communities leaders.

Dialogue in Biblical Perspectives

Dialogue is a tool of peace in the time of crisis and troubles among men. Human experience has evidently and apparently revealed that life is in stages with their attendant challenges, difficulties and conflict. People want peace but they are taken aback when they fall into crisis and conflict. Conflict is a situation where people or groups of people who are supposed to be at peace with one another are engaged in serious misunderstanding, disagreement and are opposing one another. This conflict or crisis has led to economic, institutional, material destruction and loses of millions of life during inter-tribal, same clans, national, civil and international wars.

Tracing the causes of war, conflicts, troubles and crises, two important biblical text give us the root causes of conflict among men. One is the position of the author of a prominent book in the Jewish wisdom literature, the book of Job.

“For afflictions does not come from dust, nor does trouble spring from the ground, yet man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward - Job 4: 6-7”

This wisdom text indicates the seriousness of trouble among men as the “the sparkles fly upward”. Unknown to man that the “spark” are fiery and hot, consuming and destructive if care is overlooked.

Second, among the general epistles in the New Testament literature, we find the book of James, which says

“Where do war and fight come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? - James 4:1”

Conflicts rise among us when we cannot curb our inordinate ambition for power, promotion and economic or politic superiority. The ancient near eastern nations engaged in series of wars and oppressions against one and another that lead to enslavement, servitude, oppressions, captivity and annihilations of many clans, families and tribes. In the midst of these challenges, there is a craving of peace. Peace from biblical perspective can be an “instrumentalist” agency, as a means to an end and at the same time a “functionalist” tool, where it plays a social function in the society in order to bring about social order from chaotic situations. In order to achieve this, a bridge of dialogue is used.

Traces of dialogue are found on the pages of the biblical texts where dialogue was exploited in order to achieve peace and avoid wars, crises and conflicts. Fortunate enough, the first traces of dialogue found in the biblical text was the herder's conflicts among the hirelings of Abraham and lot on the struggle for pasture for their animals. The Genesis accounts in gen13:5-11 buttressed the prosperity, progress and productivity of the businesses of both Abraham and lot in the area of flocks and herds. The fruitfulness of the flocks and herds of both called for more pastures in order to feed them and there was scarcity and need for expansion, hence crises ensued.

Abraham knew the implication of the crisis and being experienced, engaged and approach a dialogue with lot, the owner of the flocks and herd and employers of the laborers who wanted to foment troubles for both. The understanding that there would be losses of the fruit of their age investment, the flocks and herds, if there was a crises and the hirelings would eventually flee away when things felt out of hand called for the applied wisdom of dialogue from Abraham.

The inference from this texts shows that people in the ancient counted their loses, should they engage in war or destructive conflicts. It is highly good to engage in direct dialogue with the people concerned directly and face reality on ground.

Sincerity of approach and dialogue are seen in the biblical perspectives of dialogue such as the case of Abraham and Lot. If there will be meaningful solutions to the farmer's and herder's conflicts in the land, both parties must be avoiding wanton destruction of farm produce, setting the farm plantation on fire and harming one another. Implications on fighting, harming and killing one another in the name of animals should be weighed before embarking on this.

Acting as a leader, father, elder statesman and progenitor Abraham stood for life safety and property protection rather than their destruction. This is a major biblical perspective on dialogue and its advantages. "It is good to save life than to destroy life", to quote the words of Jesus Christ in another form (cf. MK.3:4). Though under pretense the Gibeonites realized that it was important for them to be servants and alive than to become dead through swords, they pleaded for a treaty, a league, and a covenant to live with Joshua (cf. Jos.9:3-26). The approach of their dialogue with Joshua led to their living. The goal of this approach was to live and the Gibeonites.

The case of strife between the house of Saul and David in 2 Samuel 2 opens our eyes to political crises and unrest today and the urgent need to sheath the ambitions of individuals could lead to bloodletting and they had to do so. The struggles for supremacy and claim to the throne in the United Kingdom, loyalty to individual parties- Saul dynasty through his chief of army- Abner and David dynasty through his chief of army -Joab were the bones of contention. After hundreds of foot soldiers had died, Abner realized the need for dialogue. He initiated and carried out the dialogue.

This perspective of dialogue opens up a line of solutions to political thuggery, fighting, maiming, and killings of innocent lives. Through a reasonable dialogue Abner called for sheathing the sword and Joab consented that it was unnecessary that the both parties should continue to kill one another. Due to this adopted dialogue approach by Abner, Joab realized that war should not continue but stop. Unwanted killings of soldiers and innocent lives came to an end. This informs us that biblical approach to dialogue leads to safety of life. A

theological import of 2 Samuel 2 also extends to the fact that political killing and rivalry can be ended through dialogue.

A dialogue Jesus had with the Samaritan in John 4 is another dimension of biblical perspective on the importance of dialogue. It portends that through a reasonable dialogue gender biases, ethnicism and religious polarization can be ended. Jesus used dialogue approach to put the wall of gender barrier down between the Jews and the Samaritans. Enmities of hundreds of years came to an end due to Jesus dialogue with the woman. Jesus took a positive and loving approach to address the seemingly written condition of the woman and he gave her "life" and "meanings" to her existence and living. The men of Samaritans came out to hear, and believe in Jesus due to his approach to new life of love, forgiveness, renewed hope, no condemnation but fair treatment, real encouragement and unity without barriers or "ethnicism".

Pauline dialogue with the Athenians shows tolerance to people who hold different political views, religious ideologies, opinions and stands apart from our dogmatic convictions and particularity. He was able to bring some to the savvy knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and Christianity.

In a nutshell, biblical perspectives on dialogue yield safety of life, avoidance of bloodletting, end to political killings, ethnicism, nepotism, discrimination and safety of property as in the case of Abraham, the Gibeonites, Abner and Joab and an apostle Paul.

Interfaith Dialogue as Framework

The situation in southwest Nigeria preempts an intentional and deliberate interfaith and inter-ideological dialogue, most especially when recognizing the deeply rooted religious affiliations within both farming and herding communities. (i.e. Yoruba Christians or Yoruba traditional worshippers and the Fulani Muslims or Fulani traditionalists versus).

It is on this backdrop that interfaith dialogue, as conceptualized by Leonard Swidler's Decalogue of Dialogue, offers a robust framework for addressing

the complex and longstanding conflict between farmers and herders in South West Nigeria. For Swidler, the primary goal of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly. The two parties involved needs this basic understanding

From this study we have come to understand that this conflict, marked by recurring violence and economic losses, stems from competition over land resources, exacerbated by ethnic and religious differences. By applying Swidler's principles, this session explores how interfaith dialogue can facilitate understanding, reconciliation, and sustainable peace-building among the affected communities.

Basic to these principles are; Leonard Swidler's Dialogue Decalogue

In his work "What is Dialogue?", Swidler [1] spells out ten rules that should guide any dialogue enterprise. Though these principles were primarily designed for Interreligious and inter-ideological dialogue, it could still be helpful in our discourse on herdsman conflicts. The principles are as follows:

First Rule: The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly. Minimally, the very fact that I learn that my dialogue partner believes "this" rather than "that" proportionally changes my attitude towards him; and a change in my attitude is a significant change in me. We enter into dialogue so that we can learn, change and grow, not so we can force change on the other, as one hopes to do in debate – a hope realized in inverse proportion to the frequency and ferocity with which debate is entered into. On the other hand, because, in dialogue, each partner comes with the intention of learning and changing themselves, one's partner, in fact, will also change.

Second Rule: Interreligious and inter-ideological dialogue must be a two-sided project-within each religious or ideological community and between religious or ideological communities. Since the primary goal of dialogue is that each partner learns and changes themselves, it is also necessary that each participant enters into dialogue, not only with

their partner across the faith line – the Catholic with the Protestant, for example – but also with their co-religionist, to share with them the fruits of the interreligious dialogue. It is in this way that the whole community will eventually learn and change, move towards an ever- more perceptive insight into reality.

Third Rule: Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. In other word partners in dialogue must be truthful and be willing to discuss the truth about religion how best they know it and not trying to add or subtract from what the religion holds in order to gain superiority of their religion. In addition to this, trustworthiness is expected from partners involved and failure to trust any partner will hinder dialogue from taking place.

Fourth Rule: In interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue, we must not compare our ideals with our partner's practice, but rather our ideals with our partner's ideals, our practice with our partner's practice.

Fifth Rule: Each participant must define her – or himself. Only a Muslim, for example can define what it means to be a Muslim. The rest can only describe what it looks like from the outside. Moreover, because, dialogue is dynamic, as each participant learns, they will change, and hence continually deepen, expand and modify their self-definition as a Muslim-being careful to remain in constant dialogue with fellow Muslim. Thus, it is mandatory that each dialogue partner defines what it means to be an authentic member of their own tradition. Conversely, the interpreted must be able to recognize themselves in the interpretation. This is the golden rule of inter-religious hermeneutics, as has been often reiterated by the "apostle of interreligious dialogue", RamundoPanikkar.

Sixth Rule: Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard fast assumptions as where the points of disagreement are: rather, each partner should not just listen to the other partner with openness and sympathy, but also attempt to agree with the dialogue partner, as far as it is possible, while still maintaining integrity with their own tradition; where they absolutely can agree no further without violating their own integrity,

precisely that is the real point of disagreement that was falsely assumed ahead of time.

Seventh Rule: Dialogue can take place only between equals, or *Par cum pari* as Vatican II put it. Both must come to learn from each other. This for instance means that there can be no authentic dialogue between a learned scholar and an uninformed person but at most a gathering of information. Also, if for example the Muslim views Christian as inferior, or if the Christian views Islam as inferior, there will be no dialogue. If authentic interreligious, interideological dialogue between Muslims and Christians is to occur, then, both the Muslim and the Christian must come mainly to learn from each other; only then will be "equal with equal, *per cum pari*."

Eighth Rule: Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust. Although interreligious, interideological dialogue must occur with some kind of "corporate" dimension, that is, the participants must be involved as members of a religious or ideological community—for instance, as Marxists or Taoists – it is also fundamentally true that it is only persons who can enter into dialogue. A dialogue among persons can be built only on personal trust. Hence, it is wise not to tackle the most difficult problems in the beginning, but rather to approach first those issues most likely to provide some common ground, thereby establishing the basis of human trust. Gradually, as this personal trust deepens and expands, the more thorny matters can be undertaken. As in learning, we move from the known to the unknown, so in dialogue we proceed from commonly held matters – which given our mutual ignorance resulting from centuries of hostility will take us quite some time to discover fully – to discuss matters of disagreement.

Ninth Rule: As we enter into interreligious and interideological dialogue, we must learn to be at least minimally self-critical of both ourselves and our religious or ideological tradition. A lack of such self-criticism implies that one's own tradition already has all the correct answers. Such an attitude makes dialogue not only unnecessary, but even impossible, since we enter into dialogue primarily so we can learn—which obviously is impossible if our tradition has all the right answers.

In interreligious and interideological dialogue, one must stand within a religious or ideological tradition with integrity and conviction, but such integrity and conviction must include, not exclude, a healthy self-criticism for without it, there can be no dialogue.

Tenth Rule: Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religions or ideology "from within", for a religion or ideology is not merely something of the head, but also of the spirit, heart, and "whole being" individual and communal. In this case, a Christian will never fully understand Hinduism if he/she is not, in one way or another connected to Hinduism. Nor will a Hindu ever fully understand Christianity unless he/she, in one way or another, becomes Christian.

Application of Swidler's Decalogue of Dialogue to Farmers- Herders Conflicts in South Western Nigeria.

Leonard Swidler's Decalogue of Dialogue offers a valuable framework for resolving farmers-herders conflicts in Nigeria by fostering open communication, mutual understanding, and cooperative problem-solving. The following principles have been adopted and applied to farmers-herders' conflicts in South-Western Nigeria:

In Swidler's first rule, the primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, change and grow in perception about the other party. Dialogue offers an opportunity to clear doubts and suspicions held against the "other". It has been observed that there is an unhealthy rivalry between herders and farmers in South-Western States which predisposes them to frequent clashes with each other. This tension could be reduced if they initiate honest conversations with each other, promote the understanding that both groups are Nigerians who can co-exist to do their business. Farmers and herders are to be encouraged to engage in direct, open, and truthful communication. Listen attentively to each other's concerns, needs, and fears to build trust and understanding. They are to approach dialogue with a willingness to learn from each other. Recognize that each party has unique knowledge, skills, and experiences that can benefit the other. Both parties to identify areas of

commonality and shared interests. Collaborate to find mutually beneficial solutions, recognizing that their interests are interconnected.

The second rule emphasizes the importance of equality. Mutual regard for each would aid effective dialogue. If the both parties see themselves as business men and women, who need to earn a living from their various investments, they would promote the understanding that they are equals trying to earn a living. Hence, no one is superior to the other. Each person's perspectives should be respected and both parties can work out modalities to safeguard their means of livelihood. More so, there should be an understanding that both crops and livestock are people's investments and should be safeguarded.

Swidler's sixth principle of dialogue highlights a crucial element for fostering peace in the farmer-herder conflict: approaching dialogue with an open mind and avoiding pre-conceived notions. This principle goes beyond simply listening. It emphasizes the need to actively challenge assumptions and stereotypes that fuel mistrust. Imagine a farmer who believes all herders are careless and destructive. This assumption can easily escalate a minor incident into a major confrontation. Similarly, a herder who assumes all farmers are hostile and unwilling to compromise is unlikely to seek peaceful solutions. These ingrained assumptions create a self-fulfilling prophecy, hindering any chance of productive dialogue.

Swidler's framework encourages open communication and a willingness to "let go and forge ahead." This means acknowledging past hurts and grievances openly during dialogue. However, the focus should not be on assigning blame, but on understanding the roots of the conflict. By asking clarifying questions and actively listening to each other's perspectives, both parties can begin to dismantle the walls of prejudice. Instead of dwelling on differences, dialogue can explore common ground. Both farmers and herders have a stake in a peaceful and prosperous region. Finding shared goals, such as ensuring food security or protecting the environment, can foster a sense of collaboration.

Dialogue provides a platform to challenge pre-

conceived notions. Farmers might learn that herders are taking steps to minimize crop damage, while herders might discover that farmers are open to designated grazing areas. Instead of making assumptions about intentions, open-minded dialogue encourages asking questions. "Why do you think this happened?" or "What are your concerns about this proposal?" can lead to a deeper understanding and potential solutions. By following Swidler's principle of open-mindedness, dialogue can become a powerful tool for healing past wounds and building trust. This, in turn, paves the way for practical solutions that address the core issues of the farmer-herder conflict, leading to a more peaceful and sustainable future for all communities involved.

In the ninth rule, Swidler harps on self-criticism. One must be self-critical about hi/herself and group, as in the case of farmers and headers. Accepting faults and apologizing for previous wrongful acts can fast-track reconciliation and healing process, as well as build lasting peace. Each party approaching dialogue should do so with the mindset of being responsible for previous conflicts, where necessary and looking forward to build a peaceful future. Leonard Swidler's Decalogue of Dialogue provides an essential framework for addressing the farmers-herders conflict in South West Nigeria through interfaith dialogue. The principles outlined in the Decalogue emphasize the importance of setting a clear agenda for dialogue, committing to truth, searching for common ground, embracing constructive tension, making dialogue a way of life, and balancing action and reflection. By adhering to these principles, stakeholders can transcend ethno-religious divides and work towards sustainable peace and development in the region. It is essential to institutionalize interfaith dialogue through interfaith councils, community forums, and educational initiatives to promote tolerance and understanding. Moreover, stakeholders should adopt a participatory and iterative approach to adapt strategies based on feedback and lessons learned, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness over time. By implementing Swidler's Decalogue, stakeholders can create a culture of peace and resilience against future conflicts.

Other Innovative Solutions and Opportunities for Scaling up Interfaith Dialogue Initiatives

It is important to also outline other innovative solutions as well as the opportunities we can stand to gain in scaling up interfaith dialogue.

Cultivating a Culture of Dialogue

Establishing regular and structured dialogue sessions between farmers and herders is a crucial first step. These sessions, facilitated by interfaith leaders and community organizers, can provide a safe space for open communication, conflict resolution, and joint problem-solving. As noted by AbubakarBello, a community organizer (personal communication, April 20, 2023), these sessions are essential for building trust over time. By institutionalizing these meetings, stakeholders can engage in proactive identification of emerging issues, enabling communities to address them before they escalate into violence. Monitoring progress towards peace-building goals becomes possible through the continuous communication fostered by these dialogue sessions.

Shared Economic Benefits: Educating Stakeholders

Effective interfaith dialogue initiatives must incorporate educational components aimed at raising awareness among herders and farmers about the economic ramifications of the conflict. Workshops, seminars, and information campaigns delivered in local languages can highlight the shared economic losses incurred due to violence, crop destruction, livestock theft, and market disruptions. BabalolaSunday (personal communication, April 2, 2023), a local farmer, emphasizes the importance of such education. When stakeholders on both sides understand the economic toll of the conflict, they are more likely to embrace peaceful solutions. Furthermore, dialogue can emphasize the potential economic gains from peaceful coexistence. Increased productivity, improved market access, and investment opportunities in both agriculture and livestock sectors become achievable when farmers and herders collaborate.

Sustainable Practices: Exploring New Forms of Cattle Rearing

Interfaith dialogue platforms can serve as forums for sharing knowledge and best practices on modern and sustainable methods of cattle rearing (Magareth Oseni, personal communication, March 20, 2023). Promoting techniques such as ranching, agroforestry, and rotational grazing can minimize environmental degradation, optimize land use, and improve livestock health and productivity. By embracing innovation in livestock management, herders can adapt to changing environmental conditions and market demands. This, in turn, can mitigate conflicts with farmers over limited grazing lands.

Finding Common Ground: Exploring New Perspectives on Grazing

Dialogue initiatives should encourage farmers and herders to explore alternative perspectives on grazing practices and land use (Idris Ahmed, personal communication, May 22, 2023). A critical aspect of this approach involves recognizing the cultural and economic significance of cattle in pastoral communities while also respecting the rights and livelihoods of sedentary farmers. By promoting dialogue around land tenure, resource sharing, and conflict resolution mechanisms, stakeholders can co-create sustainable grazing policies. These policies should accommodate diverse interests and promote social cohesion, ensuring a peaceful future for both farmers and herders.

Building Bridges: Bridging the Social Distance

Interfaith dialogue plays a crucial role in bridging the social distance and fostering empathy between farmers and herders. Cultural exchange programs, joint community projects, and interfaith festivals can facilitate interactions and mutual understanding among diverse groups. These interactions help to break down stereotypes and prejudices that often fuel conflict. Additionally, dialogue initiatives should prioritize inclusive participation, ensuring that marginalized voices, including women and youth, are represented and empowered to contribute to decision-making processes.

Shared Humanity: Promoting Sympathy and Mutual Respect

Building empathy and solidarity between farmers and herders requires promoting a culture of mutual respect and understanding of each other's livelihoods and challenges. Storytelling sessions, community exchanges, and interfaith prayers can facilitate emotional connections and promote compassion towards the hardships faced by both groups. By fostering a sense of shared humanity, interfaith dialogue initiatives can transcend ethnic and religious divides. This shared sense of humanity lays the groundwork for sustainable peace and reconciliation, enabling farmers and herders to move towards a future of cooperation and mutual prosperity.

In conclusion, farmer-herder conflicts in Southwest Nigeria are complex and require multifaceted solutions, and it is on this back drop that Interfaith dialogue offers a powerful tool to cultivate understanding, collaboration, and a shared vision for a peaceful future. Implementing the strategies outlined above within a framework of interfaith dialogue, we believe, could foster healing from past divisions and build a more prosperous future for the affected parties.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, scaling up interfaith dialogue initiatives in addressing the farmers-herders conflict requires a multifaceted approach that combines regular dialogue sessions, economic education, innovation in livestock management, perspective-shifting, social bridging efforts, and empathy-building activities. By harnessing the power of dialogue to promote understanding, cooperation, and shared prosperity, stakeholders can create lasting solutions to complex conflicts and pave the way for a more peaceful and inclusive society.

Moving forward, it is recommended to institutionalize interfaith dialogue platforms, integrate economic education into conflict resolution efforts, foster innovation in livestock management, promote cross-cultural understanding and empathy, and empower marginalized voices in peace-building efforts. These recommendations must be taken to the doorsteps of farmers, herders, community leaders, policymakers, and other stakeholders involved in

the conflict to ensure their meaningful implementation and impact.

Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of these recommendations in real-world contexts, identifying barriers to implementation, and exploring additional strategies for enhancing interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution efforts in diverse cultural and socio-economic settings. By building upon the findings of this study, scholars and practitioners can continue to refine and expand the toolkit of interfaith dialogue for addressing complex conflicts and fostering inclusive and resilient society.

Authors Contributions

The entire work was compiled and organized by the corresponding author, Ubong Isaac. David O. Alabi provided a biblical perspective on dialogue, while Ubong Iniobong Isaac, Solomon Okon Asuquo, and Goodnews Sunday Akpan focused on dialogue as a framework for resolving the farmer-herder crisis. John Olufemi Olukunle, Olaoluwa Olasehinde Oriowo, Emmanuel O. Adetula, Elisha O. Adeleke, Israel O. Olagunju, Tunde A. Olatunde, Isaac T. Fakayode, and Victor A. Adejo contributed to the survey study of the communities affected by the crisis.

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Conflict of Interest

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Further Reading

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