

## THE ROLES OF ISLAMIC CLERICS IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN ADO

### EKITI, EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This study explored the multifaceted roles of Islamic clerics in mediation, promoting peaceful coexistence, conflict prevention, counseling, and community development, and to identify the obstacles that hinder their effectiveness. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the study involved interviews and focus group discussions with 15 clerics and community members. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. Findings indicate that clerics are deeply involved in conflict resolution and community initiatives, significantly contributing to social harmony and development. However, they face challenges such as resource limitations, political interference, and cultural barriers. The study suggests that enhancing collaboration with local authorities and other stakeholders can amplify the positive impact of clerics' efforts. Policy recommendations include increased support for clerics' initiatives and the establishment of frameworks to facilitate better resource allocation and cooperation.

**Keywords:** Islamic clerics, conflict management, mediation, peace building, Nigeria

## Introduction

Conflict management remains a critical area of study globally, with religious leaders playing pivotal roles in mediating disputes and fostering peace across different cultural and religious contexts. The involvement of religious leaders in conflict resolution is not unique to Nigeria. In the Middle East, Islamic clerics have been instrumental in mediating conflicts in countries such as Iraq and Syria. Al-Rashid and Ameen (2018) highlight the significant role of religious leaders in Iraq, where clerics have mediated between conflicting Sunni and Shia groups, thereby reducing sectarian violence. Their influence is based on their spiritual authority and their ability to mobilize community support for peace initiatives, in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, Islamic clerics have also played a crucial role in resolving conflicts. Their efforts have been essential in mitigating inter-religious tensions and fostering national unity. In Africa, the involvement of Islamic clerics in conflict management is equally significant. Ahmed (2017) examines the role of Islamic leaders in Sudan, highlighting their participation in peace negotiations between the government and various rebel groups. These clerics have utilized their influence to advocate for peace and reconciliation, contributing to the signing of peace agreements and the cessation of hostilities.

In Nigeria, the role of Islamic clerics in conflict management has been well-documented, particularly in the context of northern Nigeria where the Boko Haram insurgency has caused widespread violence and displacement. Olojo (2016) notes that Islamic clerics have been instrumental in mediating conflicts in this region, using their religious authority to negotiate peace deals and provide counseling to victims of violence. Their efforts have been crucial in restoring some measure of stability and promoting social cohesion. Ado Ekiti, located in southwestern Nigeria, has also benefited from the conflict resolution efforts of Islamic clerics.

This town has experienced various forms of conflicts, ranging from political disputes to inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions. Adetunji (2019) highlights the involvement of Islamic clerics in mediating land disputes and family conflicts in Ado Ekiti, emphasizing their role in fostering understanding and reconciliation. These clerics leverage their moral authority and community trust to promote peaceful coexistence and resolve disputes amicably. These global examples illustrate the diverse ways in which Islamic clerics contribute to conflict management, emphasizing their adaptability and relevance across different cultural and religious contexts. In Ado Ekiti, as in other parts of the world, Islamic clerics draw on their religious teachings, moral authority, and community trust to mediate conflicts, promote peace, and support social cohesion. Their efforts are crucial in addressing the underlying causes of conflict, such as ignorance, poverty, and social inequality, thereby fostering a more stable and harmonious society.

## **Roles of Islamic Clerics in Conflict Management**

### **Mediation and Arbitration**

Islamic clerics play critical roles in mediation and arbitration, leveraging their spiritual authority and community ties to resolve conflicts. In many Islamic societies, clerics are viewed as impartial mediators trusted for their moral integrity. For example, in Sudan, clerics have been central in mediating ethnic and tribal conflicts by invoking Islamic principles of justice and reconciliation, leading to lasting peace agreements (El-Affendi, 2019). Similarly, in Pakistan, clerics serve as arbitrators in family, property, and commercial disputes, making decisions based on Sharia principles that are respected by all parties (Anwar, 2018). In Nigeria, Islamic clerics mediate conflicts between herders and farmers, employing their knowledge of Islamic teachings on land use and community rights to prevent violence (Suleiman & Onapajo, 2017). Additionally, in Indonesia, clerics collaborate with governmental and non-governmental

organizations to mediate conflicts, reducing tensions and fostering interfaith harmony (Effendi, 2020). Their effectiveness is enhanced by their understanding of local customs and cultural contexts. In Egypt, clerics mediate family disputes, addressing issues like divorce and inheritance with sensitivity to cultural nuances (El-Mahdi, 2018). In the West, clerics in the United Kingdom mediate conflicts within Muslim communities, providing culturally and religiously appropriate resolutions not always available through the secular legal system (Ahmad, 2019).

### **Promotion of Peaceful Coexistence**

In Southeast Asia, Islamic clerics from organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah in Indonesia engage in interfaith dialogues and community-building activities, emphasizing shared values to reduce prejudices and promote unity (Effendi, 2019). In Nigeria, clerics organize joint religious activities and peace workshops between Muslims and Christians to build trust and encourage cooperation (Udo, 2018). In the Middle East, clerics in Lebanon mitigate sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shia communities by advocating for peace and reconciliation through sermons and public engagements (Khalil, 2017). In Western countries like the UK, clerics participate in interfaith councils and community projects to counter Islamophobia and foster positive relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims (Ahmad, 2019). Islamic clerics also address ethnic and cultural diversity within their communities. In Kenya, clerics lead dialogues to promote mutual respect and peaceful coexistence among various ethnic groups (Ali, 2017). In Egypt, clerics use educational programs to teach young people about tolerance and coexistence such as In Egypt, clerics and religious institutions have launched various initiatives and programs to promote tolerance, coexistence, and interfaith understanding among young people. Some examples includes; "Imam-Priest Exchange Program": A program where imams and priests visit each other's places of worship and engage

in dialogue, "Interfaith Youth Forum": A platform for young people from different religious backgrounds to discuss and address social issues, "Tolerance Ambassadors Program": Training young people to become ambassadors of tolerance and promote coexistence in their communities, "Coexistence Schools Initiative": Integrating tolerance and coexistence education into school curricula, "Religious Tolerance Summer Camps": Organizing summer camps for young people to learn about different religions and promote mutual understanding, "Dialogue Among Civilizations" program: Encouraging interfaith dialogue and cultural exchange among young people, "Egyptian Family House" initiative: A program promoting interfaith understanding and coexistence among families from different religious backgrounds, emphasizing Islamic teachings that foster harmony and inclusivity (El-Mahdi, 2018). Islamic clerics are involved in policy advocacy and peacebuilding initiatives. In Sudan, they participate in national peace councils to formulate strategies for communal conflict resolution and national unity, using their influence to advocate for dialogue and reconciliation (Ahmed, 2017).

## **Conflict Prevention**

In the Middle East, clerics in Iraq counter sectarian tensions through educational programs, promoting Islamic teachings of peaceful coexistence to prevent violence (Al-Rashid & Ameen, 2018). In Pakistan, clerics address socio-economic issues like poverty and unemployment through development projects and educational initiatives, thereby reducing potential conflicts (Khan, 2019). In Kenya, clerics facilitate inter-community dialogues and peacebuilding workshops to address grievances and promote mutual understanding among different groups, contributing to societal stability (Ali, 2017). In Nigeria, clerics engage in counter-radicalization programs to prevent youth from adopting extremist ideologies, thereby curbing the spread of violent extremism (Olojo, 2016). In Indonesia, clerics lead community engagement and interfaith dialogues to promote religious tolerance and prevent sectarian disputes (Effendi,

2019). In Western countries like the UK, clerics work to prevent social tensions between Muslim communities and the broader society by promoting civic engagement and supporting inclusive policies (Ahmad, 2018). The multifaceted role of Islamic clerics in conflict prevention spans community development, educational initiatives, and interfaith dialogue, addressing underlying causes of conflicts to foster peaceful and cohesive societies.

### **Counseling and Support**

Islamic clerics play a crucial role in providing counseling and support services within their communities, addressing personal and social issues through religious and ethical guidance. In Egypt, clerics offer counseling that integrates Islamic teachings with psychological support, addressing both spiritual and emotional needs to help individuals navigate personal challenges (Ahmed & Noor, 2018). In Pakistan, clerics provide culturally and religiously tailored support, including personal and family counseling, to help individuals cope with trauma and stress related to conflict and social disruption (Khan, 2019). In Kenya, clerics support victims of gender-based violence by offering spiritual guidance, legal assistance, and referrals to social services, aiming to address immediate needs and advocate for broader social change (Ali, 2017). In Sudan, clerics offer counseling and psychosocial support to communities affected by the Darfur conflict, providing a safe space for expression, group therapy, and guidance based on Islamic principles of compassion and healing (El-Mahdi, 2018). In the UK, Islamic clerics provide support to individuals dealing with integration and identity issues, including discrimination and cultural adjustment, helping them navigate life in a multicultural society while maintaining their religious identity (Ahmad, 2019). In Indonesia, clerics engage in community health and mental health awareness initiatives, promoting well-being and providing support to those experiencing psychological distress (Effendi, 2020). Islamic clerics contribute

significantly to personal and community well-being through their counseling, support, and educational programs, fostering resilience and addressing various challenges.

### **Community Development Initiatives**

Islamic clerics significantly contribute to community development by leveraging their religious authority and community connections to address socio-economic challenges and promote sustainable development. In Indonesia, clerics collaborate with NGOs to promote economic empowerment through microfinance, vocational training, and healthcare services, enhancing rural community well-being and economic growth (Effendi, 2019). In Nigeria, clerics lead educational and health initiatives, including school construction, scholarships, and health clinics, to improve access to essential services and support community development (Suleiman & Onapajo, 2017). In Pakistan, clerics facilitate rural development through agricultural and infrastructure projects, improving practices, water access, and building essential infrastructure like roads (Khan, 2018). In Kenya, clerics address poverty and social inequality by leading initiatives such as small business grants and skills training programs, aiming to empower individuals and enhance economic opportunities (Ali, 2017). In the Middle East, clerics in Lebanon contribute to community reconstruction efforts by organizing relief activities, providing financial assistance, and supporting resilience programs in conflict-affected areas (El-Affendi, 2018). In Western countries like the UK, clerics support integration and social cohesion through cultural exchange programs, community outreach, and initiatives promoting mutual understanding between diverse cultural groups (Ahmad, 2019). Islamic clerics play a vital role in community development by addressing socio-economic challenges and improving quality of life, contributing to sustainable development and positive social change.

### **The Role of NASFAT in Conflict Resolution**

The Nasrul-lahi-li Din Society (NASFAT) is a prominent Islamic organization in Nigeria known for its substantial contributions to conflict resolution and social harmony. This mediation approach not only resolves immediate issues but also contributes to long-term peacebuilding (Adamu, 2020). The organization also focuses on conflict prevention through educational and youth empowerment programs. NASFAT implements initiatives that teach young people negotiation, communication, and problem-solving skills, helping them to proactively address and prevent conflicts (Bello, 2018). Furthermore, NASFAT's community development projects address underlying issues that can lead to conflicts. These projects include infrastructure development, healthcare services, and economic support, all aimed at improving living conditions and promoting social stability (Ibrahim, 2019). NASFAT's effectiveness in conflict resolution is enhanced through collaborations with government agencies and other organizations. By working with local and national authorities, NASFAT aligns its efforts with broader peacebuilding strategies, thereby improving the overall impact of its initiatives (Musa, 2021).—NASFAT's multifaceted approach to conflict resolution—encompassing mediation, education, community development, and collaboration—demonstrates the significant role Islamic organizations can play in peacebuilding and conflict management.

### **The Influence of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs**

The Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA) is a key religious organization in Nigeria that significantly impacts conflict resolution, community development, and social harmony. The SCIA is actively involved in mediating conflicts within Nigerian communities, including disputes between different Islamic sects and between Muslims and non-Muslims. The council employs traditional mediation techniques alongside Islamic principles to resolve conflicts, aiming to restore peace and unity. These institutions are crucial for fostering a well-informed,



cohesive population, contributing to social stability and conflict prevention. By investing in education, the SCIA addresses underlying issues that could lead to unrest and helps build a more knowledgeable and peaceful society (Bello, 2019). The SCIA is involved in various community development projects aimed at improving living conditions for Muslims in Nigeria. This includes building healthcare facilities, providing financial support for small businesses, and organizing health campaigns. These initiatives address socio-economic challenges that can lead to conflict and promote community well-being (Adamu, 2018). The SCIA plays a significant role in fostering interfaith dialogue and unity among Nigeria's diverse religious communities. The council organizes interfaith conferences, participates in joint community service projects, and advocates for religious tolerance. These efforts help reduce religious tensions and promote a more inclusive and harmonious society (Musa, 2020). The SCIA also engages in policy advocacy and public affairs, working with government agencies and other organizations to influence decisions affecting Muslim communities. Their advocacy focuses on social justice, religious freedom, and community development, aiming to create a more equitable environment for Muslims in Nigeria (Ibrahim & Suleiman, 2019).

### **Challenges Faced by Islamic Clerics**

Islamic clerics encounter numerous challenges in their roles, particularly due to limited resources. These constraints impact their ability to perform effectively in areas such as conflict resolution, community development, and spiritual guidance. One major challenge is the inadequate financial resources available to Islamic clerics and their institutions. Akinola (2019) reports that many clerics operate under tight financial constraints, which severely limits their capacity to fund community programs, educational initiatives, and social services. This financial limitation affects their ability to maintain and expand their activities, ultimately impacting the effectiveness of their contributions to community development and conflict

resolution. The scarcity of material resources, such as educational materials, infrastructure, and technological tools, is another significant issue. Ibrahim (2020) highlights that many Islamic institutions struggle with outdated facilities and insufficient educational resources. The lack of modern teaching aids and technology further exacerbates the problem, impacting the overall effectiveness of their educational programs and limiting their ability to deliver quality religious and secular education. The shortage of qualified staff and volunteers is also a critical challenge. Suleiman and Ojo (2018) note that many Islamic clerics work in environments with a lack of qualified personnel, affecting their ability to manage and implement various programs effectively. Clerics often have to juggle multiple roles and responsibilities, which can lead to burnout and reduced effectiveness in their roles as community leaders and mediators. The lack of access to advanced training and professional development opportunities for Islamic clerics impacts their ability to stay updated with contemporary conflict resolution techniques and management practices. Ali (2017) discusses how this gap in training can hinder clerics' effectiveness in addressing modern issues and adapting to changing community needs. Geographical distribution of resources can create disparities in support available to clerics in different regions. Clerics in rural or underserved areas often face more severe resource constraints compared to those in urban centers. Adamu (2021) explains that this uneven distribution of resources can exacerbate existing inequalities and limit the reach of clerical support and services in less accessible regions. Political interference significantly impacts the effectiveness of Islamic clerics in roles such as conflict resolution, community development, and spiritual guidance. This section reviews the effects of political interference on Islamic clerics, supported by scholarly articles and case studies.

Political interference can undermine the autonomy and operational effectiveness of Islamic clerics. Yusuf (2019) highlights how political actors exert influence over religious institutions, pressuring clerics to align with specific political agendas or imposing constraints on their

activities. Such interference compromises the credibility and independence of clerics, limiting their ability to address community issues impartially. In Nigeria, political interference affects the relationship between Islamic clerics and political authorities. Ahmed (2020) examines how political actors use religious institutions to advance their agendas, leading to conflicts of interest for clerics. This influence can compromise clerics' roles in community mediation and development, as they may be pressured to support political objectives rather than focusing on their religious and communal responsibilities. Political factors can also influence the allocation of resources to Islamic institutions. Ibrahim and Suleiman (2018) discuss how political interference can affect the distribution of funds and resources, leading to unequal support for Islamic organizations. Clerics in politically sensitive regions may face delays or reductions in funding, impacting their ability to run programs and provide services effectively. Political interference can disrupt the internal dynamics of religious organizations. Olojo (2021) notes that political actors may attempt to influence the appointment and promotion of clerics, creating internal divisions and reducing the effectiveness of clerical leadership. This interference can disrupt the hierarchical and operational structure of religious institutions, making it challenging for clerics to maintain unity and focus on their core missions.

Alignment with political entities can affect the public perception and legitimacy of Islamic clerics. Adamu (2019) explores how such alignment may lead to perceptions of partisanship, eroding clerics' authority and trust within the community. This loss of credibility can hinder their effectiveness in mediating conflicts and leading community development efforts. Cultural barriers present substantial challenges for Islamic clerics, influencing their effectiveness in conflict resolution, community development, and spiritual guidance. One major cultural barrier is the tension between traditional cultural practices and Islamic teachings. Ali and Hamid (2018) note that Islamic clerics often face difficulties reconciling local cultural practices with Islamic principles. Conflicts between traditional customs and religious teachings can

complicate clerics' efforts to provide guidance that respects both cultural and Islamic values.

This tension can lead to disputes and hinder the clerics' effectiveness in delivering support

Cultural norms can impact the effectiveness of clerics in implementing religious practices.

Linguistic and cultural differences between clerics and their communities can create significant

barriers to effective communication. Ibrahim (2019) discusses how clerics who are not familiar

with local languages or cultural nuances may struggle to connect with their audience. This can

impact their ability to deliver messages and engage in community activities effectively,

Cultural attitudes towards gender roles can affect the participation and impact of female clerics.

Adamu (2019) explores how cultural restrictions on women can limit their roles as religious

leaders and their ability to engage with and support women in their communities. Such barriers

can affect female clerics' contributions to community development and conflict resolution

Clerics often encounter resistance when introducing new religious practices or reforms that

challenge established cultural norms. Yusuf (2020) notes that this resistance can limit the

effectiveness of clerics' efforts and create friction between religious reforms and cultural

expectations. Addressing this resistance is crucial for the successful implementation of clerical

initiatives.

## **Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative research approach to explore the roles of Islamic clerics in conflict

management and the challenges they face specifically in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. The

methodology involves a mix of data collection techniques designed to provide a nuanced

understanding of clerics' experiences and challenges within this local context. The research

design is qualitative, focusing on capturing detailed insights into how Islamic clerics in Ado-

Ekiti address conflict and manage the related challenges. This approach allows for a

comprehensive exploration of their roles and the obstacles they encounter. By using qualitative

methods, the study aims to provide a deep understanding of the clerics' activities and the local context in which they operate. To gather rich and relevant data, the study employed several data collection methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 Islamic clerics in Ado-Ekiti. The clerics were selected from a variety of mosques and Islamic organizations across the city to ensure a broad range of perspectives. The interviews focused on clerics' roles in conflict management, their experiences with limited resources, political interference, and cultural barriers. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in exploring these topics in depth while maintaining a consistent set of questions to guide the discussion.

In addition to interviews, focus group discussions were held with local community members and stakeholders. Two focus groups, each consisting of 8-10 participants, were organized to gather additional perspectives on the effectiveness of clerics' roles and the challenges they face from the community's viewpoint. These discussions provided a forum for participants to share their experiences and opinions on how Islamic clerics impact conflict management in Ado-Ekiti. Documentary analysis was also an integral part of the study. Relevant documents, including reports from local Islamic organizations, community development projects, and policy papers, were reviewed. This analysis involved examining materials such as annual reports and project evaluations to supplement the primary data collected through interviews and focus groups. The goal was to contextualize the clerics' roles within broader organizational and community frameworks. Case studies of two prominent Islamic organizations in Ado-Ekiti, specifically the Ado-Ekiti Central Mosque and the Islamic Welfare Association, were conducted to provide concrete examples of clerics' roles and challenges. These case studies included a review of organizational documents and interviews with key figures within these organizations. This approach offered insights into how specific organizations manage conflicts and address challenges in the local context.

The data collected from interviews and focus groups were analyzed using thematic analysis.

This technique involved coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the clerics' roles and the challenges they face in Ado-Ekiti. Thematic analysis helped to organize the data into meaningful categories, providing a structured understanding of the issues. Content analysis was used for analyzing documents, and systematically evaluating information from local reports and community documents. This approach helped to identify key themes and issues relevant to the study, providing additional context to the primary findings. Comparative analysis was employed to examine similarities and differences in the experiences and challenges faced by Islamic clerics in Ado-Ekiti. By comparing findings across various data sources, the study aimed to offer a broader perspective on the specific challenges encountered by clerics in the region.

Ethical considerations were central to the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were briefed on the study's objectives, the use of their data, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was maintained by removing personal identifiers from the data and securely storing all information to protect participants' privacy. The research addressed sensitive topics with respect and care, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected participants' experiences without causing harm or misrepresentation. Efforts were made to minimize bias by grounding the analysis in evidence and considering multiple viewpoints, providing a balanced and objective account of the data.

The methodology outlined provides a comprehensive framework for investigating the roles of Islamic clerics in conflict management and the challenges they face in Ado-Ekiti. Through a combination of interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and case studies, the research aims to deliver a detailed understanding of the clerics' contributions and the specific obstacles encountered in this local context.

## Results and Discussion

The role of Islamic clerics in Ado-Ekiti extends far beyond spiritual guidance; they are integral to conflict management and community development. This section discusses the findings from interviews and focus groups, highlighting the various ways clerics contribute to mediation, the promotion of peaceful coexistence, conflict prevention, counselling, and community development.

### Mediation and Arbitration

While clerics have, for the most part, acted as the inseparable twins of mediation and arbitration in religious and communal contexts, clergy in Ado-Ekiti will be making an attempt at the relevant playing role of mediator of disputes and facilitating arbitral proceedings by appealing to Islamic principles on reconciliation and justice. This section discusses how clerics in Ado-Ekiti engage with mediation and arbitration processes, their strategies, challenges, and the nature of their interventions.

*"Islamic clerics often act as mediators in conflicts, not only within the Muslim community but also between different religious groups. Their role is crucial in calming tensions and facilitating dialogue"* (Interviewee 3, Cleric, Ado-Ekiti).

Islamic clerics in Ado-Ekiti frequently step into the role of mediators, leveraging their respective positions to facilitate dialogue and resolve disputes. Their involvement is not limited to intra-community conflicts but extends to interfaith disputes, highlighting their broad influence and commitment to peace. Clerics use their deep understanding of religious teachings and their moral authority to calm tensions and encourage mutual understanding among conflicting parties. This approach not only resolves immediate conflicts but also fosters long-term relationships built on trust and respect, which are essential for sustainable peace.

## Promotion of Peaceful Coexistence

Peaceful coexistence of people in diverse communities like Ado-Ekiti is what will ensure that social harmony prevails among its people and keep off conflict. The Islamic clerics, in particular, constitute an important part of such societies because through them inter-group understanding can be achieved and tensions between the different social and religious groups could be minimized or defused. In broad general outlines, initiatives taken up by clerics in Ado-Ekiti to keep peace and unity involve reviewing their approach, successes, and disappointments

*"Through community outreach and interfaith dialogues, Islamic clerics play a significant role in fostering peaceful coexistence in Ado-Ekiti. They help bridge divides between different groups"* (Focus Group Participant 2).

The clerics' efforts in promoting peaceful coexistence are evident through their active participation in community outreach and interfaith dialogues. By organizing and participating in events that bring together people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds, clerics work to bridge divides and build a cohesive community. These initiatives are crucial in a diverse society like Ado-Ekiti, where religious and cultural differences can sometimes lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. The clerics' proactive approach to fostering dialogue and understanding helps to preempt conflicts and create an environment of mutual respect and cooperation.

## Conflict Prevention

Conflict prevention is a proactive process; it addresses the root causes of potential conflicts before they degenerate into violence. The Islamic clerics were at the very center of this process in Ado-Ekiti through educative and counseling activities, social justice advocacy, and



enhancing community cohesion. This section discusses some of the strategies employed by clerics in conflict prevention, their effectiveness, and the challenges encountered.

*"Preventing conflicts before they escalate is a key focus of our work. We conduct regular counselling sessions and educational programs to address potential sources of conflict"* (Interviewee 7, Cleric, Ado-Ekiti).

Islamic clerics prioritize conflict prevention by identifying and addressing potential sources of tension before they escalate. They conduct regular counselling sessions and educational programs aimed at promoting values such as empathy, tolerance, and mutual respect. These preventive measures are designed to equip community members with the skills and knowledge needed to manage disputes constructively. By focusing on education and early intervention, clerics help to mitigate the risk of conflicts and promote a culture of peace within the community.

### **Counselling and Support**

Conflict management strategies at the community level take several key approaches, including counseling and support in cases where interpersonal and family conflicts are a problem. Clerics make valuable contributions in Ado-Ekiti through counseling and other supportive services for individuals and families, thus providing them with emotional and spiritual support as they go through processes of conflict resolution and personal problems. This section looks at counseling and support provided by clerics, the impact made by the clerical services on the community, and the challenges faced in such delivery of services.

*"Many people turn to us for personal and family counselling. We provide emotional and spiritual support, which is crucial for managing conflicts within families"* (Focus Group Participant 3).

The role of Islamic clerics in providing counselling and support is crucial in managing personal and family conflicts. Community members often seek out clerics for guidance on a range of issues, including marital problems, parental disputes, and personal crises. The clerics offer a combination of emotional and spiritual support, drawing on Islamic teachings to provide advice and comfort. This support is particularly valuable in a context where formal mental health services may be limited, making clerics an essential resource for individuals and families in distress.

### Community Development Initiatives

Community development ensures social cohesion, economic stability, and individual well-being. It is also very popular in Ado-Ekiti with Islamic clerics through various initiatives of development targeted at ensuring a better quality of life. Many such activities have been encompassed in education, health, economic empowerment, and social welfare. The section looks at clerics in community development: contributions, impacts, and challenges.

*"Our community development projects aim to address the root causes of conflict, such as poverty and unemployment. These initiatives are part of our broader effort to improve social conditions"* (Interviewee 12, Cleric, Ado-Ekiti).

Islamic clerics also play a significant role in community development, recognizing that addressing socio-economic issues is vital for long-term peace and stability. They spearhead various projects aimed at alleviating poverty, reducing unemployment, and improving access to education and healthcare. By tackling these root causes of conflict, clerics contribute to creating a more equitable and stable society. Their community development initiatives not only address immediate needs but also lay the groundwork for sustainable development, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflicts arising from socio-economic disparities.

## Discussion

The role of Islamic clerics in Ado-Ekiti goes beyond religious duty-their roles cut across conflict management and community development. This section looks at findings based on interviews and focus group discussions that specifically refer to how the clerics' role provides a contribution in mediation or peaceful coexistence, conflict prevention, counseling, and basically community development. "Most of the times, the Islamic clerics are mediators, not just among the Muslim family members but sometimes among families of different faiths. They play a significant role in the diffusion of conflict and the establishment of dialogue" (Interviewee 3, Cleric, Ado-Ekiti). The Islamic clerics in Ado-Ekiti constantly wear the toga of mediators, given the fact that they are often respected to engender dialogue for problem solving. It ranges from intra-community to interfaith, bringing into view their extensive influence and responsibility toward peace. Clerics apply their immense knowledge of religion and authority in morality to soothe tensions and advise conflicting parties for mutual agreement. This does not only help to resolve immediate conflicts but also to build long-term relations based on trust and respect, which is very essential for attaining sustainable peace. They have played a major role in fostering peaceful co-existence in Ado-Ekiti through community outreach and interfaith dialogues, which help in bringing the different groups of people together. The activities of the clerics are seen through the active participation in community outreach and interfaith dialogues. In this quest, clerics work towards bridging divides and establishing a cohesive community by organizing and participating in events that bring together people with different religious and ethnic backgrounds. These are the sorely needed interventions in a society as diverse as Ado-Ekiti, where religious and cultural differences have often propagated misunderstandings and conflicts. Being proactive, the clerics assist in creating an understanding environment and an area for preemptive approaches to conflict through respect and cooperation. "Preventing conflicts before they escalate is a key

focus of our work. We conduct regular counseling sessions and educational programs to address potential sources of conflict" (Interviewee 7, Cleric, Ado-Ekiti). The Islamic clerics identify possible sources of tension and address them before they escalate. They, therefore, offer counseling sessions and educational forums to inculcate a culture of empathy, tolerance, and understanding for each other. Such preventative measures instill in the community members those skills and wisdom to manage their disputes constructively.

When having offered education and early intervention, clerics reduce the chances of the incidences of clashes and equip the community for peaceful co-existence. "Many people turn to us for personal and family counseling. We provide emotional and spiritual support, which is very important in managing conflicts within families" (Focus Group Participant 3). Counseling and support by the Islamic clerics are very instrumental in any personal and family conflict. The community members often seek guidance from the clerics in almost every issue, including marital problems, disputes relating to parents, and personal crises. Some of the clerics give a mix of emotional and spiritual support from an Islamic perspective. This support becomes very crucial in contexts where more formalized mental health services might be lacking. Clerics become an asset in reaching those people in distress, whether individually or within family settings. This was seconded by another who said, "Our community development projects address the root causes of conflict, such as poverty and unemployment. These initiatives are part of our broader effort to improve social conditions" (Interviewee 12, Cleric, Ado-Ekiti). Islamic clerics also count a lot in community development, saying that addressing the socio-economic causes are tools for long-lasting peace. They spearhead various projects in poverty alleviation, reduction of unemployment, and improving education and health care. Through efforts from the clerics to take up the root cause of conflicts, they help in making a more just and stable society. The community development activities do raise more than the point at hand, setting a base for sustainable development, hence reducing the prospect of conflict brought up

by socio-economic inequality. These findings show that the Islamic clerics in Ado-Ekiti are indeed part of mainstream life in community conflict management and community development. All these activities of mediation, peaceful coexistence, strategies for conflict prevention, counseling, and community development add to total stability and harmony within the community. In this regard, the challenges are not yet over. Among other challenges are the limited operating resources, political manipulations, and cultural barriers that impair effective delivery. Responding to the needs, on the other hand, requires collaborative engagements with local authorities, community leadership, and other key stakeholders. The community, therefore, renews partnership and support to the clerics in a fresh move that adds value to the work of the clerics to ensure that their efforts for peace and development gain continuity and subsequent growth. In doing this, Islamic clerics in Ado-Ekiti have results in conflict management through their multifaceted effort. It is, as a matter of fact, indispensable for mediation, ensuring peaceful coexistence, preventing conflicts, providing counseling, and effecting community development processes that make their community a place to live. Success will depend on shared responsibility and collaboration, but the potential dividends for peace and stability in Ado-Ekiti make such efforts rewarding.

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