

Abstract

This paper reflects on the need for faith communities in Kenya to pull together in order to promote harmonious coexistence among themselves and within the country at large. Considering that Kenya is more affected by inter-ethnic conflict, one may be tempted to think that this country is totally devoid of inter-religious conflicts. It is the assumption of this paper that the general development and welfare of a country is, to some extent, a reflection on the state of religion in that country. There is peace and tranquility in a country when such peace and tranquility exists also among the religious groups operating therein, and the reverse is also true. Most of the faith communities in Kenya may lack the capacity to tackle the problem of inter-religious and intrareligious conflicts that confront them from time to time, though rarely reported in the media. This paper is geared towards investigating the measures that can be taken to strengthen the capacity of religious organizations to deal with conflicts be it internally or externally. The paper further seeks to interrogate the preparedness of religious organizations to lead the war against negative ethnicity in contemporary Kenya. The paper adopts Kung's hypothesis that the effective management of Inter-religious conflicts could provide a necessary ground upon which to found the effective management of inter-ethnic conflicts. (Inter-ethnic conflicts are a common feature in this country, particularly during the time of elections.) Harmonious coexistence is envisioned in Kenya's constitution as well as its development goals such as Vision 2030. It is also a key component in the sustainable Development Goals. The paper focuses on five objectives as stated below: to determine the root causes of religious conflicts in Kenya to describe the nature and pattern of religious conflicts in Kenya, to examine the impact of such conflicts on Kenya's socioeconomic development, to assess the challenges encountered in managing these conflicts and to determine opportunities available for enhancing effectiveness in the management of these conflicts. A literature survey was conducted to collect data for this paper. This was supplemented by personal interviews and discussions with some religious leaders drawn from the Christian, Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim faith communities as well as from the Indigenous African religion. Purposive sampling and key Informant techniques were utilized to pick the participants. Among the key findings for this paper include the fact that religious conflicts are largely motivated by such factors as historical, social, economic, cultural, environmental, religious and global trends. The paper also observes that religious conflicts whether located at the intra-communal level or at inter-communal level, have devastating effects on the socio-economic and religious development in this country. Among the challenges facing the management of religious conflicts in this country include hardliner positions taken by the conflicting parties, the infiltration of national politics into religious institutions, the projection of various and sometimes mutually conflicting ethnic interests among others. The opportunities include the fact that all religious groups embrace the virtue of peace, love and unity, peaceful co-existence, social cohesion, social justice and social inclusion among others. The paper therefore recommends for, among other things, the institution of measures to ensure the cultivation of a sense of cooperation within and between the various religious groups as well as the need for increased member participation in inter-religious dialogue and peace-making initiatives.