

Law, Religion and Reconciliation in Africa



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25 RETHINKING THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AS INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE, RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND RECONCILIATION

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to the twenty-first century, higher institutions of education were no more than citadels of learning. The prevailing purpose of learning at the university was to equip students with training for specific skills, jobs or self-employment. Over the years, however, universities have evolved into holistic organisations catering to the wider community and national interests in addition to the educational needs of their students. Universities have looked beyond the roles once thought to be traditional and are increasingly providing the knowledge and skills necessary to address sustainable community development, peace and justice. Some innovative universities are going beyond delivering and exchanging knowledge, information and human resources to being instrumental in peacebuilding, religious tolerance and reconciliation. Modern higher educational institutions are commonly expected to function as vehicles for the promotion of peaceful relations in diverse, multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies. A higher educational degree is now typically associated with the acquisition of soft skills such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving and critical thinking – all of which are crucial in sustaining peaceful, tolerant and reconciliatory communities. Additionally, the symbolic functions of institutes of higher education are growing in significance but are relatively underformulated in literature.

This paper addresses and delineates the role of universities as a catalyst for sustainable peace, and not just as providers of education. There are two ways universities can undertake the arduous task of peacebuilding, religious tolerance, rehabilitation and reconstruction: the direct approach through engagement, advocacy and humanitarian intervention, and the indirect approach through education. Directly, universities can create harmonious conditions of peace among different religious fractions, cultivate religious tolerance by sharing values that bind different groups and advocate for the respect of religious diversity both within and outside the school environment. Such religious interventions take place under four roles: advocates, intermediaries, observers and educators.² These intervenors can advocate for institutional and structural changes aimed at building or maintaining peace and promoting religious harmony. They can also lead the way in conflict prevention and resolution through outreach, advocacy programmes and

1 Assistant Professor of Law, American University of Nigeria.

2 Zartman W and Rasmussen JL (eds). 1997. *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques*. Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 273-316.

workshops. Educational institutions and actors can further respond to religious crises through humanitarian interventions (such as providing food, shelter, clothing and other goods), reintegration efforts and direct or indirect interventions and negotiations to strengthen settlement.

Indirectly, they can contribute through education and the inculcation of knowledge on the relationship between religious tolerance, respect and peace. Specifically, they can design curricula to enhance peace, peacebuilding strategies and religious tolerance. Courses such as peace studies can be offered as a general course for everyone to deepen their understanding of inherent factors and behaviours that threaten peace and conditions for interpersonal, societal and international peace. Students can be trained to respect religious diversity in their interactions with others and to accept the religious rights of others without discrimination, judgement and bias. Such education would provide young minds with the necessary knowledge and skills to facilitate positive social life skills and social cohesion while also developing attitudes that will eschew the culture of violence that stems from religious clashes.³ This way, higher educational institutions can provide the necessary elements to develop, manage, advocate and protect religious freedoms, tolerance and rights. Various insights have been offered in the literature on the importance and benefit of peace education not only equipping students with knowledge of non-violent conflict resolution and social justice activism, but also empowering them to recognise and challenge injustice and oppression in all of its manifestations and to utilise their expertise to help build a society that is fair and peaceful.⁴

This chapter critically delineates the roles that universities play in advancing and transforming peace. In this manner, it identifies the common ground as well as the practical steps that progressive higher educational institutions can play in the arduous task of peacebuilding through curriculum development and peace and conflict resolution education, student engagement and activities, interreligious dialogue, community service and the cultivation of a culture that promotes peace. Using the case study of American University of Nigeria (AUN), it outlines ways in which an institution can equip students to serve as instruments of national development, peace and justice in addition to stimulating their service potential to contribute to their immediate and extended community.

PEACE EDUCATION AS A CATALYST FOR PEACE

Religion has given hope to many and driven positive values and behaviour; contrastingly, it has also been used to justify heinous acts, discrimination and

3 West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). 2012. *Peace Education in Formal Schools of West Africa: An Implementation Guide*. Accra:WANEP. 5.

4 Bhirabake AM et al (eds). 2021. *Peace Education Handbook for the Great Lakes Region*. Kigali: International Conference on the Great Lakes Region; Kester K. 2017. "The Contribution (or Not) of UN Higher Education to Peacebuilding: An Ethnographic Account", *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 15: 464-48.

conflicts.⁵ The central place of religion in a person's life is crucial to shaping their identities and worldview.⁶ In Nigeria, the poignant power of religion to influence thoughts, actions and affiliation is evident in the multiple religious crises that have consistently plagued the country. The ability of religion to polarise people of different beliefs is enhanced when people do not respect, tolerate or undermine the religious beliefs, practices and values of another religion. The result of such intolerance is the destabilisation of peace, leading to the loss of lives and the destruction of properties. This is evident in the violent clashes that have claimed millions of lives in Jos, Zangon Kataf, Maiduguri, Tiv Land and many other regions in Nigeria and which are linked to religious factors.⁷ This is where peace education comes in. Peace education helps in the acquisition of values, knowledge and attitudes that can promote long-term harmonious living. Teaching students how to effectively deal with disputes, resolve conflicts peacefully and create conditions for peace is likely to help reduce the levels of violence and tension.⁸ Importantly, teaching students to embrace peace and equipping them with the methods by which they can achieve it in their lives and the community at large is instrumental to addressing intolerance and strife, and in the long run, they can pass on this culture of peace to others. This shared sentiment was evident at the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010), where it was declared that "formal and informal education are necessary means to instill in children and young people the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills required for living together".⁹ According to philosophy of education scholars Basma Hajir and Kevin Kester peacebuilding and peace education are instrumental in establishing structures that "facilitate building a just and equitable world through increasing tolerance, reducing prejudice, and changing perceptions of the self and others".¹⁰ In essence, peace education, particularly within universities, can contribute to the development of a culture of reflection on personal, social and organisational practices and norms that underpin peace.¹¹ It is also from this paradigm that the university (AUN) approaches its objective of peace education and peacebuilding within and outside the university.

5 Kadayifci-Orellana A. 2013. "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding", in Cornille C (ed) *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*. First Edition. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 157.

6 Cornille, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, 157.

7 Sulaiman KO. 2016. "Religious Violence in Contemporary Nigeria: Implications and Options for Peace and Stability Order", *Journal for the Study of Religion* 29(1):85, 88.

8 Adelson A. 2000. "Globalization and university peace education", *Peace Review* 12(1):117-14.

9 Adelson, "Globalization and university peace education".

10 Hajir B and Kester K. 2020. "Toward a Decolonial Praxis in Critical Peace Education: Postcolonial Insights and Pedagogic Possibilities", *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 39(5):515-532.

11 Kester K. 2017. "The Case of Educational Peacebuilding Inside the United Nations Universities: A Review and Critique", *Journal of Transformative Education* 15:59-78.

There have been increasing calls for educational actors and academic institutions to constructively develop peace education strategies to address some of the challenges leading to conflicts and to take a central role in engendering peace. For example, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has in its ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework given importance to peace education as a key conflict prevention strategy.¹² This understanding of the role of peace education will guide the analysis of the role of higher educational institutions in this study.

LEGAL AND POLICY SUPPORT FOR PEACE EDUCATION AND PEACEBUILDING CULTURE IN SCHOOLS

The prevailing question is: How can laws and policies create the necessary platform for the development of a peace culture and provide room for students to acquire the skills, knowledge and attitude toward peace? Laws and policies are important conduits for establishing a social order. They can provide the legal framework for educational institutions to contribute to peace education. They can also call the attention of educators to deliberately improve their curriculum with peace-related ideals and knowledge. Laws and policies also encourage the development of innovative strategies for peacebuilding and encourage a shift in the change of attitude toward peace. They can likewise direct the adoption of measures to promote peace studies in schools. A legal framework or policy instrument can also provide guiding information on the strategy, actions and benchmarks for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of peace building education in a country.

Peace education is globally recognised as a way to contribute to peace and development and is included in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.¹³ Target 4.7 aims to ensure that by 2030 "all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, *promotion of a culture of peace* and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development".¹⁴

12 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). 2008. "The ECOWAS Conflict, Prevention Framework", Regulation MSC/REG.1/01/08, 16 January.

13 SDG 4 is dedicated specifically to Quality Education, and it aims to ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning for all.

14 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2017. "What are the Sustainable development goals?" New York: UNDP (emphasis added). Online at: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>. Indicators through which achievement of these goals is measurable include the following: Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division. 2017. "SDG Indicators: Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". Online at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list>.

Several human rights documents provide the foundational basis for a legal approach to peace education and peace building in educational settings. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) provides for an education that promotes the development of the human personality. These documents set the tone for an educational standard that facilitates the development of awareness and insight into peace, tolerance, and social justice. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, further sets out a comprehensive statement of the human rights of children. Article 29 requires state parties to ensure: (a) that the education of the child should be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; (b) the education of the child should prepare the child for responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship among all peoples. These provisions serve as legal resources to impart to young people the knowledge and abilities necessary to guarantee the promotion of constructive social life skills and attitudes that will contribute to the development of a nonviolent culture and promote social cohesion. To buttress this point, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace to Actions to foster a culture of peace through education.¹⁵ The Declaration encourages states to promote curriculum revision, including textbooks, in accordance with the 1995 Declaration and Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy.¹⁶ Additionally, the Declaration directs all states to strengthen actions towards ensuring that young children receive instruction on the principles, dispositions, behaviours and lifestyle choices necessary to help them settle conflicts amicably, with an emphasis on tolerance, nondiscrimination and respect for human dignity.¹⁷

Furthermore, state actors are to include pupils in programmes that aim to instil in them the principles and objectives of a culture of peace and take measures to enable "people at all levels to develop skills of dialogue, negotiation, consensus-building and peaceful resolution of differences".¹⁸ A few years later, the UN General Assembly reiterated this obligation by committing themselves to "taking action to promote a culture of peace and dialogue at the local, national, regional and international levels and request the Secretary-General to explore enhancing implementation mechanisms and to follow up on those initiatives".¹⁹ This is

15 United Nations General Assembly. 1999. "Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace", A/RES/53/243 6 October, Fifty-third session, Agenda item 31.

16 UN General Assembly, "Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace".

17 UN General Assembly, "Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace".

18 UN General Assembly, "Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace", art 3(d).

19 United Nations General Assembly. 2005. "Integrated and Coordinated Implementation of and Follow-Up to the Outcomes of The Major UN Conferences and Summits in the Economic, Social And Related Fields; Follow-Up to the Outcome of the Millennium Summit", (A/RES/59/314), 13 September, para 114.

supported by The UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples.²⁰ Principle II states that the norms and values of peace, humanity, liberty and international solidarity, as well as all other ideals that serve to unite people, should be fostered in children through all educational means, including – and this is crucial – the guidance provided by parents, families and instructors.

At the regional level, the European Union (EU) has called for the dissemination of knowledge and values to promote peace education. The 2015 Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education aims at promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education.²¹ In the EU, a number of government initiatives have been developed and put into action to support the culture of human rights and peace education, and to provide workshops and courses for teachers, educators and managers on these matters. One of these initiatives is the PEACE Education project. PEACE Education, a 24-month project funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, was launched in November 2021, to decrease violence and foster an inclusive learning environment by giving educators the know-how and resources they need to incorporate. It was projected that integrating peace education into their respective curricula, giving students access to appropriate vocabulary, practice opportunities and constructive problem-solving techniques will contribute to building peace and manage conflicts in society.²² The African Union (AU) has also set aspirational goals on this issue, stating that “by 2020 all guns will be silent. A culture of peace and tolerance shall be nurtured in Africa’s children and youth through peace education.”²³

Elsewhere on the African continent, the Kenyan government is dedicated to fostering harmony and peaceful cohabitation among its citizens. Kenya Vision 2030 reflects this, emphasizing the social pillar of fostering a cohesive and just community with fair social growth in a hygienic and safe setting.²⁴ To this end, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) also launched the Peace Education Programme in 2008 to foster peace awareness, skills, and ideals

20 United Nations General Assembly. 1965. Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples, A/RES/20/2037, 7 December.

21 Eurydice (European Education and Culture Executive Agency). 2016. Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination through Education: Overview of Education Policy Developments in Europe Following the Paris Declaration of 17 March 2015. Luxembourg: EU Publications.

22 Eurydice, “Promoting Citizenship and the Common Values”.

23 African Union Commission. 2015. “Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want”, April 2015.

24 Kenya Ministry of Education Science and Technology, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 2014. “Education Sector Policy on Peace Education”. Nairobi: Kenya Ministry of Education Science and Technology.

within an educational framework.²⁵ To improve knowledge, skills and values for peace, the Education Sector Policy on Peace Education was developed to provide a framework for the implementation of peace education initiatives in Kenya.²⁶ The robust Education Sector Policy on Peace Education provides a policy direction for implementation and coordination the nation's peace education projects, while also fostering a culture of harmony between students and the community.²⁷ Effective implementation of this policy and programme in Kenya is expected to foster collaboration among participants and stakeholders and make it easier to carry out projects linked to peace education at all educational and training levels. In the end, it is hoped that this would support the development of a peaceful culture among students and society.

Nigeria has yet to draw up a definite peace education policy, however, efforts have been made to design policy guidelines for the development and implementation of peace-related education initiatives. Under the direction of the Federal Ministry of Education, and UNESCO, education authorities from all around Nigeria gathered in Lagos on 26 through 27 October, 2023, to deliberate on the country's first national curriculum for peace education that would address violent histories and conflicts.²⁸ Such policy direction is expected to equip students with information and morals that are necessary to prevent violent atrocities while also imbibing the values to coexist peacefully. Following the meeting, the Secretary General of the Nigeria National Commission for UNESCO, the Director of the Federal Ministry of Education, the Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), the Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), the Commissioners of Education from six geopolitical zones (federal regions) of Nigeria and other representatives of educational institutions came to an agreement on an action plan for curriculum development, implementation and dissemination. The outcome of this policy will promote harmonious coexistence in Nigeria. It will also support the goal of education as stated in Paragraph 22(g) of the National Policy on Education, which provides that the purpose of education shall be "to raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour and appreciate those values specified under our broad national aims so as to enable them to live and function as good citizens".²⁹

Implementation of peace education laws and policies can lead to curriculum development, teacher training programmes, integration into school culture,

25 Kenya MoEST, "Education Sector Policy on Peace Education".

26 Kenya MoEST, "Education Sector Policy on Peace Education".

27 Kenya MoEST, "Education Sector Policy on Peace Education".

28 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO. 2023. "Nigeria Making First Steps to Introduce a Peace Education Curriculum with UNESCO's Support", 15 November.

29 Federal Republic of Nigeria. 2004. *National Policy on Education in Nigeria*. Fourth Edition. Lagos: Nigerian Education and Research Development Council, s 5, para 22(g).

empowering students as peace ambassadors, fostering empathy and compassion and creating a culture of peace. It will provide a framework to drive academic institutions such as AUN and other actors into new ways of thinking and to further developing peacebuilding activities and imparting peace education.

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES AND HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN SUSTAINING PEACE AND PROMOTING RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

The role of education in peacekeeping, peacebuilding, peace education and peace advocacy, especially within the context of religious tolerance, has not received adequate attention. Education scholars Scherto Gill and Ulrike Niens posit that the inability to use education to achieve peacebuilding is one of the major challenges that stand in the way of achieving the Millennium, now Sustainable, Development Goals.³⁰ Others argue that schools are more prone to stress the development of cognitive thinking over interpersonal skills crucial to peacebuilding efforts.³¹ Universities, and in a broader sense higher education institutions, can be the starting point for religious tolerance and peace. As aptly captured by the preamble to the UNESCO Constitution, “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.”³² It, therefore, follows that schools can empower students with skills, knowledge and attitudes to create a peaceful society and also advocate for a tolerant, harmonious environment. Within higher institutions, students can be given the opportunity to develop a range of skills, including the ability to think critically and analytically to express themselves clearly and creatively in a non-violent manner.

Before identifying ways that higher education institutions can support peace goals, the next section will provide a brief overview of AUN.

Overview of the American University of Nigeria (AUN)

AUN is a private university located in Yola, the capital of Adamawa state in northeastern Nigeria, providing cultural and ethnic diversity to the work of the university. The university offers a broad selection of majors, minors, electives and a variety of concentrations that allow students to earn a broad knowledge-based degree.³³ The academic programmes at AUN are targeted to provide an educational foundation that will enable students to successfully explore the

30 Gill S and Niens U. 2014. “Education as Humanisation: A Theoretical Review on the Role Of Dialogic Pedagogy in Peacebulding”, *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 44(1):10.

31 Gill S and Niens U. 2014. “Education as Humanisation”, 14.

32 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 1945. Constitution of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, adopted in London on 16 November 1945 and subsequently amended by the General Conference.

33 American University of Nigeria (AUN). “Community engagement and service learning”. Online at: <https://www.aun.edu.ng/index.php/campus-life/student-affairs/community-engagement-and-service-learning>.

boundless opportunities and challenges around them.³⁴ Thus, regardless of their majors and discipline, every student of AUN is required to undertake and complete all General Education (GENED) courses covering a broad range of subjects such as English, mathematics/statistics, science, history, geography, society, community development, entrepreneurship, ethics and leadership, writing and composition, critical thinking and problem solving and Nigerian people and culture, among others.³⁵ This requirement for a broad spectrum of knowledge is meant to provide a solid educational foundation that will be essential to navigating the increasingly complex, volatile and uncertain world of the twenty-first century.

The university was founded in response to the need for a liberal arts-oriented university in Nigeria. To instill creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, AUN offers a curriculum that follows a liberal arts tradition and philosophy. Accordingly, students are taught to engage in critical thinking and quantitative reasoning to acquire an understanding of the values and complex diversity of human experiences. These skill sets, incorporated in all courses, provide an advantageous adroitness to any career. AUN's pedagogy and outcome-oriented approach to teaching and learning also prepares its students for personal growth and excellence in diverse majors that include information technology, economics, accounting, business, entrepreneurship, law, engineering, sciences, English language and other areas.

AUN is committed to offering global standards of education, training and research, with a development orientation. As a development university, students are not only trained in literacy but are taught skills to handle life's challenges and how to build solutions to issues around them. In this respect, AUN has gone a step further to connect the students with their community. A Community Development Course (CDV) programme was specifically developed to connect the student's service potential and social skill acquisition to their course of study. Each of the six departments and schools (except the graduate school) is required to explicitly offer a community development course tailored to the field of study. For example, the school of business developed a CDV course in microfinance where students are required to practically teach business principles to women and men in the community to boost their economic development. In the law school, CDV 211 (Law and Justice in Development) is designed to train all AUN students on clinical legal services within the context of development by exposing students to different development prospects in the law as it relates to society and contemporary issues. In this law class, issues that cut across societies, particularly developing countries are raised and discussed from legal, social and development-based perspectives, addressing issues of sustainability, peace, good governance and rule of law, children and women's rights, corruption and social control. All CDV courses are open to every student of the university, regardless of their discipline or major, to

34 American University of Nigeria (AUN). "Undergraduate Admissions Guide". Online at: <https://www.aun.edu.ng/docs/2019-AUN-Admission-Guide.pdf>

35 AUN. "Undergraduate Admissions Guide".

imbibe a community-oriented consciousness in them. Each CDV course integrates classroom knowledge with practical fieldwork and community outreach, which aligns with AUN's commitment to community development and peace initiatives. The various CDV courses aim to introduce students to the importance and concepts of community development and citizenship, while also instilling in them the commitment to social responsibility. Instilling this community commitment also serves to emphasise Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which students can further translate to their career and business activities.³⁶

It is notable that AUN is situated in Yola, Adamawa State, which was terrorised by the Boko Haram insurgents, displacing thousands and killing scores. The extremist Islamist movement Boko Haram has been a source of significant social unrest and sporadic violence in Nigeria for the past few years and much of its recent history.³⁷ Their broad goals in their attempts to form an Islamic Caliphate in Nigeria led to increased levels of terrorism and violence in the northern part of the country. Since its founding in 2002, Boko Haram has been responsible for not only disrupting the lives of residents in the regions they attack but also causing widespread death, abduction and wanton destruction. Boko Haram's action is characterised by its strict interpretation of Islamic law, known as Salafi, which emphasises religious purity, rejection of any form of innovation and education and stringent adherence to Islamic religious teachings. In the heat of their attacks in 2005, Boko Haram's actions had a far-reaching impact in certain parts of Adamawa State, especially the towns of Mubi, Madagali and Michika, among others.³⁸ The group has previously attacked Yola with suicide bombs and improvised explosive devices.³⁹ In the light of the critical situation created by Boko Haram, especially in the northern part of the country, the AUN felt it was important to adopt peace education and peacebuilding initiatives as tools to counter religious extremism and to fight against the radicalisation of young people, while also providing youths with skills and knowledge on peacebuilding, prevention of conflicts and resolving the occurrence of conflicts in a peaceful way. Although peace education has been part of the institution's mission as captured in its curriculum, the university took other deliberate steps after its experience of the impact of Boko Haram.

One of the most important allies in stopping and deterring young people from becoming radicalised is the education sector. AUN does not, however, focus on

36 American University of Nigeria (AUN). "School of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Catalog 2022-2026". Online at: <https://www.aun.edu.ng/index.php/downloads?task=download.send&id=115&catid=3&m=0>

37 Shalangwa M and Iwuamadi CK. 2021. "Boko Haram insurgency in Adamawa State: Opportunities For Dialogue And Reconciliation", *University of Nigeria Journal of Political Economy* 11(2):293-313.

38 Shalangwa and Iwuamadi, "Boko Haram insurgency in Adamawa State".

39 "Dozens killed in Nigeria market bombing", *Al Jazeera*, 17 November 2015. Currently, however, the insurgency is not a threat to Adamawa state, as the Nigerian authorities have effectively responded to and stabilised the threats posed by Boko Haram and other radical groups.

deradicalisation, it adopts a wholesome approach that incorporates proactive and preventive measures through designated courses, programmes to develop an appreciation for diversity and respect for human rights and initiatives that promote inclusiveness and participation. This is in line with the UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism, which outlines seven key actions: (1) dialogue and conflict prevention, (2) strengthening good governance, rule of law and human rights, (3) engaging communities, (4) empowering youth, (5) empowering women, (6) education skill development and employment generation and (7) strategic communications and media.⁴⁰ Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has enjoined educational institutions, to encourage tolerance and respect for diversity (in political viewpoint, in faith, in lifestyle and in social behaviour).⁴¹ Accordingly, the university is following this direction. In the words of North Africa historian and cultural relations expert Martin Rose, "education itself is not the answer: it needs to be the right sort of education".⁴² Many researchers emphasise the importance of the school as a safe space for young individuals to receive knowledge, values, skills and attitudes necessary for enhancing peace.⁴³ It has also been argued that education can be effective in allowing young people to develop their own unique perspectives and providing a safe space for them to question and confront others as well as themselves; thus, it can be helpful in challenging dangerous religious ideologies.⁴⁴ Importantly, it gives young people the chance to be exposed to alternative viewpoints in order to combat "groupthink" and potentially extreme viewpoints.⁴⁵ This perspective has been imbibed by AUN in its teachings, community service and humanitarian effort.

The elements of AUN discussed in the chapters sections below are identified as ways to integrate peace values into the university's core values, system and activities through the means and activities that AUN has adopted to support peace goals. AUN is adopted as a case study due to the practical, deliberate and strategic steps that it has undertaken to inculcate peace values, promote tolerance and facilitate reconciliation following religious-induced conflicts. Any university can perform these roles in their own way to their community by building peace and encouraging socio-economic and cultural development.

40 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2016. "Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity: A Development Response to Addressing Radicalization and Violent Extremism". New York: UNDP, 33.

41 UNDP, "Preventing Violent Extremism", 39.

42 Rose M. 2017. "Universities and 'Radicalisation' in the Middle East and North Africa", *Journal of Security Studies*, 19:63.

43 Sas M, Ponnet K, Reniers G and Hardyns W. 2020. "The Role of Education in the Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Developing Countries", *Sustainability* 12(6):2320.

44 Sas et al, "The Role of Education in the Prevention of Radicalization".

45 Sas et al, "The Role of Education in the Prevention of Radicalization".

Building knowledge, understanding and peace education

One of the first things educational institutions can provide is the knowledge needed to build peace, reduce violence and enhance tolerance. The impetus for this is contained in the Nigerian National Education Policy which states that Nigerian universities should aim, among other objectives, to: (1) “contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training”, (2) “forge and cement national unity” and (3) “promote national and international understanding and interaction”.⁴⁶ These objectives are to be achieved through the provision of accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of all Nigerians. Education has been used to advance positive attitudes and actions that contribute to the development of humanity and the enhancement of society in general. Indeed, educational institutions are vested with the resources and means to integrate peace education and promote religious tolerance in schools. Advocates have explored ways of incorporating the subject of peace into educational goals and strategies to transform societal divisions and conflicts into peaceful and sustainable relationships.⁴⁷ In this manner, a peace-related educational approach can contribute significantly to peace.

There are three interrelated approaches to peace education: (1) peace-related education, (2) peace *IN* education and (3) peace *THROUGH* education. Peace-related education is the process of facilitating learning and acquiring knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits that enhance peace, conflict resolution and respect. Peace *IN* education pertains to how students, educators, management and staff peacefully cohabit and relate with one another or others. It is not enough that students are taught the subjects of peace. They must demonstrate such attitudes in how they relate with one another and their communities. Peace *IN* education, therefore, ensures that the educational institution stands as a symbol of peace or acts as a peace intermediary through its students, staff, teachers and general interaction with society. Peace *THROUGH* education, on the other hand, is the outcome of the peace education they received. That is the evidence of the change in their attitudes, the demonstration of respect, and the manifestation of the change after receiving the peace education. Students engaging in peace-building initiatives and activities are said to have imbibed peace values and peaceful culture through their education.

Peace education can be structured in schools to create a human consciousness and to a greater extent, commitment to the cause and ways of peace.⁴⁸ Peace education can also assist in inculcating the skills, knowledge and management of conflicts. In this manner, the ICESCR in Article 13 says that “education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and

46 Federal Republic of Nigeria. 2013. National Policy on Education 2013, s 59, paras (a), (f), and (g).

47 Gill and Niens, “Education as Humanisation”, 12.

48 Gill and Niens, “Education as Humanisation”, 12.

friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and, further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.⁴⁹

In the same fashion, several proposals have been made to include educational considerations as critical components of post-conflict transformations and peacebuilding.⁵⁰ UNESCO, has emphasised “the need for ‘conflict-sensitive’ education that ‘does no harm’, for example, by ensuring that education does not reinforce inequalities or fuel further divisions”.⁵¹ Specifically, school personnel, such as instructors and teachers, managers and staff, can counteract the attitudes, approaches and ignorance that underpin religious intolerance. This will control the conflicts that result from intolerance and disrespect for another’s religious beliefs. They can also help to inoculate students against biases by teaching them how to live peacefully in a diverse religious setting. Teaching students to recognise the early warning signs of conflicts or how to resolve religious conflicts non-violently can help save lives and properties. For instance, the gruesome murder of a defenceless student of Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, by her irate schoolmates is a poignant illustration of the result of religious intolerance and violence in a higher institution. Deborah Samuel was attacked because she had reportedly insisted that the WhatsApp platform for students should not contain religious messages since it was created for academic matters and should remain so.⁵² In the ensuing back-and-forth argument, she was alleged to have made statements which were perceived as insulting to the Holy Prophet of Islam by her colleagues. Soon after, news spread through the college that a fellow student had committed blasphemy and her punishment was death. True to their threats, she was gruesomely lynched right on campus with no help from security operatives. One thing that stands out from this act of execution is the inability to non-violently resolve the perceived blasphemy, which escalated needlessly to the point of murder. Schools can also be the breeding ground for injustice, violence and conflicts, which undermines peace. Jamil Salmi, an expert on global tertiary education expert with the World Bank, has corroborated this view by highlighting the various ways schools contribute to violence, whether direct (corporal punishment), indirect (educational inequality), repressive (deprivation of political rights) or alienating (exclusion of mother

49 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, G.A. res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, *entered into force* Jan. 3, 1976.

50 Samura F. 2013. “Peace Education for Reconstruction and Peacebuilding in Postwar African Societies”, *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 3(2):24-46; Mitra K. 2005. “The Role of Education in Post-Conflict Kosovo: A Proposal for an Analysis of How Experts Understand the Role that Education Has Played in Peacebuilding”, *Capstone Collection* 3300; The World Bank. 2005. *Reshaping the Future Education and Postconflict Reconstruction*. Washington, DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank.

51 United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). 2011. *The Role of Education in Peacebuilding: Literature Review*. New York: UNICEF.

52 “Despicable murder of Deborah Samuel in Sokoto”, *The Guardian*, 23 May 2022.

tongue), among others.⁵³ Structural and religion-related discriminations and biases within the schools can fuel conflicts, especially where the school does not respond appropriately to previous incidents. In this fashion, any violent religious-related act should be dealt with decisively to send a strong message. At the time of this writing, the perpetrators of the gruesome murder of Deborah Samuel have not been brought to justice.

Peace education within the context of religious tolerance can promote positive social behaviour. Students can be taught how to cohabit harmoniously despite their religious differences. This can ensure that students leave the educational institutions as peacekeepers, peacemakers, peacebuilders and advocates. Through targeted curriculum, school policies, programmes, dispute resolution trainings and activities, institutions can create a peace-loving school environment while educating them to constructively approach religious differences. Such education should not only aim to stop conflicts but also create a desire to learn how a peaceful approach to religious matters and differences can provide a better basis for a just and sustainable society. This way, students would be taught to examine and challenge embedded beliefs and attitudes toward those who do not share their beliefs.

Integrating peace values into the university's guiding mission or ethos will also send a strong message that the school is taking stock of (un)intended practices of inequality, discrimination, exclusion, marginalisation or silencing. Specific courses, such as Peace Studies, Conflict Management and Resolution, Dispute Resolution and others, can be specifically designed to research and understand the causes of violence and the conditions for interpersonal, societal and international peace, dispute resolution strategies. However, every discipline can contribute to understanding peace and conflict management.

While the concept of peace education as an instrument for raising consciousness, imagining nonviolent alternatives, and providing modes of empowerment of change has been extensively discussed in the literature, others critique the generic pedagogical approach often adopted by schools. Hajir and Kester contend that while the idea of peace education emphasises reason and logical discourse as tools for emancipation and transformation, it ignores the underlying power imbalances that exist, such as the repression of non-rational modes of knowing and being.⁵⁴ Others argue for a holistic and comprehensive approach to peace education beyond the impartation of peace knowledge. Accordingly, this entails developing fresh political, social and intellectual frameworks that support social justice and give people a feeling of agency.⁵⁵ Stated differently, it must be one in which power

53 Salmi J. 2000. *Violence, Democracy and Education: An Analytical Framework*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

54 Hajir and Kester, "Toward a Decolonial Praxis in Critical Peace Education".

55 Bajaj M. 2015. "Pedagogies of Resistance and Critical Peace Education Praxis", *Journal of Peace Education* 12(2):154-166; Zembylas M. 2018. "Con-/Divergences Between Postcolonial and Critical Peace Education: Towards Pedagogies of Decolonization In Peace Education' *Journal of Peace Education* 15(1):1-23.

dynamics and systemic injustices are addressed, and students must be empowered to bring about revolutionary change in the field of peace education.⁵⁶

Take the approach of AUN in this respect. AUN's pedagogic approach focuses on students' critical thinking, problem solving-centred approach and leadership development. Through this instructional approach, learners are mentally developed through general education courses alongside majors, minors and elective courses that emphasise peace education. Some courses are specifically developed to deepen an understanding of religious issues. For instance, Philosophy 201 on "Comparative Religions: Islam and Christianity" deals with the critical knowledge of both religions – their foundation, influences, development and impact.⁵⁷ The course, "Conflict and Alternative Dispute Resolution" (LAW 501) reflects on the theories of conflict, peace and security as well as conflictology.⁵⁸ It also touches on religious conflicts and the management of such conflicts to get the most positive result for all parties involved. The course "Gender, Law and Development II" (LAW 408) also offers an introduction to legal reforms and strategies in response to understandings of the relationship between war and gender, as well as feminist peace studies.⁵⁹ Similarly, the course "Women and Development" (ICP 336) provides an interdisciplinary approach to evaluating the important and central roles women play in developing countries, their contribution to peacebuilding, feminist peace studies and the reconciliation efforts of women.⁶⁰ Many other curricula are established to develop the disposition and confidence of learners as agents of peace, cultivate their inner harmony and nurture a connection with their immediate environment and society at large. For example, students of "Communications & Multimedia Design" learn about media not only as agents and agencies of information, education and entertainment but also as agents and agencies of development, peacebuilding and change.⁶¹ The journalism major (CMD 207) trains students to become journalists who are sensitive to Africa's peace challenges through courses such as "Peace Journalism".⁶² An international and comparative politics degree with a Peace and Conflict Resolution (PCR) concentration provides students with the core knowledge and understanding of the issues and practices involved in peace and conflict resolution.⁶³ In the class, students consider peace-related case studies, including

56 Purwanto E et al. 2023. "The Peace Education Concept and Practice at Universities: A Systematic Review", *Cogent Education* 10:2.

57 AUN, "School of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Catalog 2022-2026".

58 American University of Nigeria. "School of Law Hand Book 2023-2025", 30. Online at: <https://www.aun.edu.ng/index.php/downloads/summary/3-aun-docs/143-aun-sol-hand-book>

59 AUN, "School of Law Hand Book 2023-2025", 29.

60 AUN, "School of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Catalog 2022-2026".

61 AUN, "School of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Catalog 2022-2026".

62 AUN, "School of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Catalog 2022-2026".

63 AUN, "School of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Catalog 2022-2026".

African peace and conflict studies, and post-conflict issues.⁶⁴ The course, ICP 309 “Strategies of Conflict Transformation: Approaches to Peacebuilding” examines the “theory and practice of conflict transformation and resolution, including the structural factors that play a part in conflict”.⁶⁵ Students are taught to understand conflict transformation including resolution, negotiation and mediation to provide lasting solutions to peace problems.⁶⁶

In pursuit of the development mission of the university, various CDV courses have been specifically designed to inculcate an understanding of the development needs of learners’ immediate surroundings.⁶⁷ In recognition of the volatile nature of the northern region of the country where the university is situated, the curriculum of CDV courses includes elements of peace education to enable these students to develop the ability to manifest tolerance, promote peace and acquire potent skills for non-violent conflict resolution. This way, they graduate with a sense of dedication to a culture of peace. For instance, CDV 207 “Environmental Sustainability” explores and implements strategies for redeveloping and resettling communities in northern Nigeria that were destroyed by the terrorist group Boko Haram’s insurgency. CDV 206 “Peace through Art” also equips students with the knowledge to support and promote peaceful dialogue and co-existence. In the course, students are required to serve AUN’s immediate community by using art as the medium for supporting and promoting peaceful dialogue and coexistence.

A Center for Peace and Security has been set up in the school to practically engage issues of peace, support peace studies and conduct training to enhance the knowledge of peace and conflict management. The Center draws together researchers and peace advocates around the world to engage in conflict discussions and the subject of peace through seminars, conferences and outreach. Another avenue for the research, development and dissemination of thematic matters relating to development, peace, and human rights is AUN’s Center for Governance, Human Rights and Governance. It goes without saying that a university can lead the way in the theoretical and practical impartation of peace-related education, values and skills. Through target courses, peace education can be instilled in the learners using the existing subjects in the school curriculum. In this respect, UNESCO links education with peacebuilding. Accordingly, education is a tool that can contribute to transformations within post-conflict societies in terms of changing attitudes and behaviours toward violence, policing and the legal system. It is also an instrument to better understand the political system and its implications for local communities.

64 For those considering PCR as a concentration, each student is required to undertake the following courses: ICP 229 Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies; ICP 309 Strategies of Conflict Transformation – Approaches to Peacebuilding; ICP 447 International Human Rights Protection; ICP 448 Humanitarian Intervention; ICP 477 Peace Studies/ Political Violence among other general courses. See AUN, “School of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Catalog 2022-2026”.

65 AUN, “School of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Catalog 2022-2026”.

66 AUN, “School of Arts and Sciences Undergraduate Catalog 2022-2026”.

67 A CDV course is a semester long course with at least 25 hours of community engagement.

It can facilitate the development of skills that support economic regeneration and sustainable livelihoods while also contributing to changing social relations between groups dealing with the legacies of conflict.⁶⁸

Building a tolerance culture

One of the important goals of higher education is to instil in youth a tolerant attitude towards different worldviews, religions, and cultural traditions.⁶⁹ Training them to be tolerant of others will help them to embrace and celebrate the opinions, practices, or behaviours of others. Tolerance education will stimulate empathy and respect, not only in thoughts but also through actions and deeds. It could also help to counter extremism, religious fanaticism and indoctrination.

It is apt to note that while educational institutions can promote peace education to change values and attitudes, they can likewise create the enabling ground for radicalisation, violent attitudes and extremist values. In Somalia, for example, the recruitment to Al-Shabaab has been facilitated by the radicalisation of religious and educational institutions.⁷⁰ Therefore, it should be the aim of the educational setting to serve as a safe environment where students can find a more inclusive and less rigid expression of their ideas and values.⁷¹ To stop schoolchildren from becoming radicalised, experts have also recommended the standardisation of curricula in educational institutions – including religious schools – and the adoption of initiatives to counter extremist ideals.⁷² AUN has equipped its students to take steps in this regard by launching an initiative that utilised social media to reconcile religious differences. The #IAMaBeliever and Beliepedia. The #IAMaBeliever platform is created to allow the expression of religious views in a way that encourages tolerance and respect for the beliefs of others.⁷³ Beliepedia, on the other hand, features verses from the Bible and the Quran, with analyses of their views on various topics.⁷⁴ Zamiyat Abubakar, one of the students involved in the project, said that they recognised the need to change the narrative of religious intolerance by challenging people's dangerous religious beliefs.⁷⁵ Using social media, they invite people to adopt alternative approaches to religious beliefs while also promoting a

68 UNICEF, *The Role of Education in Peacebuilding*, 8-9.

69 Putilian NS, Zakirova VG and Kamalova LA. 2019. "Developing Tolerance in Students Studying at A Multicultural University", in Valeeva R (ed). *Teacher Education – IFTE 78*, European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences 78:755-766.

70 UNDP, "Preventing Violent Extremism", 33.

71 Hilker LM and Fraser E. 2009. "Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states", Report prepared for DFID. London: Social Development Direct 30:1-50.

72 UNDP, "Preventing Violent Extremism", 33.

73 Ezeamalu B. 2016. "How Nigerian University Uses Social Media to Fight Religious Extremism", *Premium Times*, 19 November.

74 Ezeamalu, "How Nigerian University Uses Social Media".

75 Ezeamalu, "How Nigerian University Uses Social Media".

culture of peace and acceptance of others.⁷⁶ Ultimately, the project seeks to show that people are more than their beliefs.

Religion is ambivalent, and religious beliefs often lend themselves to many expressions that are sometimes contradictory. Take the case of a suicide bomber who acts according to a religious inclination. The suicide bomber is no less “religious” than the people who renounce violence and gives themselves entirely to compassion and healing. For the suicide bomber is motivated by devotion to the religion – that is, their best interpretation and understanding – and finds that act to be an expression of devotion to a religious mandate. For this reason, students who lead the programmes at AUN are specifically trained to be sensitive in their approach to religious matters. Students typically direct religious players to use their faith-based dynamics for the greater collective good of society in a wider range of peacebuilding and peacemaking activities. Rather than advocating solely for their faith, the student-led peacebuilders call on viewing audiences to apply the wealth and resources of their faiths to larger community-wide peace endeavours and harmonious cooperation.

Higher education actors as exemplary catalysts of peace and religious tolerance

To practically demonstrate peace ideals, teachers and the school management must also show respect and have regard for the religion of their students and colleagues as exemplary figures. They should be encouraged to act as model standards for religious tolerance and peace. Schools should organise collective worship, where possible, to foster a genuine appreciation for various religions. Such interactions can encourage students and the academic community to be critical, while also equipping them with the necessary skills to defeat divisive and discriminatory messages that fuel religious crises. Religious leaders in school worship centres, chapels and mosques should also be tasked with promoting positive attitudes of respect and understanding in their worship sessions and practices. On campus, AUN has a dedicated mosque and a chapel for worship and meditation. Sundays and Fridays are typically lecture-free days to allow for religious worship. Interreligious activities are also encouraged to improve peaceful coexistence among the different religious sects.

Beyond the curriculum, schools can also promote peaceful school culture and enhance healthy relationships amongst different religions through sporting activities, social events and interreligious activities. Such activities should be geared towards improving tolerance and countering extremist views while also fighting stereotypes and intolerant attitudes that students have been raised with. Consequently, AUN has sought to prevent further conflicts between Christians and Muslims by engaging joint sporting activities youth from communities that have experienced violence and religious conflict.⁷⁷ The sporting activities aim to foster

⁷⁶ Ezeamalu, “How Nigerian University Uses Social Media”.

⁷⁷ “AUN API Receives International Award for Peace Work”, BluePrint, 12 December 2016.

teamwork and tolerance across religious and ethnic divides.⁷⁸ This “Peace Through Sport Program” was developed as a research-based approach to utilise sport as a common ground to build relationships and friendships across different ethnic and religious lines.⁷⁹ The programme has identified male and female youths in vulnerable conflict-prone communities and has brought them together to form unity teams.⁸⁰ The unity teams are comprised of youth from various ethnic and religious backgrounds to play together and build relationships that promote peace and development. In addition to fostering unity, the sporting events aim to build team spirit and foster teamwork. AUN’s action is a nod to a resolution of the UN General Assembly which underlines that “sports can foster peace and development and can contribute to an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding, and we encourage discussions in the General Assembly for proposals leading to a plan of action on sport and development.”⁸¹ In this manner, higher educational institutions can foster sustainable peace and development in communities that have experienced violence and conflict displacement through collaborative activities.

Educational institutions as mediators of peace and reconciliation

School buildings in Nigeria have been used to house internally displaced persons. However, the benefits of educational institutions are not limited to structural support. In addition to creating a purposeful environment of tolerance and providing an orientation toward peace, educational actors can harness their resources to assist in peacebuilding, reconciliation, religious crisis prevention and post conflict reconstruction. As neutral agents of peace, they can keep the challenges open between opposing agents while also facilitating cooperation and exchange of peaceful negotiation to rebuild trust and repair broken relationships. Higher education institutions should place themselves in a position where the host communities can rely on them to intercede and facilitate reconciliation. The process of peacebuilding largely involves two things. First is the dialogue process that breaks through differences and creates mutual understanding. This is followed by the restoration and reconstruction process. Higher educational institutions and actors can become a hub for communities, groups and leaders to optimise their relations with conflicting groups by mediating dialogue for reconciliation and peace. They can undertake humanitarian responses to religious crises and assist in restoring peace and mediating access to humanitarian resources. Their credible and trustworthy structures can be leveraged to distribute humanitarian aid to conflict-affected areas.

78 Donohue E. 2016. “API and AUN Use Education to Empower Young People”, *Miscellany News*, 21 September.

79 “Peace Mission to Guyuk, Numan: AUN-API Donate Farm Equipment, Offer Training In Peacebuilding To Youth, Vulnerable Groups” AUNThisWEEK, 24 March 2022.

80 “Peace Mission to Guyuk, Numan”; Donohue, “API and AUN Use Education to Empower Young People”.

81 UN General Assembly, 2005 *World Summit Outcome* Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 September 2005 A/RES/60/1

AUN not only focuses on the development of its students, but also the development of the entire host community. In 2012, when the attack by the terrorist group known as Boko Haram became more violent, AUN developed an initiative to assist the Internally Displaced People (IDP) who were forced to vacate their homes and move to a relatively safe city where the university is located. Against the backdrop of clashes and banditry in other parts of the country, the management of AUN further teamed up with prominent religious, business and community leaders to form the coalition AUN–Adamawa Peace Initiative (AUN-API) to build peace in Yola and Adamawa.⁸² This internationally recognised peacebuilding organisation is mandated to facilitate peace work and human development, with a particular focus on youth and vulnerable populations in the region. The coalition has also reached out to like-minded peacebuilders and committed stakeholders in Plateau and Kaduna states to share the successful peacebuilding model in a way that has helped to keep Adamawa State relatively peaceful.

In furtherance of its peacemaking and peacebuilding objective, the AUN-API hosted several international peace conferences, peace rallies, training and livelihood support programmes.⁸³ They also undertook several humanitarian initiatives and programmes to help orphaned, vulnerable youth who had no education, dropouts and those with no work prospects. Some of the AUN-API programmes include the Feed and Read programmes for out-of-school boys and girls.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the members of the AUN-API equipped up to 15 000 young people and youth in the community with skill-based projects such as Waste to Wealth which provides training on how to transform or recycle plastic waste to useful products or artistic ornaments,⁸⁵ Science Technology and Math (STEM) and entrepreneurship training and a literacy and numeracy programme called “Students Empowered through Language, Literacy and Arithmetic” (STELLAR).⁸⁶ These programmes

82 Donohue, “API and AUN Use Education to Empower Young People”.

83 “AUN-Adamawa Peace Initiative Reconvenes, Pays Condolence Visit to Ahmed Joda’s family”, *Premium Times*, 7 September 2021.

84 The Feed and Read Program provides basic preparatory education to street children and youngsters in the community. They are taught basic English, mathematics, hygiene, and social skills and provided with meals to keep them engaged, fed and educated. Atiku Institute. 2019. “AUN Feed and Read Program”, 9 October.

85 This is a programme to upcycle plastic into artistic items. The projects resulted in the production of hand/grocery bags, wallets, baskets, key holders, table mats and iPad/school bags from recycled waste items such as nylons and plastics. This project also aims to improve the environment, reduce waste and empower women/youths to be financially endowed. Atiku Institute. 2016. “300 IDPs Empowered Through UNHCR-backed Waste-to-Wealth Program”, 1 March; Mehdi MM, Rakshit S, Zivkovic J. 2021. “Yola EcoSentials, Nigeria: waste-to-wealth community social enterprise’ *Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies* 11(2):1-23.

86 The Students Empowered through Language, Literacy and Arithmetic (STELLAR) together with the Technology Enhanced Learning for All (TELA), as supplemented by the Strengthening Education in the Northeast Nigeria States (SENSE), an early grade reading intervention targeting 5000 teachers, 200 000 learners and 100 education managers across Adamawa and Gombe states, are educational initiatives to help pupils in Adamawa’s

have sponsored youth and women to develop meaningful skills and acquire knowledge to get jobs or create jobs for themselves, thereby reducing the prospects of them having to engage in illegal acts to generate income. Participants are further mentored to develop a business plan that can attract funding.⁸⁷

The media can play a positive role in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. As a corollary, the media can distort perceptions and labels, especially when there is a religious undertone. The media has profound effects on the public's perception of issues such as terrorism, religion and what can be termed extremist actions. Indeed, public opinions of events are shaped by media coverage and exposure to negative media about a particular group produces schemas or ingrained notions about that group in the mind of the public.⁸⁸ Take Islam, for example. The biased and prejudicial media coverage linking Muslims to terrorist attacks influences the categorisation of certain incidents as religious acts and also promotes similar unfair labelling patterns and incites animosity toward Muslims.⁸⁹ Boko Haram also serves as an example. The group started as a clamour for the government to improve their living conditions and address corruption and the lack of quality welfare protection.⁹⁰ Over time, however, the group became radical in their interpretations of social problems, and they began to advocate stricter imposition of *sharia* law in regions that had predominantly Muslim populations. Reports about the activities of the organisation have often been framed through a religious lens – they are labelled as religious fanatics, “jihadist” or terrorist, and this ignores other underlying apolitical and socio-economic aspects of their agitations. Moreover, the plight of victims is often overlooked by media outlets, who rather focus on the perpetrators through a limited interest-based prism. Thus, it is imperative to frame media reports in a manner that delicately balances information accurately, responsibly and proportionately.⁹¹ According to a report by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT), the challenging task for media outlets is to make sure they possess the skills and background knowledge necessary to avoid

public schools stay and succeed in schools. In the programmes, AUN students tutor pupils in public schools in Yola and Jimeta in math, English and reading. Under the supervision of faculty, AUN students also wrote and published children's books and literature in local languages. Likewise, AUN students wrote apps to further the learning objectives and used tablets to teach pupils languages and arithmetic. “At Seven, Atiku Institute Repositions to Cater to AUN's Growing Research and Development Needs”, AUNThisWEEK, 6 October 2021.

⁸⁷ “Peace Mission to Guyuk, Numan”.

⁸⁸ Nagar N. 2010. “Who Is Afraid of the T-Word? Labeling Terror in the Media Coverage of Political Violence Before and After 9/11”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33(6):533-547.

⁸⁹ Garzon V. 2016. *Labeling Terrorism: Media Effects on Public Policy Attitudes*, Thesis, Georgia State University, 2016.

⁹⁰ Onuoha FC. 2014. “Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?”, United States Institute of Peace Special Report 348. Washington, DC: USIP.

⁹¹ Glazzard A and Reed A. 2021. “After the Attack: Lessons for Governments and Journalists in Reporting Terrorist Incident”, ICCT Report. The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, June.

self-censoring as a default when covering acts of terrorism, especially when their coverage touches on the sensitive issue of religion.⁹² Consequently, they also need to strike a balance between the public's right to information and safety.⁹³ When it comes to covering terrorist threats, journalists must be aware of both the immediate and long-term effects of such threats as well as the political environment in which they are prevalent.

Armed with this knowledge, AUN similarly undertook measures to train journalists, comprising field reporters and gatekeepers and drawn from the print, broadcast and online media from Borno, Yobe, Taraba, Bauchi and Adamawa States, which were the states most affected by terrorist activities at that time. The training was focused on peace journalism, the reporting and treatment of stories about war and conflict with a delicate and balanced view.⁹⁴ Under the theme, "Redefining the Role of Journalists in Peacebuilding", the workshop set out to offer practicing journalists an in-depth intellectual and professional perspective to the task of reporting news in a time of insurgency and to a nation in search of order, stability and development.⁹⁵ The workshop was part of a larger peace conference for peace activists sponsored by the AUN-Adamawa Peace Initiative.⁹⁶

The university also served as an intermediary mediating peace between warring communities by leading several peace reconciliation missions in Adamawa State. In 2022, a delegation of the AUN-API, comprising AUN senior management and prominent clerics, visited two communities of Guyuk and Numan with a message of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. Religious violence had erupted in Numan, Adamawa State, and spilled to neighbouring villages, including Guyuk, leaving more than 17 persons dead and some worship centres destroyed.⁹⁷ The violent clash was said to be a cumulative effect of two weeks of tense relations between the native Bachama Christian and the local Muslim community over the location of the town's central mosque, a few yards away from the Hama Bachama paramount ruler's place.⁹⁸ The reconstruction of the mosque, which was destroyed during a prior religious clash in the town in the year 2003, had reignited indignation among the native Christians who perceived that the new mosque building, which had a minaret that was higher than the Hama Bachama's palace, was an affront to

⁹² Glazzard and Reed, "After the Attack".

⁹³ Glazzard and Reed, "After the Attack".

⁹⁴ Ating N. 2015. "Peace Journalism: AUN Trains Journalists on Reporting Terrorism, Conflicts", *Premium Times*, 5 January.

⁹⁵ Ating, "Peace Journalism".

⁹⁶ Ating, "Peace Journalism".

⁹⁷ Sulaiman, "Religious Violence in Contemporary Nigeria", 88.

⁹⁸ Sulaiman, "Religious Violence in Contemporary Nigeria", 88; Alanamu AS. 2005. "Reflections on Religious Violence in Nigeria (1999-2004)", in Alanamu AS (eds). *Issues in Political Violence in Nigeria*. Ilorin: Hamson Printing Communication, 170-177.

their leader's authority and an assertion of dominance in the town.⁹⁹ Even after the violence had settled down, there were still embers of distrust in the communities capable of reigniting fresh clashes. The delegation, led by the then President of AUN Margee Ensign, visited the monarchs of the affected communities to exchange ideas and perspectives on how best to forestall conflicts, and achieve sustainable peace and development.¹⁰⁰

The community service-oriented approach to peacebuilding

The assistance often rendered by states, non-governmental and international organisations can also be performed, on a smaller scale by education actors, students and lecturers. Universities have a responsibility to give back to their host communities. Egwu outlines a few ways schools impact their host communities.¹⁰¹ These include sponsorship, stimulating economic activities, providing employment opportunities, having them benefit from the research projects of the students targeted at the community and providing humanitarian assistance to host communities.¹⁰² Through these community service initiatives, their impact can be made towards peacebuilding.

AUN has assumed a similar role for humanitarian response,¹⁰³ food distribution and essential supplies to assuage the impoverishment of internally displaced refugees who were forced to flee from Boko Haram.¹⁰⁴ In the aftermath of religious crises in the area, AUN undertook humanitarian interventions to provide for over 400 000 displaced persons who flooded into the city of Yola.¹⁰⁵ AUN staff carried the burden of providing housing and supporting many hundreds of displaced persons despite their dwindling tight resources.¹⁰⁶ Students, faculty and staff distributed food supplies every week to the indigents and displaced persons.¹⁰⁷ Many were also assisted to resettle with the support of staff, students and faculty. These projects were driven by AUN's goal of leading the students to be the catalyst of development by example. To this end, AUN is poised as an agent of development itself by playing an active direct role in the development of society.

99 Murray SJ and Ajose A. 2004. "17 Killed in Adamawa Religious Riot", *The Punch*, 10 June; Sulaiman, "Religious Violence in Contemporary Nigeria", 88.

100 "Peace Mission to Guyuk, Numan".

101 Egwu S. 2019. "Ways Nigerian Universities Impact on Their Host Communities for Mutual Co-Existence and Development: Ebonyi State University (Ebsu) Abakaliki in Focus", *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education* 9(3):49.

102 Egwu, "Ways Nigerian Universities Impact on Their Host Communities".

103 Ating, "Peace Journalism".

104 Ensign M. 2016. "Nigerian University Tackles Extremism and Hunger", BBC, 17 August.

105 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Ensign M. 2015. "University feeds 270000 taking refuge from Boko Haram", BBC, 4 March.

106 Ensign, "University feeds 270 000".

107 Ensign, "University feeds 270 000".

AUN's API also used education to empower young people to keep the peace in times of turmoil and to prevent radicalisation. They implemented a programme called Technology Enhanced Learning All (TELA) to teach over 22 000 vulnerable street children basic numeracy skills.¹⁰⁸ The University also organised educational initiatives such as earlier mentioned Feed and Read Program that still currently attends to the nutritional needs of Almajiris (itinerant Muslim students) while ensuring that they learn basic arithmetic, language and other subjects.¹⁰⁹ The Feed and Read Program aims to promote education through literacy classes while also alleviating hunger by providing a meal a day to impoverished children, the homeless, street and vulnerable out-of-school children.¹¹⁰ The organisation further engages these young people in educational activities to occupy them positively since they are most vulnerable to radicalisation and religious indoctrination. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence to the effect that the API significantly contributed to maintaining peace in Yola.¹¹¹

In 2014, the religious extremist group Boko Haram sect abducted 276 girls from a Government Secondary School in Chibok.¹¹² The Chibok girls kidnapping was a viral news that attracted the attention of the First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, and elicited the condemnation of other prominent leaders around the world. Subsequently, about 57 of the girls immediately escaped from their abductors.¹¹³ In the aftermath of that abduction, AUN, in partnership with the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs, stepped in to offer a special scholarship programme to the twenty-one girls who were rescued.¹¹⁴ The University has since mentored them into vibrant, curious and ambitious young women ready for a better life and career after graduation.¹¹⁵

It is also worth mentioning how AUN acted as a bridge for the dominant religions (Christians and Muslims) and their leaders to understand each other and work together towards embracing peaceful cohabitation. The interreligious leaders and the API came together to set an example and to send out a message of peace and tolerance through advocacy and peace intervention activities. They collaboratively provided bags of seedlings for 4 150 IDP farmers affected by Boko Haram.¹¹⁶ Their

¹⁰⁸ Donohue "API and AUN Use Education to Empower Young People".

¹⁰⁹ Ating N. 2015. "AUN's 'Feed and Read' Programme Targets Almajiri Education", *The Guardian*, 20 December.

¹¹⁰ Atiku Institute, "AUN Feed and Read Program".

¹¹¹ Campbell J. 2016. "The American University of Nigeria and the Adamawa Peace Initiative", *Council on Foreign Relations*, 14 September.

¹¹² "More Chibok girls matriculate at AUN, begin life-changing journey", *Premium Times*, 25 January 2022.

¹¹³ "More Chibok girls matriculate at AUN"; "57 rescued Chibok girls commence programmes at AUN", *Tribune Online*, 21 October 2021.

¹¹⁴ "AUN Offers Special Programme for Chibok Girls", PM News, 19 January 2015.

¹¹⁵ "More Chibok girls matriculate at AUN".

¹¹⁶ "USAID, Varsity Back 4 150 IDP Farmers in Adamawa", *The Nation*, 12 July 2016.

presence at the distribution centres also served as a balm to heal the wounds of discord and hatred following the enduring attack by religious fanatics.

Other universities around the globe have adopted similar humanitarian roles. For example, following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Howard University, in Washington, DC, began taking students to New Orleans to contribute to rebuilding the city.¹¹⁷ They named this programme “The Howard University Alternative Spring Break”.¹¹⁸ Howard University has also partnered with religious organisations to provide food and other products to vulnerable and marginalised communities in the United States (US) and many other parts of the world.¹¹⁹ Similarly, indigent farmers in one of the western states of Nigeria were given access to free training programmes to improve sustainable farming practices by the Afe Babalola University in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.¹²⁰ This was supplemented by the provision of free management and entrepreneurial training and skills for over 1 000 young farmers (including those from the neighbouring country of Benin Republic).¹²¹ The university has also endeavoured to distribute free seedlings to local producers.¹²² They further provided humanitarian assistance in the face of growing insecurity in some local government areas.¹²³

From the foregoing, it is clear that peacebuilding, reconciliation and tolerance are not limited to the efforts of government, non-governmental and international organisations. They are processes that includes those at the grassroots level and the higher institutions who must join in assisting peace efforts. The immense potential that these centres of learning bring towards actualizing peace values needs to be amplified.

CONCLUSION

Existing studies devoted to higher educational institutions tend to emphasise their instrumental role in promoting economic development, creating knowledgeable societies and fostering regional development and growth. However, the fact remains that one of the longest existing and most traditional roles of universities and higher education institutions has been and remains that of educating the individual to be a good human being within their personal, professional and communal life. The particular role of educators in facilitating this outcome is of fundamental

117 Wutoh AK. n.d. “Howard University’s Approach to Creating a Culture of Student Success: Interview with Dr. Anthony K. Wutoh”, Kaplan.com.

118 Wutoh, “Howard University’s Approach”.

119 Wutoh, “Howard University’s Approach”.

120 Afe Babalola University Ado-Ekiti (ABUAD), Office for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 2020. “Access to University Facilities for Local Farmers and Food Producers to Improve Sustainable Farming Practices”, 19 May.

121 ABUAD, “Access to University Facilities for Local Farmers”.

122 ABUAD, “Access to University Facilities for Local Farmers”.

123 “Ekiti state: Examining insecurity challenges in recent times”, *Blueprint*, 24 May 2022.

importance to building peace. In this study, it has been identified that higher educational institutions can play a major role in the development and maintenance of peace and reconciliation initiatives. They can also promote religious tolerance and facilitate peace mediation. This is because they can create a positive environment where constructive relationships between different types of individuals can take place. The creation of such an environment is particularly important in countries that are currently going through or have recently experienced violent conflict or war. This study has identified strategies that universities can adopt toward this noble peacebuilding goal. They include the integration of peace studies and conflict resolution programmes into curriculum development, the incorporation of peacebuilding principles across disciplines, the promotion of interreligious dialogue through interreligious weeks and events and promoting understanding and collaboration with local communities and organisations. Religion is often a source of conflict around the world; therefore, creating an environment of religious tolerance is important to cultivating a culture of peace. Through a robust and engaging curriculum, training on religious issues and relations and creating inclusive communities, higher education can contribute significantly towards common peaceful goals.