

Interfaith Dialogue as a Participatory Approach for Peace Building: Perspectives from Civil Society Organizations in Northern Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The Participatory Impact Analysis and Learning Approach (PIALA) was used as the main methodological approach. The use of PIALA facilitated participation and collaboration of the project stakeholders in assessing how Interfaith Dialogue (ID) as a participatory approach in promoting peaceful coexistence was effective. We adopted a qualitative data where data was collected from 381 respondents with 14 religious' leaders from various religious groups, and 5 traditional leaders (Chiefs). Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Observations were the main data collection tools used. The study found out that the use of interfaith dialogues increased communities' knowledge and experience in peaceful co-existence with an increase from 4 % of respondents experiencing extremely high knowledge to 98 %. As high as 96 % of the respondents observed a very high peaceful co-existence among various religious groups due to the adoption of interfaith dialogues. Similarly, 17 % of the respondents agreed that religious conflicts in the communities have reduced while 74 % of the respondents strongly agreed religious conflicts in the communities have reduced as a result of interfaith dialogue among them and other stakeholders. All respondents generally agreed to the assertion that there has not been any violent conflict in their communities which was directly associated with IDs. Interfaith dialogue as an approach to sustainable peace building demonstrated profound relevance by successfully addressing the root causes of conflicts stemming from religious or other group differences. It also demonstrated notable effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability in securing the needed peace among intra and inter groups. 84 % of respondents strongly agreed ID was efficient while 99 % respondents strongly agreed the adoption of IDs yielded sustainable outcomes. It is recommended that ID as a tool for promoting peace should be encouraged among communities and stakeholders in the peace building and coexistence initiative. Communities and stakeholders be equipped with the requisite interfaith dialogue facilitation skills and principles. Based on the study findings on the role interfaith dialogue plays in promoting peace, we recommend that, Government, CSO's, religious bodies and other faith-based organizations should increase investment in livelihoods and entrepreneurship development among the youth and women as part of the holistic interfaith dialogue approach.

Key Words: Interfaith, Dialogue, Participatory Approach, Peace Building, Civil Society Organizations

INTRODUCTION

African culture is noted to be a platform for interfaith dialogue (ID) because it promotes communal and human relation. What characterizes the African culture is that every acknowledge that they are all brothers and partners in development. There are community leaders whose duty is to promote peace and harmony in the community (Olagunju, 2013). Related to these cultural values is religion. Just like culture, religion is believed to command a strong force in Africa with networks and structures that permeate all levels of society. Religion plays a big role in peace building, or conflict generation in the continent (Atkinson, 2019; Omari, 2015). The misinterpretation of religious teachings and injunctions are increasingly being cited as major drivers of violent conflicts in some African countries. Religious extremism and militancy are recent developments, associated with religions, to be creeping in many African societies and countries. However, in some parts of Africa including Ghana, people from different religions have refused to work together even on social problems due to lack of dialogue. This has contributed so much even in inter group clashes in different areas of Ghana (Omari, 2015).

Ghanaian society is religiously pluralistic just like most societies in the world today. This religious plurality poses a major challenge to the general society. It has led to the emergence of various religious communities such as Christian and Muslim communities, which though distinct by virtue of their beliefs, practices, and spirituality, also constitute components of the larger human society. The Ghanaian heritage is intensely religious (Atkinson, 2019). The nation currently has three recognized religions: African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. Religious pluralism is the co-existence of different religions with respect and co-operation with one another. In other words, it is a

situation or social phenomenon in which a wide variety of religious preferences exist side by side (Atkinson, 2019)

In Omari (2015) view, In Ghana, different religious practitioners are normally found together in places such as homes, government organizations, educational establishments, business organizations and community level organizations. Competition between the Christian and Muslim communities, though not easily or openly admitted by adherents of the religious traditions and often ignored or disregarded in academic discourses, is alive and well in interreligious relations. Competition takes place between the religious individuals in their quest to outdo the other in numbers, education, personal pride, economic, and even social status (Omari, 2015). Omari (2015) argue that, in that case, religious adherence sees themselves as potential rivals competing for the soul of the society in which they live. Konadu et al (2022) posits that, competition between religious communities as such is not bad but in excess, its severity becomes a menace in the society as a whole and a formidable challenge to a nation that strives to be a community, a human family, and a unity in diversity (Konadu et al; 2022). They further argue that, as stake in competition are the great values of peace and harmony, particularly in areas of armed conflict, solidarity in the struggle for social change, unity in healing social ills, integrity, and social justice in the nation. Despite this high stake, any attempt to promote the interest of the larger community is met with serious challenges of small religious communities unduly engaged in competition. The society needs to find a way of dealing with this menace of competition if it is to promote peaceful co-existence among religious communities (Konadu et al; 2022).

Conceptual Framework

According to Konadu et al (2022) and Fox (1999) human beings need some sort of belief system or frameworks in order to comprehend the world around them. This basic human need is often filled by religious frameworks. It follows from this that when a religious framework is challenged in anyway, its adherents are also challenged at the most basic levels. As a result, many people will do anything to preserve the frameworks which they use to make sense of their existence. Religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence are therefore essential ingredients for the progress of every society since the creation of mankind. It is observed that, the majority of conflict in the world today are identity conflicts, in which identity is defined according to ethno-religious lines or where religious traditions are used to justify violence and depict negative enemy images (Kadayifci-Orellana 2009). This notion can be explored through the lens of social constructivism, which posits that our perceptions of reality including life itself are shaped by social processes and interactions of which one of these processes is Religion, our perceptions of what is normal, good, bad or accepted is either shaped by religion or culture. What is religion? one may ask, Religion is a complex social phenomenon that encompasses beliefs, practices and rituals centered around the idea of the sacred,

divine and supernatural. To others, religion is a tool to control people, for instance, Karl Marx birthed the famous Quote “religion is the opium of the masses” here Karl elaborates on his perception that religion serves as a tool for social control and an illusion that provides comfort in a world of suffering and oppression. For many who think like Karl it is indeed the opium of the masses for religion itself comes with a lot of controversies. Alluding to Kadayifci-Orellana (2009) observation, Zuure (2021) argues that conflict which is a natural part of human life should be amicably resolved.

Annan (2015) writes that, the Africa continent where religion plays a vital role in shaping morality and ethics, is also home to some of the worlds most protracted conflicts. Many countries have experienced conflicts, political instability and terrorism, which has resulted to loss of lives, displacement and destruction. In most of these violent actions, religion has been a major factor, where some groups or persons or individuals have used religious beliefs to justify violence and extremism (Annan, 2015).

From Santosa (2020) argument, the world is like a home where the diversity lives in. Religious plurality is one of integral parts of it.

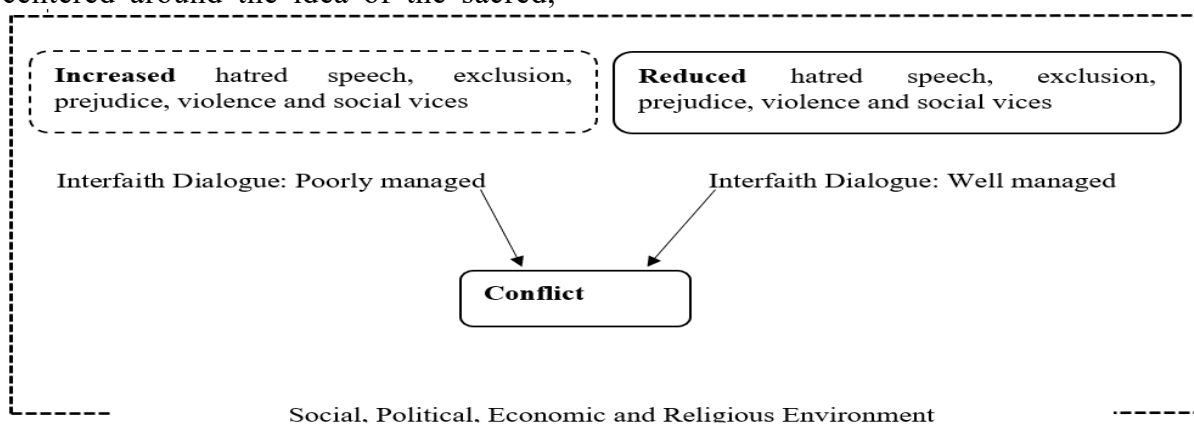


Figure 1 Conceptual Farmwork
Source: Author’s own construct (2024)

Living in diversity surely is a formidable task. Literature points out that, religious diversity might contribute into violent or even bloody conflicts when it is not well managed as depicted in figure 1 above. In this context, Santosa (2020) and Abu-Nimer et al (2007) all recognized that diversity can be both a blessing and a challenge. But on the other hand, the seemingly irreconcilable religious ideologies of the different faiths can often make it difficult for their adherents to look beyond their differences and search for common grounds upon which a shared community life can be built. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, differences in religion have been cited as a factor in conflicts between or within states. It is a paradox that historically religions have often been implicated in violence and conflict, either as a direct cause or as an associated factor but have also contributed to building peace.

Interfaith dialogue can be an instrument that facilitates the adversaries in conflict to talk and if possible, to be reconciled. Interfaith dialogue is a means for achieving this greater goal by persons of different faiths meeting to have a conversation. It is potential to foster peace in the midst of religious diversity by nurturing mutual understanding and tolerance among people of different faiths. A constructive interfaith dialogue will therefore require firmly commitment of the participants to their own faith and view dialogue as an open and transparent conversation and not a debate. This process will allow all parties in the dialogue process to understand the other's position as precisely and new insights to become more sensitive for language of hatred, exclusion, and prejudice as shown in figure 1 above.

Largely, people have the options of resorting to the statutory law or indigenous approaches which are rooted

in the customs and traditions of societies for the resolution of conflicts (Zuure, 2021). Interreligious dialogue, also referred to as interfaith dialogue is a fundamental approach in ensuring sustained peace. Kadayifci-Orellana (2009) views interfaith dialogue as people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, (i.e. "faiths") at both the individual and institutional level. Each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practise their faith freely (Kadayifci-Orellana 2009). Dessel et al (2006) also defined dialogue as a public process designed to involve individuals and groups in an exploration of societal issues such as politics, racism, religion and culture that are often flashpoints for polarization and social conflict. From Dessel et al (2006) definition, dialogue involves both formal and informal discussions as well as shared educational initiatives, music performances or art exhibitions among other projects. To an extent it includes livelihoods development, sporting activities and other actions that bring different religious grouping tother. In order to capture this broader meaning of dialogue, Abu-Nimer et al (2007) defined it as a safe process of interaction to verbally and non – verbally exchange ideas, thoughts, questions, information and impressions between people from different backgrounds. Dialogue clarifies misunderstandings and illuminates areas of both convergence and divergence through mutual sharing and listening (Abu-Nimer et al. 2007). As a result, it helps build trust, provides a space for healing and reconciliation.

Religious coexistence has been a hallmark of Ghana despite the few tribulations

among the 3 main religions. Ghana's religious landscape was shaped by its colonial masters, with African traditional religion as the native religion, Christianity from the arrival of the European colonizers while Islam influences came from trade and cultural exchange with neighboring countries. Despite their differences, these religious groups have generally coexisted peacefully. According to the 2010 population census 71% of Ghanaians are Christians, 17.6% are Muslims and 5.2% are traditionalist (Ghana statistical service, 2010). In Ghana Religious leaders play a vital role in resolving conflicts and fostering peaceful co-existence among diverse communities. Their involvement is rooted in their moral authority as they often act as mediators and peace ambassadors through the trust placed in them by their communities. Religious leaders often use mediation, interfaith dialogues and community development interventions for conflict prevention or resolution. For instance, during the 2012 election dispute in Ghana, the national peace council, comprising major religious bodies played a crucial role in reducing the tensions and facilitating peaceful dialogues between opposing parties which was very vital for the prevention potential violence and ensuring a peaceful election (Gyampo & Asiedu, 2013).

The national peace council a major organization in Ghana that houses key religious leaders was primarily formed to promote peace and resolve conflicts across Ghana. The involvement of religious leaders in this council underscores their crucial role in peacekeeping efforts. The council's intervention during elections, chieftaincy disputes and inter religious conflicts highlights the significant contributions of religious leaders to national peace. (Aning & Sarfo, 2015)

Most of the major religions in Ghana advocate for peace and non-violence. For instance, Christianity promotes the

teaching of Jesus Christ, who emphasizes on love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Islam, through the Quran and hadiths encourages peace and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Ghana religious coexistence according to the findings of Wiafi (2023) can be as a result of the high literacy level of the population, the role of interfaith initiatives, media engagements, peace and community-based livelihood programs promoted by development actors. Other theories also suggest that peace and stability in Ghana are as a result of an implicit social contract among its diverse religious groups. The various communities agree to co-exist peacefully, recognizing that stability and cooperation are in everyone's interest (Annan K, 2015). Again, the Ghana national peace council (2020) report attributes this coexistence to effective conflict resolution mechanisms and peacebuilding efforts being implemented at both the local and national levels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interfaith dialogue

Dialogue is considered as a reciprocal testimony in which a phase of witnessing or proclamation alternates with a phase of respectful listening. Interfaith dialogues are meetings of worldviews (Ox, 2004). Dialogue is interpreted as a discussion between people in which there is exchange of ideas and opinions (Andrabi, 2020). Interfaith dialogue is a situation in which people of different faiths resort to mutual understanding and respect that promotes peaceful coexistence. According to Ariarajah (2019), inter-faith dialogue is a mechanism where people are informed about the faith of others and to also about their own faith. Inter-religious dialogue is also understood to be a discourse between two or more religious organizations for better understanding of each religion in order to promote peaceful coexistence among the practitioners of such religions. According to Ox (2004), the concept of

interfaith dialogue was first discussed during 1962 to 1965 sessions and approved in 1965 by the Roman Catholic Church as a general strategy in relations towards non-Christian religions and Muslims. Faith is not the monopolization by cumulative religious traditions. Ox (2004) concludes that, individual or group meetings taking place on the anticipation of more than one perspective can be regarded as the interfaith dialogue.

Key elements of interfaith dialogue

Faith: There is no one exact definition for faith. The meaning of faith differs from one individual to the other and it is considered personal and viewed as private (Newman, 2004). Hellwig (1990) contends that faith ranges in meaning from a general religious attitude on the one hand to personal acceptance of a specific set of beliefs on the other hand. Fowler (1981) is of the view that every observable content of an individual faith there is a structure, which is deeper and more stable than the content. He contends that the issue is not about what people believe but how people believe that should be taken into consideration.

Dialogue: Dialogue is a form of acting which frowns on individuality and more considerate on the other side. People feel free to open up to each other resulting in cross learning from each other's faith. In dialogue, people must be ready to embrace the other side, listen to them and accept their multiplicity (Ox, 2004).

The Sociological Context: Pluralism and Multiculturalism: There is no specific way a dialogue occurs. Dialogue may occur in a structured or unstructured setting. In an unstructured form, it occurs whenever people of different religions meet within a public environment. In most occasions it happens naturally, randomly and often implicitly (Ok, 2004). Pluralism is used to define a social condition in which cultural, religious, ideological differences and

geographical origins are distinguishable. In such a condition two or more sharply contrasting cultural and religious communities exist within the same political community. It becomes critical when the political community is, or is perceived to be, dominated by one particular cultural or religious community (Chaplin, 1993). Multiculturalism both celebrates and seeks to protect cultural variety (Jary and Jary, 1999).

Importance of interfaith dialogue

The drive for interfaith dialogue is to enhance our understanding and respect for other religions and institutions, Dialogue should enhance our sensitivity to the feelings of all persons affiliated to different religions. Dialogue should have an effect in the deepening of the faith of every participant in the dialogue. Interfaith dialogue is possible only when two faiths pre-exist in the participants. The participants are persuaded of the inherent validity and integrity of all the faith groups involved in the dialogue and are persuaded that no group possesses total and absolute knowledge regarding the nature and works of God and human involvement with the Divine. An interfaith dialogue is necessary to dispel mistrust and to promote social equality between different faiths (Andrabi, 2020).

Dialogue between followers of different faith is very important to promote and propagate peace and corporation among different religions and cultures. The diversity in religions all over the world requires peace and tolerance. It stresses on mutual respect, understanding and peaceful coexistence in religions, and all the religions must come out of their choice. Religion should not be imposed on others. One of the critical ways to minimize the religious tension and promote peaceful civilized society is to promote interfaith dialogue between various faiths of the society which would promote mutual growth of each religion. Each religion

through dialogue helps other religion for its enrichment and provides space for the religions to contribute and complement each other (Andrabi, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The Participatory Impact Analysis and Learning Approach (PIALA) was used as the main evaluation methodology to evaluate the qualitative parameters of the study. It provided strong insight for its further implementation for greater and deeper impact. At the same time, it produced rigorous qualitative data on the relative contributions of the project. To address the challenge of rigorously assessing and learning about the project contribution to impact from a systemic change perspective. PIALA draws on a dynamic Theory of Change (ToC) approach that helps visualize the presumed systemic change pathways, map out project contributions among broader influences on impact, and identify the assumptions underneath. The research relied on participatory and learning approaches, which aim at strengthening participating respondents. The approach allows a comprehensive cross fertilization of qualitative technics. The use of mixed qualitative techniques provided different data set which complemented each other in addressing the research objectives.

Sampling Method

The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique where 10 communities from 4 districts in Northern Region that adopted interfaith dialogue approach in promoting peace and coexistence were considered for the study. Tolon and Kumbungu districts were considered as one cluster while Tamale metropolis and Sagnerigu were also considered as another cluster based on their homogeneity in social and economic characteristics as well as their geographical proximity. From the two clusters, 2 out of the 4 districts were randomly selected through the lottery process. The selected districts which constituted the sample population were Tolon and Tamale Metropolis. From the two districts, were 10 communities had interfaith dialogue interventions, simple random sampling was used to select 4 communities out of the 10 communities using a *survey-monkey* sample size calculator. The 4 communities had a total population of 41,434. Applying the survey-money sample size calculator at a confidence level of 95% and margin of error of 5%, a sample size of 381 was determined for the study. Based on the sample size of 381, the proportional distribution (p^{\wedge}) formula was then used to ensure a more even distribution of respondents per community as presented in equation 1 below.

Equation 1: Calculation of Proportional Value

$$\text{Proportional Distribution } (p^{\wedge}) = n/p$$

Where:

p is the population proportion; n is the size of the random sample (which is calculated above).

p^{\wedge} is the sample proportion (?)

$$p^{\wedge} = 381/41,434 = 0.009$$

Based on the calculated proportional value of 0.009, the sample size per community was determined as presented in equation 2 below:

Equation 1 Calculated Proportional Sample Size per community;

Proportional Sample Size = p^{\wedge} x population. i.e 0.009 x Population

Community 1..... 0.009 x 2,175 = 20

Community 2..... 0.009 x 18,613 = 171

Community 3..... 0.009 x 4270 = 39

Community 4..... 0.009 x 16,376 = 151

Table 1 below provides further information on the sample distribution across the selected communities and clusters.

Table 1: Sample Size Distribution

District(s)	Community	Pop	Sample Pop	% Distribution	Sample Size
Tolon	Tingoli	2,175	2,175	5	20
	Kpana	18,613	18,613	45	171
Total		20,788	-	-	-
Kumbungu	Gbandu	10,721	-	-	-
Total		10,721	-	-	-
Sagnerigu	Nyerizee	3,143	-	-	-
	Kpeneh	1,232	-	-	-
Total		4,375	-	-	-
Tamale	Fooshegu	4,270	4,270	10	39
	Bagliga	1,342	-	-	-
Metro.	Dakpemyili	2,187	-	-	-
	Kotingli	16,376	16,376	40	151
	Cheshie	14,283	-	-	-
Total		38,458	-	-	-
Total	10	74,342	41,434	100%	381

Source: Field Study, 2024

Due to the absence of sample list, convenient sampling was used to reach individual respondents and questionnaires administered through face-to-face interviewing. In addition, a total of 35 key informants' interviews; 14 religious' leaders (Muslim, Traditional and Christian) and 5 traditional leaders (Chiefs) were purposively selected and interviewed for their opinion and experts' knowledge on the application of interfaith dialogue in promoting peace and coexistence. In each of the 4 studied communities, two FGDs were held with Community Youth Peace Clubs with an average of 8 (3 women and 5 men) participants. Focal persons derived from CSOs such as Christian Council of Ghana, LINK Ghana, Presbyterian Agricultural Station and Empowerment for Development were also purposively selected and interviewed on the subject matter.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary data was collected through field interviews and FGDs. Whereas primary data was collected through open-ended and closed-ended questions and FGDs, secondary data was gathered through review of project documents such as peer reviewed papers and other literature. An integrated qualitative data analysis technique was done through excel spreadsheet and content analysis. It also included the use of likert scale (e.g 1. Strongly Agreed, 2. Agreed, 3. Uncertain, 4. Disagree and 5. Strongly Disagree) for ordinal level data analysis for a better understanding of changes that occurred as a result of the use of interfaith dialogue (ID) as a tool for peace and coexistence. Additionally, qualitative data analyses also included the use of Nvivo tool as well as the use of quotes, opinions and personal experiences shared by respondents. Community members and key stakeholders interpreted their views and data provided which included their perspective and contributions in the findings. This helped

provide a rich picture of the assessment results based on the assessment. Bar graphs, histograms, pie charts and tables were used to present results. Report was generated and presented based on key thematic areas focusing on the objectives and results areas of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study as shown in figure 1 below shows that, out of 381 respondents interviewed, the majority (57%) were men while women made up the remaining share of 43 %. Women, children and the aged are considered vulnerable when it comes to conflict and so are very instrumental in the management and resolution of conflicts. This is more relevant in a patriarchal society such as the Northern Region of

Ghana. The study observed that 65 % of respondents were within the age brackets 36-64 years as depicted in figure 2 below. This means majority of the communities have active population who are within the working population and hence have great potential to promote interfaith dialogue actions such as games, livelihoods and economic empowerment as observed by Konadu et al (2022) and Zuure (2021). At 29 %, the age range 13 to 35 years represents the "youth" (African Youth Charter, and Ghana National Youth Policy, 2010) is the second majority while only 7 % of the respondents were 65 years and above. The finding simply that study population is generally composed of very active groups with great potentials in terms of economic and social development actions. These potentials when not properly utilized could degenerate into conflict and other social vices.

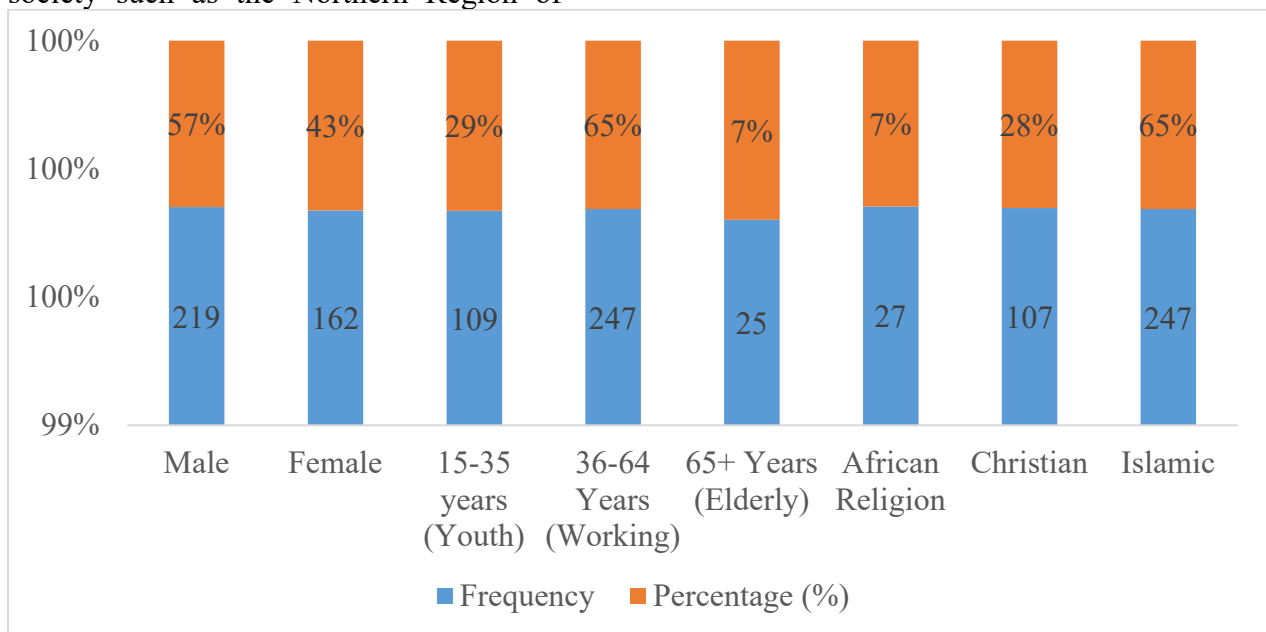


Figure 2: Demographic Data of Respondents

The study revealed three main religions specifically; African Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity practiced in the districts. These three religions co-exist in the communities and there are usually the tendencies for misunderstanding if care is not taken (Annan; 2015). This sometimes creates competition among the various religious sectors or individuals in their

quest to outdo each other in numbers, education, personal pride, economic, and even social status (Zuure, 2021). Konadu et al (2022) argues that this competition sometimes degenerates into religious intolerance and conflict. The study shows that, African Traditional religion constitute 7 % of the respondents, with Christians representing 28% with majority being

Muslims constituting 65 % of the populates in the districts as presented in figure 2 above. The evidence of religious pluralism is established in these communities hence the adoption of interfaith dialogue as a participatory approach in promoting peace and coexistence is in the right direction.

Marital Status, Education and Occupation of Respondents

As depicted in Table 1 below, 71 % of the respondents are married with 29 % not married. Marriage is an important institution in northern Ghana and hence highly respected. Once a person attains the age of 18 years and in some cases, begins to show signs of adulthood, he or she is ready and preparing for marriage. This observation supports de Groot (2018) arguments that children with adult features are more likely to engage in marital relation at early stage. As argued by Addai (2000), the major religious traditions (Christianity and Islam) in Ghana encourage early marriage because premarital sex and childbearing are considered “immoral”. These behaviours were, and often still are, strongly prohibited and sometimes punished. Both Christianity and Islam seek

to ensure that sex and childbearing occur within marriage. Hence, they tend to encourage early marriage (Addai, 2000). The educational attainments of respondents in the study communities also shows that, 80 % of respondents are non-literates with 20 % being literates. Out of the 20 %, the study revealed that 6 % had basic or Junior High School education while 8 % had either Senior High or Middle School level education with the remaining 6 % being tertiary level. The high illiteracy level could be associated to the rurality nature of the communities though there is free Basic School in Ghana. For Interfaith dialogue to be effective in promoting peace and coexistence means, there should be more educational and sensitization programs through the use of visuals and local language. It also means the interfaith intolerance among communities and groups could be associated to the high illiteracy level which will also require a more intensive and proactive approach through community level trainings and economic empowerment. This is also more relevant as majority of the populates are farmers who constitute 97% of the population as presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: Marital and Educational Status of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
(A): Marital Status	381	100%
Married	278	71%
Single	113	29%
(B): Level of Education	381	100%
Non	304	80%
Junior High School (JHS)	23	6%
Senior High School (SHS) / Middle School	31	8%
Tertiary / HND/University/ Collage	23	6%
(C): Main Occupation	381	100%
Farming (Crops and Livestock rearing)	370	97%
Teaching and Trading	11	3%

Source: Field Study, 2024

In exploring respondents occupation, the study found out that 97 % of respondents were into farming as their major

occupation. This was the case because the study communities are mainly agrarian in nature with their lives revolving around

agriculture (crop farming and animal rearing). This is consistent with the NPC (2019) who observed that most rural communities in northern Ghana are agrarian in nature. Any interfaith conflict therefore is likely to negatively affect their farming business. It also means, any livelihood intervention should revolved around agriculture since that is their main economic activity. Other livelihood activities in the district included teaching and trading in representing 3% of the economic activities as shown in table 2 above.

Knowledge and understanding of communities on Peaceful Co-existence

As a participatory tool, interfaith dialogue is to promote transparency, accountability, and clarification of issues that allows for coexistence (Zuuri, 2021). Annan (2015) also argues that, in line with Zuuri (2021) that interfaith dialogue could promote actions such as games, educational programs, livelihoods development and other collective actions that promote peaceful coexistence and tolerance. The study confirmed these arguments as studied communities indicated their engagements in interfaith actions promoted by organizations such as Christian Council of Ghana, LINK-GHANA, Empowerment for Development and other CSOs. Among the actions carried out by these stakeholders included community education and sensitization activities on the need for peace and religious tolerance, communities (youth, women, children, religious leadership) have also been trained in relevant areas such as co-existence and triggers of interfaith conflict. Communities' knowledge and understanding on peaceful coexistence and interfaith tolerance enhanced through these community level educational dialogue and knowledge sharing sessions. Actively involving communities in these actions does not only promote peace but also provides the opportunity for communities to understand and participate in interfaith

dialogue actions as a learning process. The study also observed that as part of the interfaith dialogue process, stakeholders as already mentions above this section had organized various radio discussions on topical issues on peace and tolerance. Among the mentioned radio stations included Radio Tamale, Savannah radio and 'Suhipelli' radio both in the Tamale Metropolis reaching about 42,400 listeners.

When assessed on communities' knowledge levels on peaceful co-existence and tolerance using a Likert scale, the study revealed that 73 % of respondents had low knowledge before the interfaith dialogue actions but an improvement which reduced the number within that cohort of scale to only 3%. This means less people now have low knowledge on how to tolerate and coexist with other religions or groups peacefully. This improvement was directly attributed to interfaith dialogues actions being carried out in the study communities. On the Likert scale, the study observed a significant shift from low and average knowledge to high and extremely high. 2% of respondents who very high knowledge on interfaith coexistence and tolerance increased to 20 % while 2 % on extremely high increased to 32 % as shown in figure 3 below. Also, before interfaith dialogue engagements, who had high knowledge was only 3% which increased to 32% providing a significant change on participants knowledge on interfaith coexistence and tolerance. The assessment therefore concludes that, there is an increased knowledge on how to manage and promote peace among participants who are involved in interfaith dialogue actions. This conclusion is further supported by the statements made by respondents and religious leaders as shown below.

A female respondent in Fooshegu has this to say

'... we are women and when we advise our husbands and children

they will listen. Now I understand that, whether you are a Muslim, Christian or traditionalist, we are all one and we do not need to fight. We are all God’s children and we need to help each other’

In the understanding of a male respondent in Kotingli, peaceful co-existence is;

“.... people living together without problems among them and everything functions properly”

Another religious leader in Kpana had this to say;

“....when people live together without fighting”.

These statements are a testimony of communities understanding and appreciation of interfaith dialogue actions provided how it has impacted communities positively. Generally, the study findings suggest that interfaith dialogue action as a new paradigm for peace building is very effective and yields positive results.

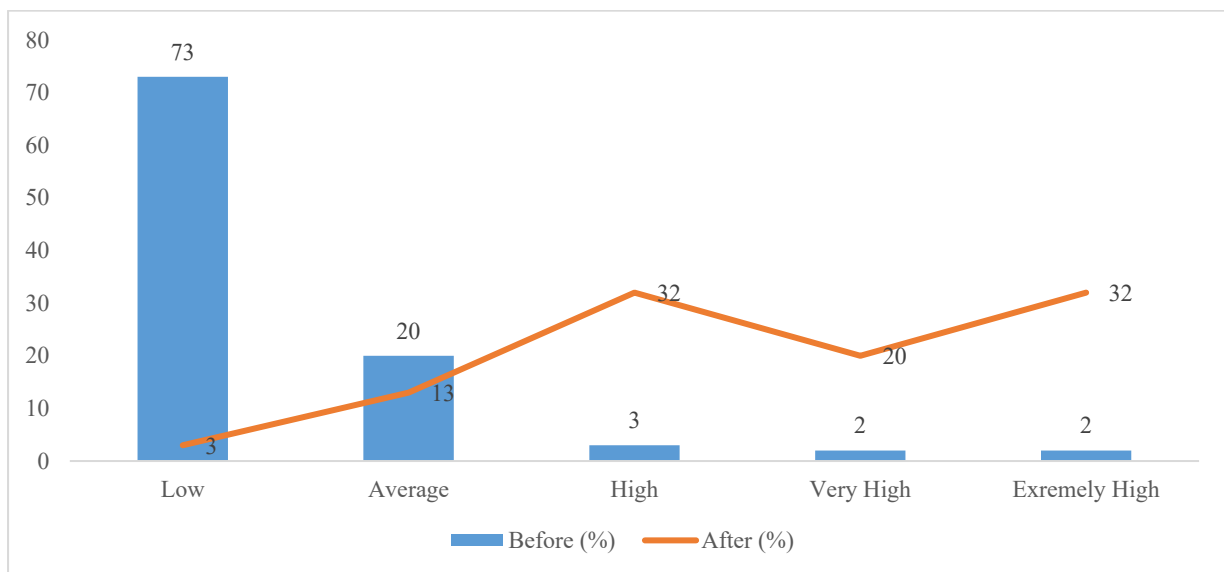


Figure 3: Knowledge Level of Respondents

As argued by Konadu et al (2022) and Zuure (2021) as well as the researchers own experience, interfaith dialogue goes beyond engaging two or more people on discussions on a topical issue. Broadly, it encapsulates engaging all relevant stakeholders who matter in addressing a particular topical issue and could take various forms. The study observed that, various interfaith dialogue actions engaged community opinion leaders, media personnel and owners through workshops and radio awareness on the theme “Promoting Peace through Inter-Religious Dialogue in Northern Ghana; the role of the Media”. The activity brought together eight (8) radio stations and three (3) Television

stations and the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) to discuss and to encourage communities especially the youth to be ambassadors of peace and tolerant. As part of the knowledge and skills communities shared included religious acceptability, proper information dissemination and how to edit recorded messages to delete provocative, offensive, derogatory messages. As Konadu et al (2022) argued, when people or a group of people feel their religious framework has been looked down upon could result into conflict since that is the very fiber of their existence. Evidence of interfaith dialogue meetings revealed that, a total of 40 interfaith dialogue meetings were held in all

10 communities focusing on peace and tolerance within the period 2020 to 2024 by various stakeholders and community members. Respondents were quick to mention that in each dialogue meeting, the chiefs or representatives alongside the 'Magazia' (women leader), youth and various interest groups leaders were present. The dialogue sessions were aimed at reducing religious discrimination and suspicion among various religious adherence in the study communities and to promote sustainable peace and inter faith tolerance and coexistence.

Interaction among people of different faith

Interfaith dialogue according to scholars such as Zuuri (2021), de Groot (2018) and Konadu et al (2022), is to promote peaceful interaction and tolerance and to provide a wholistic understating of human existence. It therefore goes without saying that interfaith dialogue as a participatory tool in ensuring peace and tolerance is to achieve an objective of cordial interaction in harmony. In accessing this assertion, respondents indicated as a result of the interfaith dialogue actions, there is an enhanced peaceful interaction among people of different faith (Muslims, Christians, Traditionalist and political interest groups). The various interfaith activities ensured each of these different religious groups now have better understanding of each other beliefs and strong appreciation of their worldview. Though there have been some highlights on some of the interfaith actions promoted by various stakeholders, it is satisfying to note here among such actions included soccer fun games among different groups particularly the youth of different religious faiths, joint radio and community level discussions and dialogues, inter religious meetings and many others. These initiatives to a very large extend promoted dialogue of peace, hope, confidence, trust, peaceful co-existence and tolerance. This finding is concurrent with that of Konadu et al (2022)

assertion on actions that can strongly promote peaceful coexistence and tolerance (Konadu et al; 2022). In all the four communities under this study, it was found out that as part of the fun games, a total of 321 people (84% youth) from various interest groups, religious bodies and opinion bodies participated. Peace messages were delivered before and after each event by leaders of Muslims, Christians and Traditional Authorities strengthening the relationship between these different groups. An important element of inter-religious dialogue is the use of religious language and vocabulary. It is important to remember that each religious tradition holds what Abu-Nimer (2007) calls a 'secondary' language and a 'primary' language. A 'secondary' religious language emphasizes what is common between different traditions such as tolerance, peace and dialogue; while a 'primary' language distinguishes that unique tradition from other traditions through notions such as the Holy Trinity, Jihad, the Chosen People and many others (Abu-Nimer, 2007). It is therefore understandable why as part of the interfaith or religious dialogue, clarifications and appreciation of these symbols are key for peace and tolerance. Through the FGDs with the youth groups, they touched on the fact that, during events, they were educated and encouraged to divert their energies into productive activities and not conflict or abusive actions. Additionally, the fun games contributed to fostering unity and co-existence among the youth from all religious groups for a peaceful society confirming de Groot (2018) and Zuuri (2021) assertion. Generally, the study observed 100 % of respondents argued there was peaceful coexistence among various religious and social groups which was directly related to interfaith actions. Out of the 100 % respondents, 97 % of them observed a very high peaceful co-existence while 2 % observed high peaceful co-existence with only 1 % observing average peaceful co-existence among various

religious groups as shown in figure 4 below.

A review of various stakeholder's interfaith dialogue initiatives for the period 2021 to 2023, shows that, stakeholders such as Christian Council of Ghana, LINK-GHANA, World Vision and others have facilitated the formation of peace councils. Christian Council of Ghana had established ten Peace Clubs/Committees and five school peace committees. These communities in the *Bagliga, Kpene, Kotingli, Gbandu and Dakpemyili*

communities. Each of the Peace Clubs with an average membership of 25 means there are more people at the community level who can serve as peace ambassadors in promoting and scaling up interfaith actions. The Peace Clubs were formed to champion and promote tolerance, dialogue and peaceful coexistence among diverse groups in the project communities. The significance was to develop more trust and understanding for one another thereby disseminating the trust to their followers and to promote peaceful co-existence of different faith.

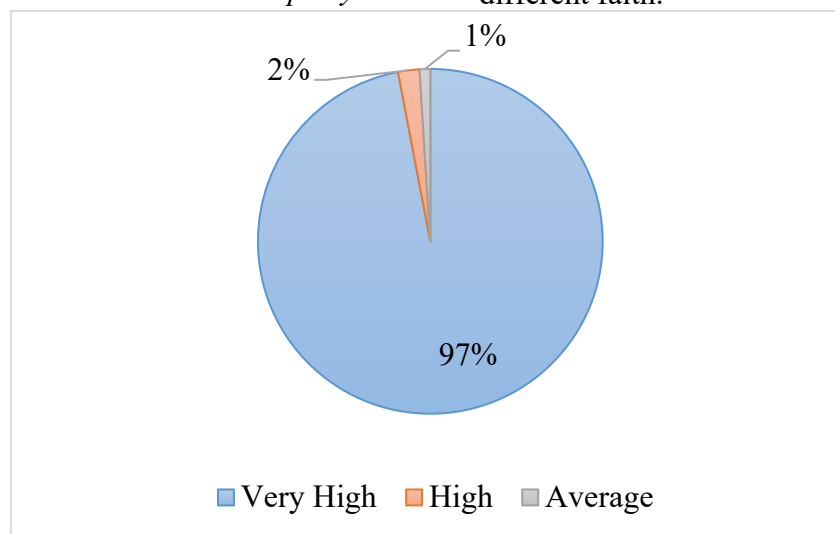


Figure 4 Level of Peaceful Co-existence

Also, the study revealed that, there has been increased peaceful interaction between interfaith groups. Evidently, all the 381 respondents affirmed that there has been an increased peaceful interaction among people of different faith. In assessing the quality of the peaceful co-existence, 24% of the respondents said the quality was excellent. The reason for rating the quality of coexistence excellent is because they now have a better understanding of what coexistence is all about as a result of the trainings which they had received from various stakeholders including LINK-GHANA and CCG peace project. Through the FGDs, it was further observed that, traditional and religious leaders now effectively cooperate and coexist and to a very large extent integrate tolerance and interfaith coexistence in their daily

sermons. This was demonstrated when a religious leader in Foosegu had this to say;

“...during the training we all agreed that for us to be peacefully coexist together, no one should criticize any religion. We as leaders will have to set good examples and making sure we preach the need for coexistence to our followers. I preach to my congregation any time we have prayers. This has helped in preventing conflict”.

This statement was further confirmed by a different religious group in Kpana when he said;

“...for a long time I have not witnessed any intra or inter religious conflict in this community because we all preach interfaith tolerance and coexistence’

Religious conflict in communities

According to Hormy (2006), religious conflict is a situation in which religious adherents are involved in a serious disagreement or argument with one religious group and another. This definition is further enforced by Addai (2000) who argue religious conflict is a situation in which there are opposition in ideas, opinions, feelings and wishes. As part of the efforts in achieving this object of promoting peace by enhancing inter-religious relations that is constructive and accommodative with people from different faith groups, interfaith dialogue seems to provide such an opportunity (Konadu et al, 2022). Evidence from the study conducted in Northern region of Ghana shows that

there is a reduction in religious conflicts in communities where interfaith dialogue as a participatory tool has been applied. The disagreements between and amongst various religions in the communities has reduced which is partly attributed to interfaith dialogue actions. Though generally, there is a reduction in religious conflict, 9% of respondents indicated that there were still few people in the communities who confront each other over religious matters. They were also quick to add that, it is normal and expected because there is no perfect society where there are no confrontations. Respondents also argue that such confrontations do not and would not escalate to destructive conflict. To buttress this point, a 42-year-old woman in Tingoli community indicated that;

“... since the training that was organized for us, there has been no religious intolerance or conflict. We respect each other and do not see the need to fight among ourselves”

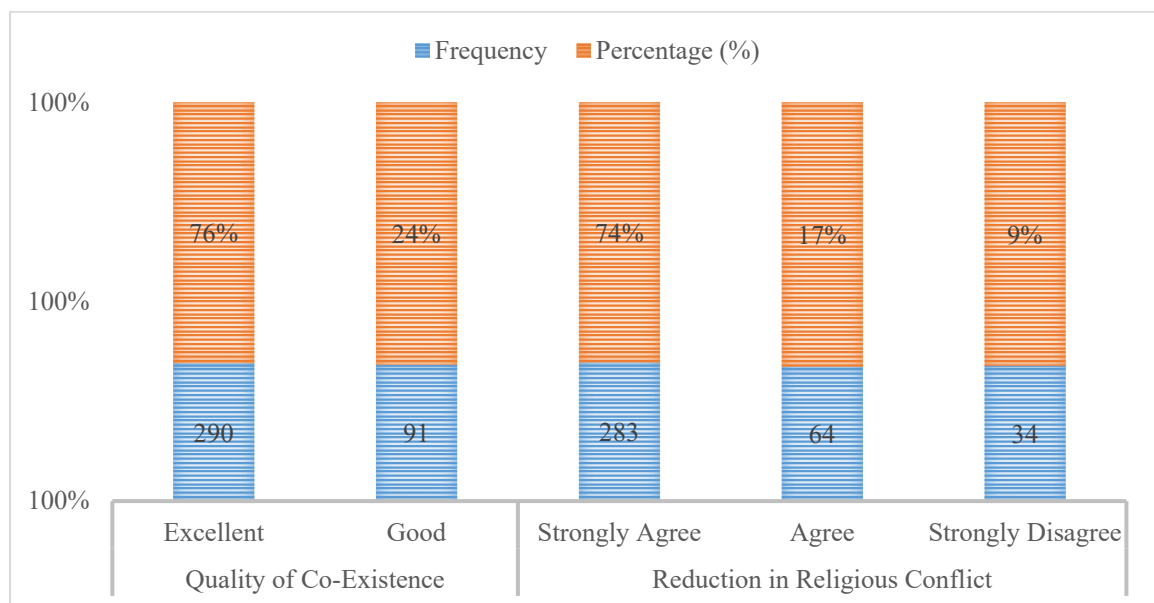


Figure 5 Quality of Coexistence and Religious Conflict

Also, 17 % of the respondents agreed that religious conflicts in their communities has reduced while 74 % of the respondents strongly agreed religious conflicts in their

communities have reduced as shown in Figure 5 above. This means that there is now religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence amongst the various religions

but there is the need to safeguard this peace and tolerance. Quality of the religious tolerance was examined through respondents' views and experience. Out of the total number of respondents, 76 % of respondents alluding to the fact that the current peace and coexistence could be rated as excellent while 24 % viewed it as good as shown in *Figure 5*. There were no disagreements on the quality as 100 % of respondents acknowledged the quality of peace was excellent. This means that, adopting interfaith dialogue as a peace building tool provides high possibility of sustained peace. Development actors and research actions could therefore leverage on this positive outcome to scale up or adopt this approach in other areas where there is conflict and religious intolerance.

Violence and other forms of social vices in communities

In assessing the occurrences of violent conflicts and other forms of social vices in communities, the study confirmed through key informant interviews and FGDs with community leaders and peace clubs, 100% of respondents indicated that violent conflict and social vices had reduced. This they directly associate with interfaith dialogue interventions and actions. This finding corresponds with Wiafi (2023) and Annan (2015) findings. Out of the 100 %, more than half (65 %) of the respondents strongly agreed that violent conflicts have reduced in the communities while 35 %agreed that violent conflicts have reduced. A respondent from Kotingli community said;

“...The training has taught us We have to live peacefully with each other, and we have considered everyone as brothers and sisters. This has come a long way to promote peace in the communities. Since the training I have not witnessed or heard any violent

confrontation among people or between people”.

The potential to derail the peace efforts in communities is the youth who engage in social immoralities such as drug abuse and stealing. The presence of the trained community and school clubs coupled with the strong role traditional and religious leaders play in interfaith dialogue process contributes strongly in sustaining peace and sustained reduction in social vices in communities. Interviews with community peace committees and religious leaders as well as traditional leaders indicated that they had excellent relations and are constantly preaching and talking to community members to prevent any occurrence of violence. They however, noted that, some youth when care is not taken could trigger violence. This therefore calls for the need for constant peace and tolerance activities. As argued by Horny (2006) and Andrabi (2020), social vices such as drug abuse, thievery, arm robbery and other forms could facilitate and accelerate conflict when not well managed. Regarding social immoralities, perceptions were assessed using Likert scale to measure the extent to which it still persisted with reference to drug abuse and theft cases. Through FGDs and interviews with community leaders and religious clerics, the study shows that, 1 % of the respondents strongly disagree that social immoralities have reduced in their communities while 37 of the respondents agreed that social immoralities have reduced. Higher proportion which is 60 % of respondents strongly agree that social immoralities has reduced in their communities as shown in figure 6. Generally, the study confirmed that 99 % of respondents agreed a reduction of social vices in their communities which they associated it with interfaith dialogue actions. What this means is that interfaith dialogue as a participatory approach can be used not only for peace building processes but also for attitudinal and social behaviors.

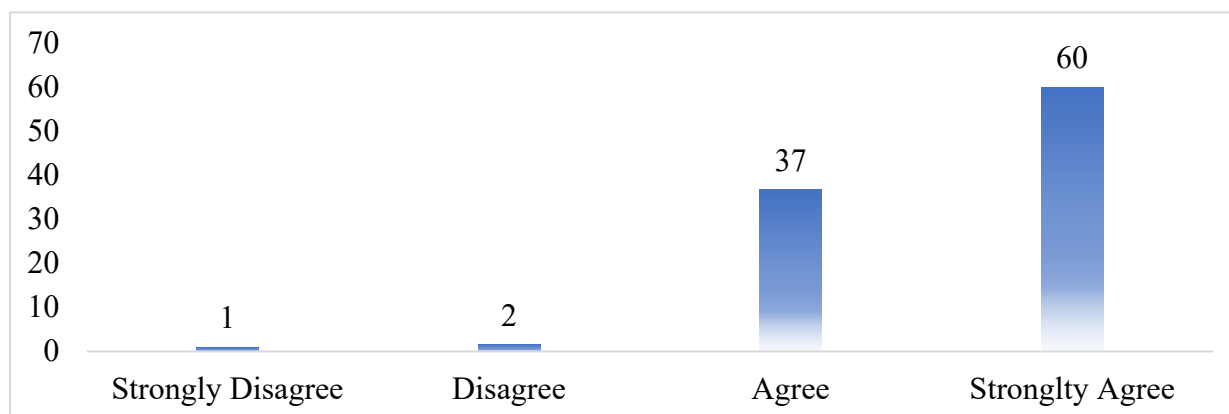


Figure 6 Level of Social Immoralities

During the FGD with community peace clubs in Kpana, a 32-year woman had this to say;

“...we are each other’s keeper therefore youth who engage in social vices are called to other. This has brought a lot of discipline into the community”.

The youth are usually engaged as key actors in violent conflicts especially when they engage in social vices such as hard drugs. This phenomenon has reduced in the communities, but the fear is that neighboring communities such as Tamale still have incidence of such drug abuses which when care is not taken could have influence on the current peace and security. This calls for a wider and broader scope of interfaith actions to support youth and religious groups.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that interfaith dialogue as a participatory approach in peace building and social order has been effective and sustainable in its process and outcome. Its results were clearly multifaceted in how it has restored peace and order at the community level. The use of the approach has been mostly experienced by faith-based organizations though some non-faith-based organizations have also deployed it in peace mediation and conflict prevention processes. Ghana, just like most African countries are strongly

rooted on faith, culture and believe systems which makes interfaith dialogue a more culturally accepted approach within the Ghanaian context.

Communities and stakeholders have expressed how impactful interfaith dialogue has been with emphasis on local ownership, community involvement, and empowerment of leadership ensuring sustained peace and livelihood outcomes. Their views collectively project the relevance of interfaith in contemporary peacebuilding initiatives as it positively fosters a sense of collective responsibility within communities and among stakeholders. Capacity building, both in terms of skills enhancement and knowledge transfer, has contributed to resilient communities capable of independently managing and sustaining peaceful coexistence and tolerance. The use of interfaith dialogue has become relevant also in the pursuit of financial sustainability as donor funding are shrinking within the donor landscape. The approach also allows for diversification of funding sources and income-generating activities, for communities which has further strengthened communities. Interfaith dialogue therefore is not just a discussion between different religious or social groups but also a wholistic process that also ensures the livelihoods and wellbeing of the parties involved are addressed through a number of actions. In conclusion, the

interfaith dialogue approach has proven to be an effective participatory approach that provides a holistic and forward-looking strategies in addressing peace and community development. It promotes sustainable peace, understanding, coexistence, tolerance and unity within communities, groups and among stakeholders.

Based on the experience and impact of interfaith dialogue approach, academia, civil society organizations, government and individuals should foster inclusive community engagement, ensuring the active participation of diverse religious groups. There is the need to involve community members in decision-making processes to promote a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. Community involvement that ensures all religious groups are part is often weak hence implementation is challenged with low commitment and if not well managed outbreak of conflict. The study also recommends the need for financial support for youth and women business development since verbal discussions alone would not yield the desired results if the structural issues such as poverty, unemployment which contributes to stereotyping and conflict. Religious groups as well as CSOs and Government should institute a small loan recovery scheme complementing it with Village Saving and Loans Association (VSLA) model which is self-saving financial scheme for vulnerable communities. VSLAs also provide a platform where different religious groups jointly meet to save and to support each other hence strengthening coexistence and peace. VSLA build financial capital among community members, strengthen physical, social, political and environmental capitals while also improving the human capital. Awareness creation in peace building is recommended but not sufficient to achieve long term impact as the drivers of conflict are multifaceted especially in northern regions of Ghana where poverty is

endemic. It is therefore very critical to design livelihood and economic empowerment activities to empower the youth, women and general communities

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