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Religious Communities, Faith Leaders and Eco-violence in Nigeria

The impact of climate change is felt in the global south through flooding, drought, and desertification (Peralta et al 2005), and in many places it is having adverse effects on sources of livelihood (Shehu 2018). In Northern Nigeria, it has triggered the migration of the mostly Muslim, Fulani herders, who take their cattle in search of greener pasture from the northern to the southern part of the country, which is dominated by mostly Christian farmers (Amusan et al 2017). In recent decades, this competition over scarce resources, has led to violent conflict between the Fulani herders and southern farmers (Ibenegbu 2017; Ndubuisi 2018) – which in turn has frustrated efforts for sustainable development. The escalation of violence driven by environmental scarcity and climate change, is further troubled by a history of interreligious suspicion between Muslims and Christians in the region (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin 2018). For example, Christian religious leaders have acknowledged that “the church and its leaders have not properly articulated the issues around Farmer-Herder violence through strategic thinking and conflict analysis” (CAN Summit 2018: 1). This is largely due to a focus on interreligious violence without paying attention to environmental scarcity or degradation. In this paper, I hope to explore how recent histories of inclusion or exclusion of religious communities and faith leaders might mitigated or escalated eco-violence in Nigeria. Finally, this paper will speculate about the appetite and motivations of religious communities and faith leaders for addressing the eco-violence, promote SDGs and lay foundations for achieving sustainable livelihoods.

Keywords: religious communities, faith leaders, eco-violence, interreligious violence, Nigeria, sustainable development goals