

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AS A STRATEGY FOR VIOLENT CONFLICT PREVENTION IN MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines intercultural dialogue as a strategic instrument for violent conflict prevention in multi-ethnic societies, drawing lessons from selected African experiences and exploring its implications for national security and development. The study adopts the theory of relational cohesion through mutual recognition. Using a qualitative research approach based on secondary data analysis, the study reviews existing literature, policy reports, and empirical case studies from African countries that have implemented dialogue-based conflict prevention initiatives. The analysis demonstrates that structured intercultural dialogue contributes to conflict prevention by fostering mutual understanding, reducing identity-based mistrust, strengthening social cohesion, and creating platforms for addressing grievances before they escalate into violence. Furthermore, the study finds that dialogue-driven peace initiatives strengthen national security by enhancing community resilience, supporting inclusive governance, and creating an enabling environment for socio-economic development. The study concludes that intercultural dialogue should be integrated into national security and development strategies in Africa as part of a broader preventive peacebuilding framework. Institutionalizing dialogue platforms at community, national, and regional levels significantly enhances conflict prevention, promotes social stability, and contributes to sustainable development across multi-ethnic societies.

Keywords: *Ethnic Plurality; Communal Tensions; Preventive Diplomacy; Social Cohesion; Peace Infrastructure.*

Introduction

The persistence of violent conflicts in multi-ethnic societies remains one of the most significant threats to national security and sustainable development in contemporary African societies. Across the continent, ethnic diversity has historically been a defining characteristic of social organization, cultural identity, and political interaction. While diversity itself is not inherently conflictual, tensions often emerge when ethnic identities become politicized or manipulated within contexts of weak governance, socio-economic inequality, and limited access to state resources. Scholars of ethnic conflict have long argued that it is not diversity but the mismanagement of diversity that frequently produces violent confrontations, in several African states and beyond. Unresolved historical grievances, competition over land and political power, and perceived marginalization have contributed to recurrent communal violence, insurgency, and social fragmentation. These dynamics pose serious implications for national security and development. Violent conflicts disrupt economic activities, weaken state institutions, displace populations, and create fertile ground for transnational criminal networks and extremist groups. In many cases, protracted communal tensions evolve into broader security crises that undermine governance and development efforts. For example, ethnically driven political crises have triggered large-scale violence in parts of Africa, including electoral conflicts, communal clashes, and identity-based insurgencies.

Intercultural dialogue refers to structured and constructive communication among individuals and groups from different cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds to foster mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation. Through dialogue, communities have addressed stereotypes, negotiated grievances, and developed shared norms for peaceful coexistence. Within this context, intercultural dialogue has increasingly emerged as an important tool for managing diversity and preventing violent conflict. In multi-ethnic societies, such processes are particularly valuable because they help bridge identity divides and create opportunities for collaborative problem-solving. Dialogue, therefore, functions not merely as a symbolic gesture of tolerance but as a practical mechanism for reducing mistrust and strengthening relationships across social boundaries. The significance of intercultural dialogue has been widely acknowledged in global peacebuilding frameworks; international organisations have increasingly emphasised dialogue as a preventive instrument for addressing identity-based tensions and promoting social cohesion. The logic underpinning this approach is that sustainable peace cannot be achieved solely through coercive security measures; it must also involve the transformation of

relationships, perceptions, and communication patterns among communities. Dialogue initiatives at local and national levels often provide platforms where grievances are expressed and negotiated peacefully before they escalate into violence.

Africa provides several instructive examples where dialogue-based initiatives have helped mitigate tensions and rebuild trust among divided communities. Experiences from post-conflict reconciliation processes, community peace committees, interfaith initiatives, and traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms demonstrate the potential of dialogue to transform hostile relationships and prevent the recurrence of violence. Against this background, this study examines intercultural dialogue as a strategic instrument for preventing violent conflict in multi-ethnic societies, drawing lessons from African experiences and exploring its implications for national security and development. By situating dialogue within the broader framework of security governance, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing scholarly debates on preventive peacebuilding and the management of diversity in plural societies. To guide the analysis, the study addresses the following research questions: How does intercultural dialogue contribute to the prevention of violent conflict in multi-ethnic societies? What lessons can African experiences provide for integrating intercultural dialogue into national security strategies? How does intercultural dialogue promote social cohesion and sustainable development in multi-ethnic African societies?

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Relational Cohesion through Mutual Recognition posits that conflict in multiethnic settings arises primarily from what can be termed an 'identity deficit' and a lack of perceived systemic fairness, rather than just resource competition alone, and that violent conflict erupts when one or more groups feel fundamentally unrecognised, leading to the mobilisation of identity-based defences. Intercultural dialogue serves as the strategic mechanism to bridge this deficit; it moves beyond superficial exchanges to facilitate deep, empathetic understanding of the other group's historical narrative, aspirations, and fears. Relational cohesion is achieved when dialogue processes institutionalize mutual respect, transforming adversarial relationships into cooperative ones based on shared civic identity (Habermas, 1984). This requires structured engagement in which power dynamics are temporarily levelled, allowing minority or marginalised voices to be on equal footing with dominant groups. The application of intercultural dialogue directly impacts national security by shifting the locus of conflict management, to the point that when dialogue is prioritised, the state relies less on coercive security apparatuses and more on social resilience. In contexts like Nigeria, where ethnoreligious tensions frequently manifest as insurgency or communal violence, formalised dialogue structures, perhaps incorporating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, preempt escalation and transform national security from a purely military concern into a

socio-political imperative (Telfer, 2018).

Violent conflict is perhaps the single greatest inhibitor of long-term development in Africa. Instability disrupts infrastructure, displaces labor forces, drains national budgets through military spending, and deters foreign investment. Intercultural dialogue enables states to foster stability and creates the prerequisite conditions for sustained economic and human development. When communities engage in constructive dialogue, they are more likely to collaborate on local development projects, manage shared water resources equitably, and support inclusive infrastructure planning, instances shows that, in areas recovering from civil unrest in the Horn of Africa, dialogue focused on cross border trade and pastoralist rights has shown preliminary success in creating shared economic incentives that supersede ethnic loyalties, this development dividend flows directly from the enhanced relational cohesion achieved through dialogue (World Development Report 2017). While theoretically sound, the implementation of sustained intercultural dialogue faces significant challenges in the African context, political elites have often been accused of benefit from maintaining ethnic divisions (the politics of polarization), actively sabotaging genuine dialogue efforts, because, the process demands significant investment in training facilitators, ensuring inclusivity across gender and age lines, and creating secure spaces for vulnerable groups to speak truthfully Uvin (2006). Without strong institutional backing and a commitment to implementing the agreed-upon outcomes, dialogue risks becoming merely performative, ultimately breeding greater cynicism.

Literature Review

The relationship between cultural diversity, violent conflict, and national security has long attracted scholarly attention in political science, sociology, peace and conflict studies Horowitz, (1985; Fearon & Laitin, (2003). Multi-ethnic societies are characterized by the coexistence of diverse linguistic, cultural, and religious groups within a shared political space. While diversity enriches social and cultural life, it may also generate tensions when political institutions fail to effectively manage competing identities and interests (Horowitz, 1985; Lijphart, 1977; Nnoli, 1998). Scholars have consistently emphasized that ethnic diversity in itself does not cause conflict; rather, violent conflict often arises when ethnic identities are politicized or manipulated by elites seeking access to power or resources (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Cederman, Wimmer, & Min, 2010). In such contexts, grievances related to marginalization, inequality, and perceived injustice frequently escalate into violent confrontations that threaten national security and development. Intercultural dialogue has emerged as a critical framework for preventing violent conflict in multi-ethnic societies, particularly in Africa, where ethnic plurality intersects with political competition, historical grievances, and

resource inequality (Gurr, 2000; Horowitz, 1985).

The literature conceptualizes intercultural dialogue as a structured process of communication among culturally diverse groups aimed at fostering mutual understanding, trust, recognition, and peaceful coexistence (UNESCO, 2006; Council of Europe, 2008). Unlike superficial tolerance, intercultural dialogue emphasizes reciprocity, active listening, and shared civic identity (Habermas, 1996; Taylor, 1994). The theoretical basis of intercultural dialogue is grounded in deliberative democracy. Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis argues that structured interaction under conditions of equal status and cooperative goals reduces prejudice. Lederach (1997) applied conflict transformation and extended this by emphasising long-term relationship-building and grassroots peace infrastructures. Similarly, Galtung's (1996) concept of positive peace shifts focus from mere absence of violence to elimination of structural and cultural violence, these frameworks collectively position dialogue as both preventive and transformative. Scholars of African conflicts highlight how ethnic identity becomes politically instrumentalized during state competition (Horowitz, 1985; Nnoli, 1998). Fearon and Laitin (2003) argue that weak state institutions, not ethnic diversity per se, explain civil war onset, that in many African contexts, exclusionary governance, patronage politics, and resource capture intensify ethnic polarization (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Cheeseman, 2015). Therefore, intercultural dialogue becomes essential in addressing grievances before they escalate into violence.

The challenge of managing diversity has therefore become a critical concern for states characterized by ethnic pluralism. Political theorists have proposed several institutional arrangements to address these challenges, including federalism, consociational democracy, and power-sharing systems (Lijphart, 1977; McGarry & O'Leary, 2009). While these institutional mechanisms may reduce tensions at the elite level, they do not necessarily address the deeper social mistrust and stereotypes that often exist between communities. Lederach (1997); United Nations (2012) maintain that peacebuilding literature emphasises dialogue as a core preventive mechanism. Boutros-Ghali (1992) states that the UN's preventive diplomacy approach highlights dialogue as an early intervention strategy to manage tensions. As a result, scholars increasingly emphasize the need for complementary societal approaches that strengthen communication and trust across cultural boundaries. The Council of Europe (2008) states that intercultural dialogue refers to an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups from different cultural backgrounds to promote mutual understanding, tolerance, and cooperation. The concept emphasises communication processes that enable societies to manage diversity constructively and prevent identity-based conflicts.

International organizations have increasingly recognized the importance of intercultural dialogue in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. For instance shows that, the United Nations highlights dialogue among civilizations as a core principle for fostering peaceful coexistence and addressing intolerance among communities. UNESCO similarly emphasises that intercultural dialogue is essential for promoting social cohesion and preventing conflict in diverse societies. Research indicates that societies with limited capacity for intercultural dialogue are significantly more vulnerable to violent conflict. Evidence from UNESCO suggests that a large proportion of global conflicts occur in environments where dialogue mechanisms are weak or absent, highlighting the critical role of communication and trust-building processes in preventing violence. The theoretical foundations of intercultural dialogue can be traced to several intellectual traditions. One of the earliest contributions is the contact hypothesis, developed by Allport (1954), which posits that meaningful interaction between members of different groups can reduce prejudice and hostility when certain conditions, such as equal status and cooperative goals, are present. Subsequent research has confirmed that structured interaction between culturally diverse groups often reduces stereotypes and promotes empathy (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). These insights have informed numerous dialogue-based initiatives aimed at preventing intergroup conflict.

Another important theoretical perspective emerges from the work of peace and conflict scholars who emphasize the transformation of relationships as a prerequisite for sustainable peace. Galtung (1996) introduced the concept of positive peace, arguing that peace should not be understood merely as the absence of violence but as the presence of social justice and harmonious relationships. Similarly, Lederach (1997) argues that conflict transformation requires long-term engagement aimed at rebuilding trust, addressing grievances, and creating inclusive structures for dialogue. Within this framework, intercultural dialogue becomes a practical tool for transforming adversarial relationships and fostering cooperative interaction among diverse communities. In addition to these theoretical foundations, social capital theory provides an important lens for understanding the role of dialogue in conflict prevention. Scholars such as Putnam (2000) argue that social networks, trust, and civic engagement constitute critical resources for maintaining social stability, that societies characterised by strong civic networks are generally better able to manage disputes peacefully and prevent violence. Varshney (2002), in his influential study of ethnic conflict in India, demonstrates that inter-ethnic civic associations significantly reduce the likelihood of communal violence by creating channels for communication and cooperation, these studies highlight the importance of bridging social capital connections that link individuals across ethnic or cultural divides in preventing violent conflict.

The relevance of intercultural dialogue to national security has become increasingly evident in contemporary conflict environments, modern security threats are often rooted in internal social divisions rather than conventional interstate rivalries (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Ethnic conflicts, communal violence, and extremist movements frequently emerge in societies where social cohesion is said to be weak, and identity grievances remain unresolved. In such contexts, Paris (2004) and Fukuyama (2011) state that security cannot be achieved solely through military or coercive measures; it requires addressing the underlying social dynamics that fuel conflict. African societies provide particularly important contexts for examining the relationship between intercultural dialogue, conflict prevention, and national security. The continent is characterized by extensive cultural diversity, with many states encompassing hundreds of ethnic groups. While this diversity represents a significant cultural asset, it has also created challenges for nation-building and governance. Historical legacies of colonial boundary formation often placed diverse groups within single political entities without adequate mechanisms for managing diversity (Nnoli, 1998; Ake, 2001). As a result, ethnic tensions have contributed to several violent conflicts across the continent.

Empirical evidence from Africa demonstrates that dialogue-based initiatives play a critical role in preventing conflict and rebuilding trust. In South Africa, the transition from apartheid to democracy involved extensive dialogue and negotiation among political actors and communities. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided a platform for victims and perpetrators to share experiences and promote national healing (Hayner, 2011). While the process did not eliminate all social tensions, it contributed significantly to preventing large-scale violence during a highly sensitive political transition. Rwanda provides another example of dialogue-based reconciliation following violent conflict. After the 1994 genocide, the government introduced community-based justice mechanisms known as Gacaca courts, which encouraged community participation in addressing crimes and promoting reconciliation (Clark, 2010). Although scholars debate the effectiveness and fairness of the process, it nonetheless represents a significant attempt to rebuild social trust through dialogue and community engagement. Kenya's experience following the 2007–2008 post-election crisis also illustrates the role of dialogue in conflict prevention. Ethnic violence following the disputed election led to the deaths of more than one thousand people and the displacement of hundreds of thousands. Branch & Cheeseman (2009) state that the crisis was eventually resolved through a mediated dialogue process facilitated by regional and international actors, which resulted in a power-sharing agreement and constitutional reforms aimed at reducing future electoral violence. These developments highlight the importance of dialogue mechanisms in stabilizing societies facing identity-based political conflicts.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the role of intercultural dialogue as a strategy for preventing violent conflict in multi-ethnic societies and its implications for national security and development in Africa. The research relies primarily on secondary data analysis, drawing from scholarly literature, policy reports, and documented case studies relating to intercultural dialogue, conflict prevention, and national security within African contexts. The study utilizes a comparative case-oriented approach, focusing on selected African experiences where dialogue-based initiatives have been employed to mitigate or prevent violent conflict. These include post-conflict reconciliation processes in Rwanda, national dialogue and reconciliation initiatives in South Africa, and community-based peacebuilding efforts in Kenya and Nigeria. These cases were selected purposively because they represent diverse conflict contexts within multi-ethnic societies and demonstrate different forms of dialogue mechanisms, including national reconciliation processes, community mediation platforms, and institutionalized dialogue initiatives. Data for the study were obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, reports from international organizations, and policy documents produced by institutions engaged in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. The collected materials were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying recurring themes and patterns related to intercultural dialogue, conflict prevention, social cohesion, and national security outcomes. To enhance analytical rigor, the study applies triangulation of sources, comparing insights from academic literature, empirical case studies, and policy reports.

Findings

The analysis of selected African cases, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Kenya, demonstrates that intercultural dialogue plays a significant role in preventing violent conflict, strengthening national security, and supporting socio-economic development in multi-ethnic societies. In Rwanda, the study found that intercultural dialogue emerged as a critical component of national reconstruction following the Rwandan Genocide. After the devastating violence between the Hutu and Tutsi communities, the government introduced community-based reconciliation initiatives aimed at restoring social cohesion and preventing renewed conflict. One of the most prominent initiatives was the Gacaca community justice system, which encouraged public dialogue between victims and perpetrators to address crimes committed during the genocide. Through community hearings and participatory justice processes, citizens were able to discuss grievances, acknowledge wrongdoing, and rebuild trust at the grassroots level. Complementing the Gacaca process, where national dialogue initiatives were introduced, such as Ndi Umunyarwanda (“I am Rwandan”) program, which promoted a shared national identity above ethnic division, these initiatives fostered discussions about historical grievances and

collective responsibility, thereby encouraging reconciliation and reducing ethnic polarization. The findings suggest that these dialogue platforms contributed significantly to stabilizing Rwanda's internal security environment by discouraging retaliatory violence and strengthening national unity. Furthermore, the restoration of social stability created conditions conducive to economic recovery and development, enabling Rwanda to pursue ambitious national development programs and attract foreign investment.

Kenya provides another example of how intercultural dialogue mitigate identity-based violence and strengthen national security outcome, the country experienced severe ethnic violence following the 2007–2008 Kenyan post-election violence, which resulted in widespread displacement and loss of lives, in response, national and international actors facilitated dialogue processes aimed at resolving the political crisis and preventing further violence, mediation efforts led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan resulted in a power-sharing agreement between rival political factions. Beyond elite-level negotiations, community-based dialogue initiatives were implemented across the country to address local tensions between ethnic groups, civil society organizations, religious institutions, and peace committees organized inter-ethnic forums where community leaders and citizens discuss grievances and promote reconciliation. These dialogue initiatives played a critical role in reducing tensions and preventing the recurrence of large-scale violence during subsequent elections. The findings indicate that the institutionalization of dialogue mechanisms contributed to strengthening Kenya's national security framework by improving early-warning systems for conflict and promoting collaborative responses to emerging tensions. Additionally, the stabilization of political relations facilitated constitutional reforms and governance improvements that enhanced democratic accountability and development planning.

The study found how Nigeria's experience highlights the importance of intercultural dialogue in managing complex ethnoreligious conflicts within a highly diverse society, the country's multi-ethnic composition and intense competition for political and economic resources have generated recurrent communal conflicts, particularly in regions such as the Middle Belt and parts of northern Nigeria and the Niger Delta region. In response, various dialogue-based initiatives were developed to promote peaceful coexistence among communities, interfaith dialogue programs involving Christian and Muslim leaders played an important role in reducing religious tensions and preventing violent clashes. Community peace committees and traditional mediation institutions also facilitated dialogue between farmers and pastoralists in areas affected by land-use conflicts. These platforms allow stakeholders to negotiate grievances, establish agreements on resource sharing, and promote conflict de-escalation. The findings reveal that such dialogue initiatives have helped reduce

localized violence and strengthen community resilience against extremist recruitment and communal polarization. By promoting communication and cooperation among diverse groups, dialogue mechanisms contribute to national security by reducing the likelihood of conflict escalation and improving community-based intelligence networks. Furthermore, peaceful relations among communities create a more stable environment for economic activities, infrastructure development, and investment, thereby supporting broader national development goals.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from Nigeria, Rwanda, and Kenya demonstrate that intercultural dialogue plays an important role in preventing violent conflict and strengthening national security in multi-ethnic societies. First, the Rwandan case supports the argument that dialogue-based reconciliation processes contribute to rebuilding social cohesion after large-scale violence. Community justice initiatives and national identity dialogue platforms helped restore communication between previously antagonistic groups and reduced the likelihood of renewed violence. This outcome aligns with the conflict transformation perspective, which emphasises long-term engagement aimed at rebuilding relationships and addressing historical grievances (Lederach, 1997). Similarly, the concept of positive peace, developed by Galtung (1996), suggests that peace requires not only the absence of violence but also the presence of social justice and cooperative relationships. Rwanda's reconciliation initiatives illustrate how dialogue contributes to these conditions by encouraging acknowledgement of past injustices and fostering collective responsibility for national reconstruction. It also resonates with transitional justice scholarship, which argues that truth-seeking and participatory reconciliation processes play a crucial role in rebuilding trust after mass violence (Hayner, 2011).

The Kenyan experience demonstrates how intercultural dialogue stabilize politically polarised societies and prevents electoral violence. The mediation and dialogue processes following the 2007–2008 electoral crisis illustrate the importance of communication platforms in resolving identity-based political conflicts. These developments support the argument that inclusive negotiation and dialogue mechanisms are essential components of democratic conflict management in divided societies (Lijphart, 1977; McGarry & O'Leary, 2009). In addition, the establishment of community peace committees and inter-ethnic forums reflects the importance of civic engagement networks in preventing communal violence. This observation aligns with the work of Varshney (2002), who argues that strong inter-ethnic civic associations significantly reduce the likelihood of violent conflict by facilitating communication and cooperation between communities. By creating channels for dialogue at both elite and grassroots levels, Kenya's post-crisis initiatives helped

restore political stability and strengthen national security institutions. Contemporary security scholarship increasingly recognizes that internal social cohesion is a critical dimension of national security, particularly in societies characterized by ethnic diversity (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Violent communal conflicts weaken state institutions, undermine governance, and create opportunities for criminal networks and extremist groups. By reducing identity-based tensions and promoting cooperation among communities, intercultural dialogue enhances societal resilience against these threats.

The Nigerian case highlights the importance of community-based dialogue mechanisms in managing ethnoreligious tensions and resource-related conflicts. Dialogue initiatives involving religious leaders, traditional authorities, and local peace committees have been instrumental in mediating disputes and preventing escalation of violence in several regions. These findings are consistent with social capital theory, which emphasizes the role of trust, networks, and civic engagement in maintaining social stability (Putnam, 2000). Where dialogue platforms exist, communities are more capable of resolving disputes peacefully and resisting attempts by political actors or extremist groups to exploit identity divisions. The Nigerian experience aligns with Kriesberg (2007) and Best (2006) it also supports research indicating that locally driven peacebuilding initiatives often produce more sustainable outcomes than externally imposed interventions because they reflect local cultural norms and community ownership. Across the three cases, the findings reveal a common pattern: intercultural dialogue contributes to conflict prevention by strengthening trust, improving communication, and addressing grievances before they escalate into violence. This pattern reinforces the argument that dialogue mechanisms function as important components of preventive diplomacy and early-warning systems within national security frameworks.

Comparative Insights

Across the three cases, intercultural dialogue emerges as a critical instrument for conflict prevention and social stabilization. Rwanda demonstrates how dialogue facilitates post-conflict reconciliation and national unity. Kenya illustrates the role of dialogue in resolving political crises and preventing electoral violence, while Nigeria highlights the importance of community-level dialogue in managing ethnoreligious and resource-based conflicts. In all three contexts, dialogue initiatives contribute to national security by strengthening trust, improving communication, and addressing grievances before they escalate into violence. These findings underscore the importance of integrating intercultural dialogue into broader national security and development strategies within multi-ethnic African societies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, the experiences of the selected countries reveal that dialogue initiatives, whether in the form of community peace committees, national reconciliation programs, or interfaith platforms, play a critical role in stabilising multi-ethnic societies. In Rwanda, dialogue-driven reconciliation processes contributed to rebuilding national unity after the genocide; in Kenya, structured mediation and community dialogue helped address electoral tensions; and in Nigeria, interreligious and community dialogue mechanisms have assisted in mitigating communal and resource-based conflicts. These experiences demonstrate that intercultural dialogue functions as a preventive security mechanism by enhancing communication, promoting inclusive governance, and strengthening trust among communities. Importantly, the study concludes that intercultural dialogue should be recognized not merely as a peacebuilding practice but as a strategic component of national security and development policy. Sustainable security in diverse societies requires the cultivation of cooperative relationships among cultural groups and the institutionalization of mechanisms that facilitate continuous engagement. By integrating intercultural dialogue into governance structures and development strategies, African states would have strengthened internal stability, enhanced societal resilience, and created enabling conditions for long-term development.

Author's Contribution and Area of Departure

While existing scholarship has extensively examined intercultural dialogue as a mechanism for peace building, reconciliation, and social cohesion in multi-ethnic societies, this study departs from earlier works by explicitly situating intercultural dialogue within the broader framework of national security and development strategy in Africa. Much of the literature has approached dialogue primarily from humanitarian, peace education, or reconciliation perspectives (Lederach, 1997; Galtung, 1996; UNESCO, 2017). However, this study advances the argument that intercultural dialogue should not merely be perceived as a soft peacebuilding tool but as a strategic component of national security architecture in diverse societies. By advancing a security-centred interpretation of intercultural dialogue, the study offers a new analytical perspective for policymakers seeking innovative strategies to manage diversity, prevent conflict, and promote long-term development in multi-ethnic societies.

The central contribution of this study, therefore, lies in conceptualizing intercultural dialogue as a preventive security instrument capable of strengthening internal stability and reducing structural vulnerabilities that often lead to violent conflict. The research demonstrates that ethnic mistrust, identity-based political mobilization, and weak communication channels between communities frequently create security risks that conventional state-centric security approaches cannot adequately address.

Consequently, this study proposes that dialogue platforms should be institutionalized as community-based early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms embedded within national governance systems. Furthermore, the study introduces the idea of a “Dialogue-Based Security Framework” for multi-ethnic African states. This framework emphasizes the integration of intercultural dialogue into three strategic domains: community-level conflict monitoring, inclusive governance structures, and national development planning. By embedding dialogue mechanisms within these domains, governments can transform intercultural engagement into a proactive security strategy that addresses tensions before they escalate into violence.

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