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The Role of the Vatican in Faith-Based Diplomacy and Peacebuilding in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The Vatican, as a sovereign religious entity with global moral authority, occupies a distinctive role in international peacebuilding. Hence, its role in mediating conflicts in Africa has grown, as evidenced by the cases in the Central African Republic and South Sudan, but the strategies and impacts of this involvement remain insufficiently explored in the field of peace studies. Generally, this paper examined the strategies and impacts of faith-based diplomatic interventions and reconciliation processes conducted by the Vatican within African peacebuilding. The study adopted a qualitative research method that included documents of the Vatican's communication, scholarly journal articles, and other related secondary reading materials that were analyzed. However, it was found that the Vatican has significant contributions to peacebuilding in Africa through its use of multifaceted strategies and approaches in its faith-based diplomacy, which includes moral mediation through papal envoys, influential local Catholic institutions, and grassroots engagement, despite the few limitations in the effectiveness of religious diplomacy in modern African conflicts. Further, it was found that the Vatican's peacebuilding efforts resulted in major de-escalations of conflicts and enhanced community relations, thus depicting the influential position played by the Vatican in the promotion of peace, especially behind-the-scenes, diplomatic engagement and trust-building between parties in conflict. The research adds to the existing knowledge on faith-based diplomacy since it offers a detailed analysis of faith-based diplomatic strategies and their impacts on African peace-building. It highlights the critical importance of religious institutions in international affairs and provides sound advice to policymakers and practitioners determined to use faith-based activities in conflict resolution. Therefore, there is a need for greater scholarly attention to the role of religious actors in conflict resolution.

Keywords: Vatican, faith-based diplomacy, peacebuilding, Africa, conflict resolution

INTRODUCTION

Over the past years, Africa has faced a spectrum of complex conflicts consisting of ethnic, political instability, resource conflicts, and violent extremism. This has triggered a revival of interest in unconventional actors of diplomacy and modes of peacebuilding among scholars (Kehinde et al., 2023). These new actors include the Vatican, which, due to its moral authority as well as its broad-based diplomatic footprint, has become the advocate of a faith-based response to armed violence. The fact that the Church is well established in Africa has given the Vatican a strong bargaining chip in peace-building efforts in the region. According to Berinyuy (2025), the recent events indicate that the Vatican is still an active element of African peace efforts since Pope Francis constantly urges a peaceful resolution to African conflicts. Hence, such engagement has been particularly notable in long-term conflict areas where other more conventional diplomatic avenues have regularly been unable to achieve lasting solutions. The Vatican has an increasing demographic presence, a developed system of diplomacy, and a large foundation of moral capital, which can be used to support a unique form of faith-based diplomacy in African Conflicts. This tendency can be observed in the examples of the South Sudan and the Central African Republic--showing the prowess of the Vatican in facilitating the ceasefire and the promotion of the reconciliation between the IPs--and overall emphasizing the significance of religious diplomacy to the current conflicts on the African continent (Vatican News, 2025).

Accordingly, Kehinde et al. (2023) posit that the dynamics of conflicts in Africa, which involve religious identities and require intervening actions that would have to be based on the knowledge of local patterns of culture. The fast growth of the Catholic communities on the continent, as well as the extensive institutional presence of the Church, including schools, hospitals, and other social-service institutions, give the Vatican unmatched access to religious communities and religious leadership, providing diplomatic opportunities perhaps unavailable to strictly secular negotiators (Maulana & Manullang, 2024). Again, the fact that the Vatican has long been engaged with developing long-term relationships and institutional capacity-building aligns with the contemporary construct of sustainability of peacebuilding, which underlines the prologue work within long timeframes (Ochi et al., 2023; Shinoda, 2018). Further, it is crucial to do a systematic examination of the role of the Vatican in faith-based diplomacy and peacebuilding in Africa.

Considering the permeation of religion in the African community and the instrumental role played by religious leaders in resolving conflicts, religious diplomacy has become a salient tool of African conflict resolution (Kehinde et al., 2023). Thus, this research offers a deeper understanding of faith-based diplomatic strategies and impacts in African peacebuilding. It also underscores the importance of religious institutions in international relations and provides insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to leverage faith-based approaches in conflict resolution (Agensky, 2019; Kehinde et al., 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Faith-Based Diplomacy

Faith-based diplomacy emphasizes the roles of religious actors in conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Thomas, 2010). It understands that religious figures and faith groups have distinctive peacebuilding capabilities, given their moral authority, local access and community trust (Hurd 2016; Thomas 2010). Unlike traditional diplomacy, faith-based diplomacy takes a holistic approach, not only indulging in direct resolution of conflict, but also reconciliation and restoration of social and political order (Thomas 2010). An interreligious dialogue is one of the most important approaches to establishing mutual knowledge and collaboration between religious groups (Kwuelum, 2024). It is the implementation of religious values and practices that constitutes the ultimate determining factor in the effectiveness of faith-based diplomacy (Troy 2008). However, it has its challenges. Religious actors can sometimes be partisan, and their involvement can inadvertently exacerbate conflicts (Kwuelum, 2024). Despite these challenges, the inclusion of faith-based perspective in the approaches to peacebuilding and in development processes continues to grow in multilateral institutions like the United Nations, the World Bank and others (Marshall & Van Saanen 2007). The trend is a wider recognition that, with the right approach and when used ethically and deployed, religion is indeed a potent tool of diplomacy. Faith-based diplomacy thus enhances conventional diplomatic practices that seek to work out the spiritual and moral aspects of human enmity thus providing a more comprehensive and culturally established approach towards peace talks and reconciliation. A successful peace had based on faith must therefore be more inclusive, transparent and must have clear-sighted view on both the prospects of and the limitations of faith participation (Troy 2008). Explorations of soft power approaches taken by religious agents also contribute to the understanding of the intricate nature of religious authority and identity in the framework of globality (Hoesterey, 2020).

Peacebuilding in Africa

Peacebuilding in Africa is a complex process given the continent's history of conflicts and the ongoing efforts to establish lasting peace. Various actors, including the United Nations and the African Union, have engaged in peace operations, with mixed successes (Osuchukwu et al, 2025). Civil society organizations are also well-positioned for peacebuilding due to their close ties to local communities (Harsch, 2012). Simultaneously with that, interreligious dialogue and collaboration come out as the crucial tools of establishing mutual understanding and trust between different religious groups (Ntakirutimana, 2023). However, the existing literature emphasizes the importance of addressing the root causes of conflict and incorporating local capacities in peacebuilding initiatives (Krampe et al, 2024). The focus of the recent debate is on the idea of African solutions to African problems since there is a need to focus on problem-specific, context-specific interventions that reflect on the specific dynamics of conflict and the corresponding sociopolitical matrices (Rein, 2015). Against the backdrop of the classical liberal paradigm of peacebuilding, which tends to prioritize democratization, market liberalization as well as strong state-building, a majority of scholars argue that superior results can be achieved by embracing the models of peace that combine international norms with locally-established conflict-resolution mechanisms, which enhances legitimacy and survival (Murithi, 2006). In countries such as Rwanda and Sierra Leone, community-based strategies like gacaca courts and truth commissions have demonstrated the value of integrating traditional practices into post-conflict justice and reconciliation processes (Lambourne, 2009). At the regional level, African institutions such as the African Union (AU) and sub-regional organizations like ECOWAS have played growing roles in peacekeeping and mediation, though their impact is often constrained by limited resources, political will, and bureaucratic inefficiencies (Williams, 2009). Moreover, scholars underscore the need for holistic peacebuilding strategies that address the root causes of conflict, including poverty, marginalization, and weak governance structures (Adetula, Bereketeab, & Odukoya, 2021). It is getting more apparent that gender and youth involvement are paramount aspects of sustainability, as it is believed that involving women can lead to peace agreements that are more concrete and widespread (Falch, 2010). Additionally, literature insists that peacebuilding is not a linear, technical undertaking, but a complex, socially rooted process that should be examined as a highly political exercise that focuses on local ownership and the transformation of people in the long term (Pouligny, 2005). This evolving understanding challenges the notion of externally driven peacebuilding and calls for approaches that empower local communities, promote justice, and foster inclusive governance (Osuchukwu et al, 2025). Ultimately, the literature suggests that peacebuilding in Africa must be multidimensional, which combines security, development, justice, and reconciliation. to create resilient societies capable of addressing future conflicts peacefully.

The Vatican as a Diplomatic Actor

The Vatican's unique position as both a spiritual authority and sovereign state has established it as a distinctive diplomatic actor in international relations with full diplomatic status and extensive soft power. As the world's smallest sovereign state, Vatican City possesses full diplomatic status under international law, maintaining formal diplomatic relations with 183 countries and holding permanent observer status at the United Nations (Troy, 2018). Essentially, this dual identity as a religious institution and temporal power grants the Vatican exceptional legitimacy in mediating international conflicts and promoting peace initiatives. Historically, the Vatican's diplomatic involvement can be traced back to the early modern period, with its use of papal legates and nuncios as key instruments of influence (Philpott, 2007). Its diplomatic tradition was distinguished by an emphasis on moral authority, impartiality, and engagement through dialogue rather than coercion. This long-standing tradition allows the Vatican to serve as a credible mediator in international and intrastate conflicts, especially where religion and identity are central to the dispute.

The network of the Vatican and its control through incredible number of Catholic institutions give the Vatican unique capabilities to obtain information and provide access to local communities that cannot be provided by the vast majority of state actors, and thereby enhances the influence of the Vatican in areas with predominance of Catholics. This church structure allows papal nuncios and local Roman Catholic clergy to continue a dialogue with the conflicting parties when official diplomatic relations have been cut. Additionally, the Church has long existed in numerous areas of conflict before the international bodies and offers essential stability and local expertise. The Vatican represented a rather subtle but also effective program of diplomacy during the years of the Cold War, in particular, in terms of its role in promoting human rights and religious freedom in Eastern Europe. The role of the Vatican in bringing about the end of communism in Poland, particularly the infusion of moral strength brought by Pope John Paul II, is often quoted as one of the crucial proofs of its international power (Byrnes et al., 2001). New literature points out the novelty of the non-standard functions of the Vatican in its struggle against contemporary global problems. In furtherance of the traditional conflict resolutions, the Church is involved in peacebuilding practices where it teaches, advocates and informally makes diplomatic interventions. Its diplomacy strategy commonly includes such processes as track-two diplomacy or back-channel efforts to create reconciliation and dialogue. Hence, the Vatican is accustomed to engaging with both state and non-state actors and can provide mediation in a conflict where other diplomatic actors are bound by political or ideological constraints.

However, the Vatican peacebuilding work over the last few decades has focused on forgiveness, social justice, disarmament and tending to the needy. Further, during this time, the Vatican has been actively involved in the peace efforts in various parts of the world, such as Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. One of the most striking instances is the one that took place in 2015, as the Vatican has mediated between the United States and Cuba and helped the two nations restore diplomatic contacts (Faggioli, 2017). The Vatican has favored interreligious dialogues in African regions and conflict-resolution projects with states like South Sudan and the Central African Republic, where Pope Francis has led the way towards peace and reconciliation since symbolic gestures and pastoral actions (Sandri, 2021). The Vatican tends to rely on the Catholic social teaching as the base of the peacebuilding process, where human dignity, solidarity and the common good are emphasized. Opposers of the idea argue that the moral rather than the material influence of the Holy See is mainly perceptible, but the researchers state that constituting the only authority position, the Holy See can draw the boundaries between religious and political sides and, thus, can even assist the international peacekeeping in the cases where states are not able to do so (Johnston, 2003). In short, literature presents the Vatican as a unique actor in diplomacy whose historical memory, religious presence, and strategic position help it to contribute to peace and dialogue under presence in the international scene.

Table 1: The World's Population of Catholics

	Population	Catholics	Percentage
Africa	1.384.373.000 (+15.861.000)	272.423.000 (+7.271.000)	19,7% (+0,32%)
America	1.038.640.000 (+8.275.000)	666.209.000 (+5.912.000)	64,1% (+0,02%)
Asia	4.650.852.000 (+29.139.000)	154.244.000 (+889.000)	3,3% (-0,02%)
Europe	722.315.000 (-517.000)	285.589.000 (-474.000)	39,5% (-0,08%)
Oceania	42.764.000 (+417.000)	11.108.000 (+123.000)	26,0% (+0,06%)
TOTAL	7.838.944.000 (+53.175.000)	1.389.573.000 (+13.721.000)	17,7% (+0,03%)

Source: Catholic Church Statistics, 2024

The Vatican's Peacebuilding in Africa

The Vatican mediation in Africa represents a peculiar, but effective combination of the moral authority, church diplomacy and popular intervention that has expressed a considerable impact on the conflict settlement and reconciliation in the various parts of the continent. Within the Catholic Church, social teachings and ethical doctrines are embedded, the Vatican functions both by formal diplomacy and something called pastoral outreach, and often intervenes in situations where state machineries fail in matters where there is neither moral legitimacy in action nor space to act upon (Johnston, 2003). According to academic research, the system of Vatican peacebuilding in Africa works in the form of a complex of mutually interacting mechanisms. Episcopal conferences are the main tools of local conflict resolution, as can be seen in the case of the Kenya Conference of catholic bishops being able to intervene successfully in the post-election crisis of 2007-2008 (Cheeseman & Tendi, 2010). Similarly, the role of mediation played by the Catholic

Church in Congo political negotiations reveals how a religious institution becomes a neutral territory of discussion when the mechanism of the state should have failed (Betances, 2004).

The theological priority of the Vatican on reconciliation and forgiveness entails a unique way of handling the aspect of post-conflict situations. The studies of post-genocide recovery in Rwanda demonstrate that the reconciliation programs led by Catholic reconciliation programs, despite the original complicity of the institutions, have eventually helped achieve a more comprehensive social healing and healing courtesy of community engagement in dialogue (Longman, 2017). This process was differentiated from purely political solutions in that it places the moral aspects of conflict into the forefront and, through relationship changes, can find permanent solutions to illuminated peace. The recent Vatican peacebuilding had not been as proactive with the African conflicts, and the present-day one, as conducted by Pope Francis, has demonstrated. This stronger commitment is displayed through the direct intervention of the Pope in peace processes of South Sudan, such as by inviting political leaders in South Sudan to the Vatican, as well as papal visits to areas of conflict. Researchers, however, single out the existing obstacles, such as insufficient resources to implement it and the occurrence of tensions between Vatican social teaching and local cultures (Appleby, 2020; Haynes, 2019).

Vatican's Peacebuilding Strategies and Impacts

The Vatican's peacebuilding initiatives in Africa represent a model of religious diplomacy that leverages the Catholic Church's extensive institutional presence, grassroots engagements, and moral authority across the continent. The Vatican has a strong Catholic population of over 230 million people who make up about 20% of the total population across the continent, and the same can also contribute to the effectiveness of the peacebuilding activities of the Vatican (Orobator, 2018). Such demographic status provides the Vatican the ability to access both grass-roots constituencies and political elites, thus making it easier to implement the multifaceted approach to war resolution.

The Vatican has promoted a multi-layered approach to peacebuilding that combines high-level diplomacy and pastoral activity in situations where the scoring of conflict is centred on ethnic, religious and political cleavages. The most important strategies include the following: mediation, interreligious dialogue, humanitarian advocacy, and the symbolic power of papal visitation. Diplomacy has especially featured prominently in the Great Lakes region as the Holy See has maintained constant dialogue with the key combatants in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. According to this strategy, the emphasis of the long-term relations building is put foremost, rather than expedient resolutions based on the realization that the sustained peace necessitates the coordinated coordination of the social rifts and historical indignations.

All over the African continent, the local episcopal conferences have been believed to play a central role in the peace-building mechanism employed by the Vatican. The role of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops in mediating the 2007-2008 post-election violence is a classic example of how church hierarchies in the country can offer sterile platforms of discussion in cases where the state institutions have failed to do so (Cheeseman and Tendi, 2010). A similar situation is the mediational role of the Catholic Church in the 2016 political agreement in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which proves the effectiveness of church mediation in situations where the traditional agents of diplomacy are not credible.

The Vatican has invested significantly in the aspect of reconciliation and forgiveness as the theological approaches towards peace building, and thus their impact has been felt, especially in post-genocide Rwanda. The efforts made by the Catholic Church of promoting the concept of unity and reconciliation activities, which were to be eventually used to proceed with broader efforts at healing society, despite its early missteps related to the role of the clergy in the genocide, demonstrate both the power and the limited effect of religious peacebuilding when institutional reputability was damaged (Longman 2017).

Scholarly assessment reveals mixed outcomes of Vatican peacebuilding efforts in Africa. Success stories include the interventions of the Church in facilitating a peaceful transition in Ghana and Kenya, where Catholic leaders provided moral authority in decisive political situations (Gifford 2016). However, the critics consistently state that the whole hierarchical and conservative stances of the Vatican may restrict its ability to deal with gender-based violence and marginalization of young people, two primary causes of most African conflicts.

The present-day research, Contemporary research emphasizes the Vatican's evolving approach under Pope Francis, who has prioritized African concerns through multiple papal visits and the elevation of African cardinals to key positions. The Pope is also dedicated to the so-called periphery-centred diplomacy, which has escalated the Vatican's participation in African conflicts, the Central African Republic and, most notably, South Sudan, where the direct involvement of the Pope has deflected international attention to otherwise-forgotten conflicts (Faggioli, 2020). These developments reflect a more active, circumstance-based approach to African peacebuilding that incorporates African consciousness of strategic importance in global Catholic demographics and contemporary security issues.

Vatican's Peacebuilding in the cases of the Central African Republic and South Sudan

The efforts of the Vatican in peacebuilding in the Central African Republic and South Sudan bring paradigmatic examples of religious diplomacy dealing with different but overlapping conflict patterns in sub-Saharan Africa. Both wars, caused by state frailty and resource rivalry, have conflicting characteristics, which shaped the Vatican's style of engagement depending on the situation.

After the Seleka rebels took control of the country, the Central African Republic conflict that began in 2012 developed as a conflict between churches and Muslims as a sectarian war, resulting in massive displacement and a major humanitarian crisis (Lombard, 2016). On the other hand, in South Sudan, the civil war (2013-2018) started as a political struggle between President Salva Kiir and his former Vice Prime Riek Machar, who later gained ethnic attributes along the line of Dinka and Nuer groups, and ruined the youngest nation in the world (Johnson, 2016).

There was a significant difference in Vatican peacebuilding strategies in these contexts. The Vatican used local episcopal leadership and a grassroots reconciliation program in the Central African Republic, and Catholic bishops enabled interfaith dialogue and a haven for the displaced populations. Another important figure was the Archbishop of Bangui, Dieudonne Nzapalainga, who has led the interfaith initiative about the reconciliation of Christians and Muslims on a platform with other leaders of Islam and Protestants. In comparison, South Sudan has experienced unprecedented high Official stewardship that was the meeting with the Pope when the leader of South Sudan President Kiir and the opposing party leaders were invited to Vatican where Pope Francis begged the opposing leaders to kiss his feet as a symbolic approach to the problem of war (Wooden, 2019). Such symbolic action demonstrated the ability of the Vatican to apply moral suasion and attract global attention.

Essentially, the impacts of these interventions demonstrate both successes and limitations. In the Central African Republic, Vatican-supported interfaith initiatives contributed to reduced sectarian tensions in urban areas and facilitated the return of some displaced populations. However, rural areas remained largely inaccessible to church-mediated reconciliation efforts. South Sudan's papal intervention enhanced international pressure for peace implementation and provided symbolic legitimacy to the revitalized peace agreement, contributing to the formation of a unity government in February 2020 (Craze, 2021). However, there still exist significant barriers in both environments. Weak state institutions, poor financial capability, and the influence of armed groups that are not answerable to the religion cut the influence of the Vatican. Furthermore, although the high-level negotiations have proved overwhelmingly successful in South Sudan, there is still an outstanding question of how to convert papal moral authority into long-lasting local-level peace. In line with this, interfaith reconciliation advances in the Central African Republic that have been made in Bangui have not grievously dealt with the rural frustrations or institutional inequalities that have led to the conflict. The combination of these examples indicates that the success of Vatican peacebuilding was heavily dependent on each context, local church capacity, and conflict dynamics in question. They also highlight the possibilities and the limitations of religious diplomacy in the modern African conflicts.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Vatican Faith-Based Interventions in South Sudan and Central African Republic

Dimension	South Sudan	Central African Republic
Type of Conflict	Civil war (2013-2018) involving ethnic divisions, resource competition, and political power struggles between government forces (SPLA) and the opposition groups	Sectarian conflict (2012-2019) characterized by Christian-Muslim violence, state collapse, and humanitarian crisis, with ethnic and religious dimensions
Key Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-level papal diplomacy (Vatican retreat for leaders in 2019) • Direct papal engagement and foot-kissing gesture • Interfaith dialogue initiatives • Support for peace agreements through moral authority • Coordination with international partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local church-based mediation through Catholic bishops • Interfaith reconciliation programs • Protection of civilians in church compounds • Advocacy for international intervention • Grassroots peace education initiatives
Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced international attention to the conflict • Symbolic breakthrough in leader engagement • Strengthened peace process legitimacy • Improved interfaith relations • Increased donor commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced sectarian tensions in specific localities • Safe havens for displaced populations • Interfaith dialogue restoration • Community-level reconciliation • Women's peace network strengthening
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revitalized Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS) signed in 2018 • Formation of a unity government in 2020 • Reduced large-scale violence • Ongoing fragile stability • Limited territorial control improvements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradual reduction in sectarian violence • Partial restoration of state authority • Return of some displaced populations • Interfaith coexistence in urban areas • Persistent insecurity in rural regions

Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited influence over military commanders • Inadequate resources for implementation • Weak state institutions persist • Economic challenges unaddressed • Regional dynamics beyond Vatican control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited reach in remote areas • Insufficient international support • Weak government capacity • Continued armed group activities • Resource constraints for reconstruction
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Source: Authors' Compilation, 2025

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the Vatican's peacebuilding strategies in Africa using a qualitative research methodology. The qualitative method was chosen because it is appropriate for interpreting texts to comprehend intricate social, political, and religious dynamics. The study relies exclusively on secondary data, using document analysis to examine a wide range of materials relevant to the Vatican's faith-based diplomacy and peacebuilding initiatives. The data sources for this study include official Vatican communications such as papal speeches, apostolic exhortations, press releases from Vatican news, and diplomatic correspondences. Online academic books, think tank reports, and scholarly journal articles from academic databases like JSTOR and Taylor & Francis are used to supplement these Vatican texts.

Furthermore, the primary research tool was document analysis, which involved systematically analyzing textual materials to discern patterns, themes, and relationships in regards to Vatican peacebuilding strategies. Scholarly literature was systematically searched on several occasions using keywords such as "Vatican diplomacy," "papal peacebuilding," "Catholic Church Africa," "religious mediation," and with the use of names of specific countries. The judicious use of Boolean operators enhances the precision of academic database searches. The documents were organized for analysis to follow the Vatican's involvement with African conflicts. The documents were thematically organized by the context of the conflict, the type of intervention, and the lens through which the analysis was presented. The quality assessment criteria used to assess documents included only credible documents, with a focus on peer-reviewed documents and documents derived from official Vatican documents. In this study, the analysis was done with a critical approach; therefore, both the strengths of Vatican interventions, their weaknesses, and the limitations encountered in the post-conflict environments were evaluated.

Thematic analysis represented the primary analysis technique, which involves a systematic identification, analysis and interpretation of patterns within the data that was collected. The analytic process followed normal qualitative research practices. Familiarization was completed by repeatedly reading source materials. The methodological approach facilitated the study to remain verifiable and academic; however, it simultaneously provided an analytical interpretation of the role of the Vatican in peacebuilding in Africa.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Accordingly, utilizing an array of secondary sources, this study examined the Vatican's faith-based diplomatic methods in Africa and also revealed that the Vatican employs a multifaceted approach to advance both peace initiatives and diplomatic efforts. The program operates through strategic high-level initiatives while simultaneously maintaining active local community engagement. An exceptional instance occurred when Pope Francis held a meeting with South Sudanese leaders in 2019 at the Vatican, which underscored the urgent necessity for regional peace. Their approach also relies on moral mediation as a key strategy. Papal representatives known as envoys and nuncios perform essential functions by providing spiritual assistance while promoting communication among opposing factions. These representatives operate in hidden capacities to reduce conflicts and foster recovery through Catholic teachings. Essentially, across national and community levels, prominent Catholic organizations, including bishops' conferences and diocesan peace commissions, serve as essential mediators. Their role involves organizing discussions, mediating conflicts, and supporting nonviolence. The efforts receive support from grassroots Catholic groups, which include parishes, schools and various local associations that promote interfaith cooperation and peace education while helping conflict-recovering communities.

Politically, these peacebuilding initiatives implemented on the ground have produced substantial impacts during their implementation and areas where the Vatican took action experienced lower violence levels, and more fighters started following ceasefire agreements. Hence, through Vatican-facilitated peace initiatives, South Sudan and the Central African Republic achieved renewed national dialogue commitments alongside more inclusive political processes. The local Catholic institutions established programs that integrated displaced people and former fighters while building better community relations and fostering peaceful coexistence between opposing war groups. The results demonstrated how Vatican religious networks and moral authority effectively foster enduring peace and social harmony in African conflict zones. Economically, the peacebuilding success of the Vatican depends heavily on contextual elements and the church's local capacity, as well as conflict dynamics, as shown by South Sudan and the Central African Republic. Hence, this demonstrates that, although religious diplomacy faces certain limitations in addressing contemporary African conflicts, its potential to contribute to sustainable peace significantly outweighs these challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed how the Vatican actively shapes religious diplomacy and peacebuilding efforts across Africa by demonstrating its strategies and impacts on the Central African Republic and South Sudan. Accordingly, It was revealed that the Vatican implements a thorough strategy through combined diplomatic actions, which include political leader contact and papal envoy moral mediation, together with strong local participation of Catholic institutions and peace movements at the grassroots level. The Vatican's peacebuilding initiatives have led to decreased violence levels and helped establish ceasefire compliance and national dialogical reconciliation by utilizing their exclusive religious influence and wide network of followers, despite having some limitations.

Furthermore, the study has some limitations because it depended mainly on secondary sources and insufficient access to undocumented faith-based interventions at the grassroots and diocesan levels. Again, the research does not sufficiently address the unfavourable outcomes of the Vatican's involvement and fails to examine the viewpoints of stakeholders who are not Catholic. and which may perceive such interventions differently. Despite these limitations, the study contributed to the existing knowledge about faith-based diplomacy through its empirical evidence, which demonstrated how faith-based diplomacy serves as a soft power strategy in African peacebuilding to support traditional diplomatic approaches in complex conflict zones through its moral authority and enduring community presence. Politically, by recognizing the Vatican as a multi-dimensional actor that bridges spiritual and political realms, scholars and practitioners alike can gain richer insights into the potential of faith-based diplomacy in fostering sustainable peace across the African continent. Moreover, it demonstrates both the significance of religious institutions in global affairs and delivers strategic recommendations to policymakers and practitioners who want to use faith-based conflict resolution methods.

Furthermore, this research faces limitations because it depends on secondary sources and insufficient access to undocumented faith-based interventions at the grassroots and diocesan levels. In addition, the research does not sufficiently address the unfavourable outcomes of Vatican involvement and fails to examine the viewpoints of stakeholders who are not Catholic and may perceive such interventions differently. Despite these limitations, the study, the research contributes to the existing knowledge about faith-based diplomacy through its empirical evidence, which demonstrates how faith-based diplomacy serves as a soft power strategy in African peacebuilding to support traditional diplomatic approaches in complex conflict zones through its moral authority and enduring community presence. Moreover, the research demonstrates both the significance of religious institutions in global affairs and delivers strategic recommendations to policymakers and practitioners who want to use faith-based conflict resolution methods.

Based on the findings of this research, we would recommend strengthening the collaboration between the Vatican and local faith-based organizations because deeper collaboration with local Catholic dioceses, ecumenical partners, and interfaith councils can enhance the effectiveness of the Vatican's peacebuilding initiatives. Also, there is a need for more academic research on the roles of religious entities in conflict resolution because their roles remain underexplored. Future research should expand case studies and employ primary data collection through interviews with essential stakeholders to develop a complete understanding of religious actors' involvement in contemporary conflict resolution practices.

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