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THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN ALLEVIATING POVERTY AMONG THE NIGERIAN YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is now embroiled in a web of economic woes, which has resulted in a high proportion of unemployment, suffering and poverty, particularly among the country's youth. The impact of poverty on Nigerian youth was investigated in this research, as well as the role of the church in alleviating this social ill. The fundamental point of this article, however, is to encourage the church to continue to use its abilities, resources, and experiences to help young people become productive citizens as a model and crucial social organization. Despite numerous poverty eradication and alleviation programs established by successive governments in the country, it was discovered that a larger number of Nigerian youth lack almost all of the basic things needed for a standard of living, such as meaningful employment, clothing, formal education, and so on. Based on the foregoing facts, the article concludes that the government alone cannot eradicate poverty among Nigeria's youth, and that the government's incapacity to do so necessitates the involvement of all social and religious players in addressing the problem. The study suggests, among other things, that the church should continue to set up skill acquisition programs and network with both the government and the private sector to make cash accessible to emerging and established businesses in Nigeria in order to take alleviate poverty alleviation among the youth to the next level.

Keywords: Role, Church, Poverty Alleviation, Youth, Nigeria.

Introduction

Poverty is one of the most serious worldwide concerns impacting people's lives and property, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria. Poverty is often regarded as one of the primary causes of societal ills. As a result, poverty is a nebulous term that can be applied to anyone depending on the context and the individual's perspective. The term "poverty" has been defined in a number of ways. Poverty is defined by Adedokun and Adeyemo (2008) as a condition in which one or more people fall below the minimal level of economic wellbeing and lack the vital means of meeting their basic requirements. Clothing, food, housing, health, education, and recreation, according to Illiyasu, Hamidu, and Awals (2006), are the fundamental requirements of life. The researchers, on the other hand, contend that if a person's fundamental needs are not met, that person is considered poor. Adedokun and Adeyemo (2008) define poverty in terms of per-capital income, emphasizing that persons living on less than one dollar per day are considered absolute poor.

Despite Nigeria's wealth of human and material resources, it does not take much effort to uncover that poverty has been a major factor in the lives of ordinary individuals. Nigeria, according to Ituma and Ukeachusim (2013), is one of the few African countries that has all of the capability to battle poverty but is still mired in it. Many people in the country are said to

be unable to afford three meals every day. Many Nigerians could not brag of a place to sleep since they live in dismal circumstances. The majority of university graduates were unable to find work, and those who did are underemployed (Ogundele et al 2014).

When one considers the high levels of both human and natural resources in the country, as well as the amount of poverty, one cannot help but be struck by the irony of the situation: Nigeria is a richly blessed country with a vibrant population, but it is impoverished and undeveloped. Poverty has severely entered the Nigerian populace, particularly the youth, who are society's most vulnerable demographic. Most young people lack almost all of the basic necessities for a better standard of living, such as meaningful employment, a well-balanced diet, access to quality health care, clothing, and formal education, among other things, and when they face such challenges, they are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, depression, and mental health issues.

The Nigerian government has implemented programs and policies for poverty alleviation over the years to combat poverty, particularly among the youth. Some of them include: Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life Programme (BLP), Peoples' Bank of Nigeria (PBN), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDs), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS), and others (Ogundele et al 2014). However, the increased rate of poverty in the country currently indicates that these programmes have not yielded considerable positive results.

Given the foregoing, one would wonder why poverty, which is persistently battled against by numerous entities, persists in seizing every nook and cranny of Nigeria. Why does poverty among Nigeria's young persist despite the measures put in place by successive governments? Is it possible for other social players in society, such as the church, to play effective and efficient roles in combating poverty among the youth that would result in long-term solutions? These are the key issues that this study aims to address. The study also aims to determine how poverty among the youth has impacted Nigeria's overall development, as well as to identify and assess methods in which poverty might be eliminated in Nigeria with the support of the church.

Explications of Concepts

Church, youth, and poverty are three key terms that need clarifications in this study. Since these essential concepts can be applied in a number of ways, their definitions should be explained.

Church

The Greek term ekklesia is translated as "church" in English. According to the New International Encyclopaedia of Bible Words, ekklesia is God's people considered as a new and full community (Richards, 1985). According to Ngele et al. (2011), the term 'church' is synonymous with the Hebrew word 'qahal,' which means a gathering of Yahweh's people who share a similar faith in the Bible's teachings. Ituma (2009) stated that the term *ekklesia*portrays a living, breathing entity known as the church. As a result, the church in this

study refers to a community of believers in the Lord Jesus, and not a structure where born again Christians go to worship God.

Youth

In academic literature, the term "youth" has been the topic of heated debate. In existing works the researchers came across, there are at least four broad definitional interpretations of the term which include: youth as an age group, a transitory period between infancy and maturity, a social construct, and a "social switcher" (Onuoha 2010). The United Nations defines "youth" as anyone aged 15 to 24 years old, regardless of alternative definitions used by member nations. Most African countries use the age category designation primarily for policy reasons. For example, in Kenya and Malawi, "youth" is defined as 15-39 years old; in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Madagascar, and Senegal, it is 15-35 years old; and in South Africa, it is 14-35 years old (Richter and Panday 2007). The youth in Nigeria are described as "all young individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 who are citizens of the federal republic of Nigeria" (National Youth Policy 2001:3). Based on this criterion, this study will use the National Youth Policy's definition of "youth."

Poverty

Poverty is not a simple concept to define. As a result, any study of poverty must start with a definition of poverty. A study of the relevant literature demonstrates that there is no universal consensus on any useful definition of poverty, because poverty impacts many facets of the human condition, including physical, moral and psychological. According to Odusola (1997), a clear and widely agreed definition of poverty is problematic. Poverty has been defined using a variety of criteria. As Odusola properly highlighted, most assessments follow the traditional understanding of poverty as a result of lack of income for procuring essential commodities and services. The individual's capacity to survive and reproduce himself, as well as the individual's ability to command resources to do so, is at issue here. Many other researchers have defined the poor as a group of people who are unable to achieve their fundamental dietary demands (Sanda, et al 2006). Others see poverty as a result of factors such as education, health, life expectancy, child mortality, and so on. According to Aber (1997), poverty can be viewed from two perspectives: (i)"moneylessness," which refers to a lack of cash as well as a chronic inadequacy of all types of resources to meet basic human needs such as nutrition, rest, warmth, and body care; and (ii) "powerlessness," which refers to those who lack the opportunities and choices available to them and who perceive their lives to be governed by forces and persons beyond their control.

Similarly, Akanji (2008) virtually followed this idea by categorizing poverty into two categories: narrow economic and broad cultural. Poverty was characterized from an economic viewpoint as the external conditions that impact a person's behavior, particularly in economic talks and transactions such as the purchase of consumer items, the learning of skills, and the providing of productive services. Poverty is described as a condition of deprivation based on economic and social factors such as income, education, health care, portable water, food access, social standing, self-esteem, and self-actualization (Umar 2008). To put it another way, poverty is defined as a lack of sufficient income or disposable resources to afford a basic quality of life.

Poverty is a worldwide epidemic that affects not only young people but all people, and it affects all facets of human life, from the economic and social to the environmental, political, and cultural. Poverty, according to Okojie (1997), is defined as a lack of resources or income. It is defined by a lack of fundamental human requirements such as appropriate and nutritious food, clothes, clean water, and health care in its most extreme form. Poverty, according to Ewetan (2005), is defined as a lack of control over fundamental requirements, i.e., an insufficient level of consumption, resulting in insufficient food, clothes, and shelter. This means that poverty is defined in terms of fundamental human requirements that an individual must possess in order to exist. When a family is unable to meet its fundamental necessities, it is considered to be living in poverty. Similarly, Okunmadewa (1997) defines poverty as a lack of fundamental necessities for a reasonable level of living. Poverty is defined as the inability to meet a basic standard of life as measured by fundamental consumption demands or the money necessary to meet them. Poverty can be absolute, relative, or a combination of the two. When people fall below the amount of income required for bare sustenance, they are considered to be in absolute poverty, whereas relative poverty refers to the living conditions that exist elsewhere in the society (Egwin, 1989).Poverty in the context of this study is defined as a denial of choices and chances, a violation of human dignity, and a lack of fundamental competence to participate successfully in society.

Poverty among the Youth in Nigeria

Poverty is pervasive and severe in Nigeria, despite the country's abundance of people and natural resources. According to a report by Adekunle (2018), Nigeria is among the world's poorest countries. Nigeria has surpassed India as the world's poverty capital, according to Adekunle, with over 87 million people living in severe poverty, Nigeria is paradoxically referred to as one of the world's most blessed countries due to its richness of natural and human resources. According to Chukwu (2011), the country has been regarded as one of Africa's richest for decades due to its vast petroleum reserves and massive population. Chukwu went on to say that, just as the 8th century brought enormous prosperity to Israel, the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta put Nigeria among the world's wealthiest nations. However, much as the top class in Israel monopolized money, Nigeria has been divided into upper and lower classes, with the higher class dominating resources and pushing the lower class into poverty.

Because most politicians and their associates regard oil money as a national cake, they conceal the country's commonwealth in foreign bank accounts in Europe and America. Joblessness and poverty were the accompanying curses. Unemployment has exacerbated the scene of religious crises and tribal uprisings in Nigeria; members of ethno-religious crises in the country have been teeming unemployed youth, an incident that provides ready soldiers for such wars, and has thrown Nigeria into a quagmire of problems and challenges with dire consequences for the country (Chukwu 2011). Poverty among Nigerian youth is currently exacerbated by a lack of social amenities such as reliable power, good roads, drinkable water, and health facilities. To make matters worse, increased incidences of militancy, herdsmen crises, abduction, and terrorism are not helping matters. As a result, development and production have stagnated, and there is no growth but regress, if not annihilation.

In rural regions of Nigeria, where social services and infrastructure are inadequate or non-existent, youth poverty is particularly severe. The vast majority of rural residents are

impoverished and rely on agriculture for food and money. Small-scale farmers growing little pieces of land who rely on rainwater rather than irrigation systems generate around 90% of the country's food.

Causes of poverty among the youth in Nigeria

Neglect of the rural population, civil unrest, the desire for riches, the corrupt political process, the high population rate, sectionalism, the winner-take-all mindset, and a lack of comprehensive education are all factors contributing to the high degree of poverty among Nigerian young.

In Nigeria, the rural population has long been neglected in terms of rural infrastructure, while expenditures in health, education, and water supply have mostly been concentrated on the metropolis. Thousands of young people flock to cities in pursuit of hardly accessible employment. Rural residents have severely limited access to amenities like schools and health centers, and almost half of the population does not have access to safe drinking water.

Poverty among the youth is exacerbated by civil upheaval. Poverty and violence are frequently inextricably linked. Religious and ethnic conflicts persist in several sections of Nigeria, with the youth serving as the primary players due to unemployment. This frequently results in outbreaks of violence, which then leads to an increase in poverty and starvation. Thousands of young people have died in recent years as a result of violence between ethnic and religious groups, as well as separatist efforts for independence. A robust trade in stolen oil has resulted in a major collapse of law and order in the Niger Delta part of the country, where the oil industry is situated. Several acts of sabotage have been perpetrated against international oil firms by organizations demanding a larger portion of the Niger Delta's oil resources (Alabi, 2014).

The desire for riches at any costs are among Nigerian youths is one of reason contributing to the country's rising poverty rate (Kolawole, &Omobitan, 2015). As a result, rather than becoming better economically, more and more young people are doing worse every day, with little sign or prospect of a brighter future. Another important reason of poverty among Nigerian youngsters is the country's corrupt political system. The nature and condition of politics, as well as public perceptions of it, are a do-or-die affair and a winner-take-all game, in which only the wealthiest, most powerful, and those with the most godfathers in high places are elected or appointed to positions of authority (Alabi, 2014).

The governing party takes advantage of the poor people's poverty to buy votes and bribe electoral officials. As a result, politics in Nigeria is a monopoly of the wealthy and powerful. As a result, any impoverished person's position or state of poverty is difficult to modify.

Effects of poverty among the Nigerian youth

Poverty among Nigeria's young people is a recurring and persistent issue that is impeding the country's long-term growth. Poverty has a significant detrimental impact on people's quality of life, the possibilities available to them, and their capacity to fully engage in society. Unfortunately, it appears that breaking the cycle of poverty is tough, since impoverished children are more likely to grow up to be poor teens and adults. Children from low-income homes are more likely to drop out of school early and without a diploma, ending up

unemployed or in low-paying occupations. According to Anugwom (2002), lack of income among the youth which translates to poverty leads to insufficient resources to enable sustainable livelihoods. The outcome is that there is hunger, malnutrition, ill-health, restricted or absence of access to education, homelessness or inadequate housing and other essential services. Onah (2010) states that most Nigerian youngsters lack the fundamental requirements of life. The dismal economic situation in the nation has exposed many Nigerian youngsters to vulnerable situations in the effort to live. Some prefer to relocate to other nations to hunt for better pastures. Such persons sometimes fall prey to human traffickers.

In some situations, impoverished parents from rural regions send their children to work as househelps in Nigerian towns or across the border in the hopes of bettering their children's education and living conditions. However, these youngsters are frequently abused and exploited.

Death, terrorism, conflict, less job possibilities, a high prevalence of criminality, rising illiteracy, and heightened favoritism are all notable effects of poverty among Nigerian youth, (Agundu 2012). For example, a young person who is unable to consume nutritional meals is clearly a victim of poverty, and malnutrition is the result of poverty in this case. Youths who live in poverty are more likely to live in substandard housing and become homeless. Whether one looks at it from the perspective of fundamental requirements or that which defines necessary in a given socio-cultural environment, the poor lack the things that the wealthy have. They are unable to fulfill the basic essentials of existence or may barely satisfy some of them. This demonstrates that poverty is both socially and physically humiliating. Poverty is an adversary of humanity, a plague that affects not just the impoverished individual, but also the rest of the community, nation, and global civilization (Blackbum, 1991).

In addition, disadvantaged kids are more likely to have poor mental and physical health (Brown 2007). They are sicker and die younger than others who have it easier. A poor diet, a greater prevalence of chronic disease, a lower level of engagement in sports and leisure activities, and a generally worse quality of life all contribute to poor health and well-being among the youth.

Poverty also deprives people of their humanity and their sense of self-identity. Poverty makes a person inferior; it degrades them and lowers their self-esteem. According to Ilo (2008:174), poverty "shuts the door to existence." It turns life into a story of grief and anguish, as well as a voyage into the unknown realm of want and dissatisfaction. Poverty also makes individuals helpless and voiceless; it prevents them from realizing their full potential and investing in themselves for the sake of our collective humanity. Poverty no longer affects merely external or inferior things or belongings, but also the human person's basic being, essence, and dignity. Poverty, according to Nze (2009), is a social and global issue that dehumanizes and isolates kids and impedes growth on both an individual and communal level. Poverty causes social exclusion, which is both a violation of human dignity and a threat to life itself.

Poverty can make it difficult for young people to participate in society as equals, to feel a part of their community, and to develop their skills and abilities. The effects of poverty on youths, according to Ononogbu (2010:134), are that "they hang on for a while, just whiling away the time, but when they get tired of merely sitting on the wall; they tend to implode and fall into

all sorts of anti-social behaviors and habits that society may never be able to help them again." The majority of young people who engage in socially undesirable behavior are poor. This is how many young people wind up as career criminals and societal threats for the rest of their life. Poverty among children also leads to a rise in criminality, child labor, child abandonment, high maternal death rates, and a decrease in most youths' life expectancy. Poverty, according to Soludo (2012), leads to the disintegration of the social ladder, ideals, and networks that individuals have historically utilized to rise out of poverty in our society. Poverty may have a negative impact on a person's future.

The Role of the Church in Poverty Reduction among Nigerian Youth

The Nigerian government appears to have failed to fulfill its contractual commitment to its citizens to offer jobs and an enabling environment that will improve their lives. It is heartbreaking to learn that the majority of Nigerians, particularly young people, live in abysmal poverty. The government's failure to relieve or eradicate poverty in Nigeria necessitates the involvement of all social and religious players in addressing the problem. In this context, the Church's involvement becomes important. The Church is a powerful social force with a huge role to play in steering Nigeria in a new direction. The importance of the church in bringing about social transformation has been highlighted by Kalu (2004) and Ononogbu (2008).

With regard to youth, Okwueze (1998) notes that the first type of wisdom literature consists of practical guidance to young people on how to live a successful and happy life. As a result, the church has a foundation for dealing with young people and having a beneficial influence on them. This involves the task of creating a Nigeria where the majority of our population is free from poverty and despair thanks to the resources we have, since an entrepreneur is a gift of God's grace in the community (Olubitan, 2014). He or she makes use of God's resources (ideas and money) to create utility and meet human needs. Profit is required for the production of utility in order to collect capital and make a firm productive enough to offer jobs.

As a result, the entrepreneur engages in the vocation of producing utility with God's resources while applying ethical lessons from the Christian faith and church to become a more loyal disciple as an entrepreneur. In light of this, the church has a compelling need to develop this model of problem-solving and critical analysis of the contemporary reality confronting the youth, because it is not biblical to be complacent in the face of the reality of a typical Nigerian youth who is faced with the challenge of how to feed, clothe, and have adequate housing. Christians are encouraged throughout the Bible to work hard and not be slackers in their enterprises. As a result, in one's chosen field of endeavor, one must be hardworking and conscientious (Prov. 10: 4; 22: 29; Rom. 12: 11; I Thess. 4: 11). On this point, because the socio-economic difficulties confronting Nigerian youth and the country as a whole are expanding, the church's ministry is critical in modeling a comprehensive pattern of entrepreneurial skill acquisition. This necessitates the mobilization and development of a single voice to challenge the current quo and question the premise of business as usual (Onwuliri, 2008).

While a result, as the church teaches and equips young people to venture into business, the enterprises will also develop links between young entrepreneurs and other economic players, which will be beneficial. Furthermore, because it pushes young people to develop new

solutions, ideas, and ways of doing things via experience-based learning, youth entrepreneurship fosters creativity and resilience. Another aspect is that young entrepreneurs are more receptive to new economic possibilities and trends since it is increasingly recognized that they may offer new perspectives on work organization, technology transfer, and the market economy.

As a result, the Church is obliged to set an example of grace by sharing its valuable gifts and experiences with the youth in order to weave them into a tapestry of usefulness in society. The church, furthermore, gives the gift of good management and administration, as well as operational efficiency, space use, relationships, money, and efficient decision-making. These are important qualities to study and practice in order to assist the Kingdom of God's mission, which is manifested first in the local church and then in the numerous causes of Christ across the world (Ani, Chukwuelobe, &Nwankwo, 2015). In order to reduce poverty among Nigerian young, the church must also fulfill the following duties.

a) Motivation

Because of the alleged tough climate that hinders company growth in Nigeria, it is obvious that the majority of Nigerian youngsters are unmotivated to create and operate firms. As a result, the church must play an important role in this area by hosting seminars, workshops, and adding motivating presentations and enlightenment in their teachings. The church must teach the youth that failure in one undertaking or endeavor does not imply that a person is a failure in general. Failure is a necessary component of development, and young people should view it as a positive experience. It is not illegal to fail at anything, yet many individuals fail to learn from their prior failures. This will go a long way in alleviating poverty among the youth in Nigeria.

b) Entrepreneurship and innovative education

Even when they have some enthusiasm, most young people in Nigeria are discouraged by a lack of cash or the difficulty to get start-up financing or seed funding. So there is no question that capital is one of the most important elements causing poverty among Nigerian youngsters. As a result, the church should collaborate with the government and the organized private sector (OPS) to provide funding to aspiring and established businesses. Using the OPS as a form of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) will go a long way toward assisting young people in achieving more rather than wasting their time. However, if these kinds of assistance are unavailable, the church should encourage the young to seek alternate means of funding, such as loans from friends and family. These would help Nigerian youngsters to establish something that will support them financially, hence eliminating poverty.

c) Basic management skills

The majority of young people lack the fundamental skills required to run even modest enterprises. A large percentage of young Nigerian graduates aspire to establish and operate their own enterprises, although their choice of business is frequently unrelated to their academic concentration. As a result, because the abilities required to be a successful entrepreneur vary, the church should create a platform where the kids may acquire more business management practices in order to reach their objectives. Furthermore, the church must teach the youth that running or managing a business entails more than just personal gain. As a result, sustainable business management strategies should be adaptive in the real

world, and young people who wish to start enterprises should understand the value of a business plan. This would undoubtedly reduce the rate of poverty among Nigerian young.

d) Mentoring/Coaching

In any endeavor one is involved in, recent studies have highlighted the benefit of having someone more experienced than one to look up to. As a result, the church should establish a mentoring/coaching program in order to disciple and teach her young who are interested in pursuing a career in business. Mentoring and coaching programs have had a huge impact in most industrialized nations because they allow protégées to share their concerns and challenges with a more experienced individual who can advise and provide appropriate support when needed. As a result, the church must establish mentorship and coaching programs in order to adequately educate young people for careers in business. As a result, Nigeria's poverty rate will be reduced.

Recommendations

1) Because access to financing is critical to the success of any business initiative, the church should encourage ongoing financial reforms. This involves commercial bank recapitalization and the establishment of micro-credit financing institutions owned by people and private groups to replace community banks that are no longer operational. This should be done with the goal of decreasing the bottlenecks associated in acquiring soft loans for young entrepreneurs who do not often have the needed collateral to be credit worthy to banks that are primarily interested in making a profit from their investments.

2) Encouraging skill acquisition will go a long way toward resolving Nigeria's unemployment problem. To eliminate unemployment, the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations (of which the Church is one), and people should collaborate. Self-discovery is another option for addressing unemployment in Nigeria.

3) The church should also urge Nigeria's youths to take use of the internet's potential as a viable solution to the country's unemployment problem. Bogging, e-lancing, web development, application design, and online publication are only a few of them. For example, internet publication can assist in learning how to write. Those who are interested can sign up, and the site's administration will teach them how to use the platform and profit from merchant advertisements. This forum does not require any funds to begin operation, and the management instructs the writers on how to get compensated.

Conclusion

The church was explored as a remedy for poverty among Nigerian youth in this study, although the focus was on how the church may aid in poverty reduction in Nigeria. The rising tide of poverty among Nigeria's youth has reached such alarming proportions that it is no longer news to anybody, since its impacts can be seen in both rural and urban places, and at both individual and communal levels. The fact that many experts have dedicated themselves to researching the reasons and solutions to Nigeria's high degree of poverty is also proof of the country's high level of poverty.

Unemployment, illiteracy, ignorance, sloth, natural calamities, violence, and indiscipline are some of the reasons of poverty listed in this study. However, among these factors,

unemployment is commonly blamed for poverty, and Nigeria's jobless rate is sadly on the rise. Unemployment may affect both young and elderly people, but it has recently taken a toll on adolescents, and the situation has become concerning. Similarly, youth unemployment is one of the causes contributing to Nigeria's high crime rate. Many jobless adolescents turn to robbery, abduction, and other illicit actions rather than remain in poverty; female youths frequently resort to prostitution in order to live. It's no surprise that multiple studies have been conducted on the various solutions to young unemployment in Nigeria, with all agreeing that the church and other non-governmental organizations must teach the spirit of hard work and entrepreneurship as panaceas for the problem. As a result, if young people gravitate to small companies and entrepreneurship, poverty in Nigeria must have decreased to some level.

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