

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Poverty is one of the greatest social problems in the history of humanity. Poverty refers to lack of sufficient resources to afford a decent living. A vast majority of Nigerians live in poverty. This is noticeable in the rate of illiteracy, poor health and life expectancy in the country. This paper looked at poverty reduction in Nigeria and the role of the Christian church in combating the menace, especially, among the urban poor. It focused on poverty alleviation interventions in Okpoko by two major Christian denominations in the community, the Roman Catholic Mission and the Anglican Mission. Written works were consulted, personal observations and interviews were equally employed in the course of the research. It is discovered that the Nigerian government have initiated and implemented various poverty alleviation programmes aimed at lifting Nigeria out of poverty. Sadly, these programmes, to a large extent, have failed. Factors that led to the failure of these programmes include corruption, poor planning and implementation, poor funding and policy inconsistency. The church has played some vital roles in reaching out to the poor. Schools, health clinics, skill acquisition training are some of the interventions of the church in poverty eradication. The church does this in the belief that the gospel should speak the total man; that is man, in his spiritual, social and economic dimensions. No doubt, the issue of poverty outweighs the resources of the church. Therefore, the church should embark on advocacy, synergize with government and other agencies to reduce poverty in our land. Further, the church needs to step up its intervention, set up special fund for the purpose of giving the poor access to credit facility, give them financial education and closely work with the people to monitor what they do with the funds given to them

Introduction

Poverty is generally referred to as a state of lack or inability to afford the basic things of life. It is usually associated with rural areas where production and economic activities are generally low. As a result of low productive and economic activities, the income level in most rural communities is low leading to inability to meet one's needs. Poverty has been a recurring decimal in human history, but its significance has changed overtime. Poverty, according to Encyclopedia Britannica (nd), is determined by two modes of economic production namely; traditional or non-industrialized modes and modern or industrialized modes. "Traditional modes, also known as non-industrialized modes refers to the era prior to industrialization. Under the traditional modes of production, poverty was widespread because the total output of goods and services, even when evenly distributed, was not sufficient to provide the populace with decent living standard" (<https://www.britannica.com>, nd). Under the modern or industrialized modes of production, output of goods and services increased significantly leading to economic growth and increased income and thereby reducing poverty level. The industrialized nations were able to provide comfortable living standard for their population while the less industrialized nations struggle to ensure the basic minimum standard for their citizens (Encyclopedia Britannica, nd)

The global economic landscape has witnessed significant change since the 18th century industrial revolution (Benevelo, 1980). Rapid industrialization, no doubt has considerably improved economic activities and increased the wealth and income of people. It has, equally created urban centres and modern cities. The glitz and glamour of urban life as well as the promise of better opportunities for economic and social advancement attract a large number of people to those commercial and industrial centres in search of better living conditions. Consequently, the cities became over populated as many

migrated to the cities in search of better living conditions and economic advancement. However, who migrated to the cities in search the proverbial greener pasture found themselves among a sub-group referred to as the urban poor. In almost every urban centre, there exists settlements where those whose dream of better living in the cities did not materialize as they expected dwell. These groups found themselves in informal settlements within and around major cities where the condition of living is poor and unhealthy. These groups of people are known as the urban poor. This paper takes a look at the role of the Church in combating poverty among the poor in Okpoko, Anambra state.

Okpoko Community

Okpoko community is a peri-urban slum settlement in Ogbaru L.G.A. Anambra State. It is, however, situated within the metropolis of Onitsha; one of the largest commercial cities of Nigeria. Onitsha has seen great influx of people due to high volume of economic activities that go on in on daily basis. This rapid growth in population led to the formation of several informal settlements around Onitsha town among which is Okpoko. Okpoko is one of the earliest fringe settlements that make up greater Onitsha. According to Okafor (1986) Okpoko (also including Nkutaku) lies South West of Onitsha city. It shares boundary to the West with a tributary of the Niger River, Harbour Industrial layout, East Niger Residential/Industrial Layout and Niger Bridge Head; to the North with Fegge Community and Enugu-Onitsha Express Road; to the East with Onitsha/Owerri Road and Obosi community; and to the South with Odekpe and Atani communities (Okoye, Ezeokonkwo and Mbakwe, 2017).

Okpoko community can be referred to as a slum. Its inhabitants are majorly the low-income earners who do not have the financial strength to afford better living conditions in the city. The community is characterized by poor housing, filthy environment, poor network of roads, lack of clean water sources, high population density and a lot of unemployed youth. There are no good hospitals in the area, save a primary health centre, a situation that leaves health care services in the hands of patent medicine dealers and medical greenhorns (Onwudiwe, 2019). Basic and secondary schools in the community are inadequate which translates to lack of schools to attend. Okpoko is a haven to the migrants into Onitsha, whose expectation for coming into the city did not materialize.

Concept of Poverty

Poverty essentially means lacking enough resources to provide the basic necessities of life (Okalow, 2022). These basic needs of life include food, clothing and shelter. According to World Bank (2001) a person is considered poor if his/her income level falls below some minimum level necessary to meet basic needs. Poverty describes also the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possession. Poverty is all about lack, and World Bank (2001) sums up this lack as lack of opportunity, lack of empowerment and a lack of security. For the poor, the window of opportunity remains closed, and this makes them practically inactive in the society (Ucha, 2010). This lack of empowerment limits their choices in almost everything and their lack of security exposes them to diseases, violence and eviction.

Townsend (1979) understands poverty in a broader sense. To him, poverty goes beyond shortage of income to include the inability of the poor to actively participate in the society. Thus, poverty could be seen as deprivation of basic capabilities, basically wellbeing and freedom. Capacity to participate in the society is limited while wellbeing and freedom are denied to some segment of the society on account of being poor. Consequently, United Nations (cited in Ucha, 2010) describes poverty thus:

Poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in the society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe; not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living; not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environment without access to clean water and sanitation (p.46).

This aptly describes the condition of the poor urban dwellers who live in slums and informal settlements around large commercial cities. Urban poverty denotes a situation of lack, disenfranchisement and social exclusion of a section of urban population. Poverty and lack of basic amenities are the major characteristics of urban slums (Arcila, 2008, United Nations, 2003). Informal settlements house the urban poor who lack the economic capacity to afford better living conditions in the cities. The communities are often neglected and left unattended to thereby entrenching their poverty.

Poverty in Nigeria

Nigeria is blessed with abundant human and natural resources, yet majority of people in Nigeria are poor. This reality is evident in the lack or inadequacy of food, clothing, shelter and other basic social amenities in the nation. Many Nigerians find it difficult to afford three-square meal while some others live in squalors. Severely poor people lack the most basic necessities of life such that one wonders how they manage to survive. Barnes (2010) describes the poor as people who have insufficient income and inadequate food intake, lack basic healthcare, lack shelter and safe drinking water, have poor environmental cleanliness, lack access to basic education and skills, are ignorant of fundamental human rights and lack access to information. Many in Nigeria are actually poor based on this definition. The national minimum wage of thirty thousand naira (N30,000) cannot put food on the table for many wage earners. This comes with some ugly consequences such as malnutrition, poor health, high maternal and infant mortality and low life expectancy (Ucha, 2010). Okpoko reflects the reality of severe poverty in Nigeria as these conditions prevail in the community.

Poverty has continued to ravage the greater percentage of Nigeria's population despite its enormous agricultural resources and oil wealth. Nigeria is the 10th largest producer of crude oil in the world and the sixth largest exporter of the commodity among Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (Odeh, 2011). In addition to this, there are abundant deposit of solid mineral which has remained largely untapped. Nigeria's natural endowments have not translated to better life and prosperity for the citizens, rather, it has retrogressed to one of the poorest countries in the world today (Ekpe, 2011). Poverty is endemic in Nigeria such that seventy percent of Nigerians live on less than US \$1.25 a day (Aidelunuoghene, 2014). This is below the international poverty level of 1.90US Dollar per day.

The effect of poverty in Nigeria is seen, not only in poor health and low life expectancy, but also in crime. Ayegba (2015) posits that crimes such as human trafficking, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery and various insurgencies could be linked to poverty and unemployment. More so, many Nigerians are migrating to Western countries in an attempt to escape poverty and joblessness. Hence, enormous human resources that would have contributed to the economic development of the nation are annually lost to this pattern of migration as many professionals seek better condition of service and living outside the shores of Nigeria.

Causes of poverty in Nigeria

1. **Unemployment:** Unemployment is a major contributing factor to poverty in Nigeria. There is a strong correlation between unemployment and poverty. If people are unemployed, their source of livelihood depletes and subsequently they become unable to meet the basic needs of life. With unemployment, standard of living goes down while the cost of living continues to go up (Ucha, 2010). There are many Nigerians who lack the opportunity to be employed. Even educated ones in Nigeria cannot find job. Yearly thousands graduate from our tertiary institutions with no job opportunities to absorb them. Education is no longer a guarantee to securing job. World Bank (2008) observes that education which was once a sure way of getting employment no longer looks certain. This is very true in Nigeria. The report further states that unemployment in Africa is higher among those with some form of higher education and among those from wealthy households who do not consider employment a priority because they depend solely on family wealth.

Many youths who graduate every year and are willing to work roam the streets in search of job. Furthermore, employment in Nigeria is usually not based on merit, but on how connected one is to the

people that have power. This leaves many highly qualified and capable people in poverty. Unemployment-induced poverty tends to increase the crime rate and violence in Nigeria. Most unemployed youths resort to drug abuse and crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, internet fraud and other forms of fraudulent activities.

2. **Corruption:** According to Transparency International (nd) corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Abuse of power and office has become so prevalent in Nigeria and it has dealt disastrously with the political and economic systems of the nation. Embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds have become a tradition. Public office holders seem more mindful of their personal and family interest than the welfare of the nation and its population. Corruption is deep seated in the government and economy such that everyone seems to be blinded by it.

Nigeria's income is mostly generated from natural resources. This income, instead of being used for developmental purposes, is circulated among political office holders, government functionaries, their families and cronies. Consequently, the few in government circle enrich themselves while the vast majority wallow in poverty. The painful aspect of this is that the political office holders practically ignore the welfare of the people who elected them into office. Corruption in Nigeria creates inequality in the system, increases poverty and contributes to crime rate.

3. **Poor Education System:** Education is one of the surest ways of empowering one to actualize one's dreams and potentials as well as contribute to the society. It has the ability to reduce poverty and increase productivity. The nations with greater productivity are those with strong and functional education system (Ucha, 2010). Many children and youths in Nigeria are deprived of education which is a denial of their right. Lack of education means lack of capacity to participate in the society, and a poor system of education produces poor quality human resources.

Education system in Nigeria can be regarded to have failed. Corruption, lack of policy consistency and poor funding are contributors to the collapse of education in Nigeria. Further, the system of education aims at the "head and not the hand". Theoretical aspect of learning is promoted against the practical aspect which could only produce graduates that will depend on white collar jobs for survival. Hence education in Nigeria has failed to reduce poverty.

4. **Dependence on oil:** Dependence on oil revenue is another cause of poverty in Nigeria. Since the discovery of oil, Nigeria's economy has been influenced by the commodity. Prior to 1970, Agriculture was the main stay of Nigeria economy; the oil and gas sector contributed just 1% of the country's export revenue. However, by 2008, the oil sector constituted 97.5% of export earning, 81% of government revenue (National Bureau of Statistics, nd). This trend has continued to rise. The oil and gas sector cannot provide job opportunities for teeming unemployed Nigerians. This overdependence on oil and gas led to neglect of agricultural sector, solid minerals sector and other sectors of the economy. Thus, government's inability to diversify the economy contributes to the high rate of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria.

Poverty Eradication Programme in Nigeria

Nigeria, along with other nations of the world, endorsed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, which has eradication of extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 as its first goal (Onah, Okwuosa and Uroko, 2018). To fight poverty, the Nigerian government has instituted various programmes for poverty eradication. Some of these programmes and policies include Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Poverty Alleviation programme (PAP) among others (Onah, Okwuosa and Uroko, 2018). The National Poverty Alleviation Programme was established in 2001 with the aim of providing strategies for the eradication of extreme poverty in Nigeria (FRN, 2001). NAPEP, according to Antai and Anam (2014) consists of four schemes: Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS), and Natural Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS). NAPEP was initiated to help the citizenry acquire skills and create jobs.

Besides the above, there have been other programmes and policies of similar nature in the Agricultural sector. Programmes such as Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA), Strategic Grains Reserve Programme (SGRP) and other similar programs were introduced with the aim of increasing food production and reducing hunger and poverty. The impact of these programmes did not reduce the incidence of hunger and poverty as Nigeria still spends billions annually on food importation (Onah, Okwuosa and Uroko, 2018). The Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP), according to National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) (2016), has the potential to meet food security, reverse food importation, promote agricultural export to earn foreign exchange and improve the nation's Gross Domestic product (GDP). Sadly, these programmes and policies have not yielded the desired result as Nigeria is still ranked third among countries with the highest population of people living in abject poverty in the world (NIPSS, 2016).

Problems of Poverty Eradication Programmes in Nigeria

Nigeria, no doubt, has initiated several poverty eradication policies and programmes. These initiatives have however, not resulted in lifting the poor masses of Nigeria out of poverty. Several constraints are responsible for the ineffective implementation of these programmes. These, according to Obadan (2002), include corruption and mismanagement, ineffective targeting of the poor, poor design and implementation, deficient infrastructural facilities, inadequate funding of programmes and political and policy instability. All these point to bad governance and total concentration of power at the centre which has slowed down government programmes and developments in the country. He further states that Nigeria's ethnic, regional and cultural diversities affect government's programmes and policies such that it is difficult to implement a holistic programme of poverty reduction that would fit and satisfy all the segments of the Nigerian society.

Political and Policy instability has been identified as one of the greatest contributors to the ineffectiveness of poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria (Onah, Okwuosa and Uroko, 2018). Government is believed to be a continuity, but the reverse is the case with Nigeria. Regime change in the country means change of policies and programmes. Each government that comes to power relegates what the previous one had started and initiates entirely new programmes and policies. The frequent change in poverty eradication programmes does not give enough room for the people to fully embrace the programme and for the programme to make appreciable impact. Thus, poverty reduction programmes have become campaign slogan for politicians during electioneering periods and a means for public office holders to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor.

Some of the programmes are poorly designed and implemented which lead to poor results. In some instances, the idea behind some of these programmes has little or no relevance for the people. Rather than create productivity, they create dependency in the unemployed. For example, some unemployed graduates and youths were empowered with tricycle (Keke NAPEP) and as street and road sweepers. At some point, the Federal government vouched to give monthly stipend to unemployed youth (Onah, Okwuosa and Uroko, 2018). These kinds of initiatives do not encourage productivity neither do they achieve lasting freedom from poverty. Rather, they tend to engender dependency attitude leading to loss of self-esteem. Furthermore, they impoverish the resources of the government.

In addition to the above, corruption and mismanagement are other enemies of poverty reduction programmes. Many of the programmes and funds meant for them do not reach the targeted poor population due to corruption and selfishness. This leads to the leakage of the benefits to unintended persons. Some administrators of these programmes also sell forms to intending beneficiaries which should have been free. These tend to limit the chances of the programmes reaching the poor and making the desired impact on the economic landscape of the country.

Lack of proper policy awareness is another clog in the wheels of implementation of poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria. This has led to misconceptions about these programmes in some quarters. These programmes are seen by many as a means of cutting their own share of the national cake. Consequently, the loans disbursed in these programmes are used by the beneficiaries to take care of pressing family

needs rather than improving their handwork and agricultural activities. There is also no mechanism for effective monitoring of the activities of the beneficiaries of these programmes and recovery of the funds disbursed to them. All these lead to the ineffectiveness of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria.

The Church and Poverty Alleviation

The failure of the various poverty alleviation programmes of the government implies that government alone cannot eradicate the menace of poverty in Nigeria. This calls for all social actors, including the church, to be involved. The Church has a role to play in eradicating poverty and making the love of Christ real to those living in extreme poverty. The church, as followers of Jesus Christ, subscribe to the teachings of Christ that unequivocally upholds concern for the poor. As part of its mission, the church needs to integrate spiritual concerns with care for the material needs of man. This concern has been pursued by the church, especially the early missionaries to Nigeria. For instance, ignorance is seen as one of the root causes of poverty. The church, from the days of the missionaries, has been striving to lift the literacy level of the people. Urakpa (1996) outlined the involvement of the Anglican Church in Educational Development in eastern Nigeria. Other mission bodies such as the Roman Catholic Mission have equally done marvelous work in the area of education.

In addition to focusing of education, the missionaries took practical steps to reduce hunger and poverty. Jakonda (2011) observes that they introduced crops like cocoa, ginger, groundnut, tomatoes and cotton which helped to boost the economy and income of the people. Similarly, crops like cassava were equally introduced into Nigeria by white missionaries. Improved agricultural practices meant improved production and better living standard for the people. Through education, health care services, agriculture and trade, the income of natives were positively touched by the early missionaries to Nigeria.

In Modern times, the church has played some important roles in the society especially as it concerns poverty and poor people. The church has continued to strive to free humanity from hunger, misery, oppression and hatred which are rooted in man's selfishness (Achunike, 2004). The Church's concern for the poor stems from Jesus' concern for the poor and is part of the church's vocation on earth. The redeeming power of Christ makes meaning to the poor only when their poverty is addressed genuinely. To Engel (1988) meeting the basic needs of the people and their social challenges is a sure way of showing the love of God in practical terms.

In Okpoko community, in Ogbaru Local Government Area of Anambra State, the church has engaged in various forms of activities geared towards lifting the people out of poverty and improve their livelihood. Various church denominations in Okpoko established Nursery/Primary and Secondary schools to complement the existing public ones within the community. Other programmes aimed at the youths are also carried out by the church denominations to help them escape the clutches of poverty. Venerable KenPaul Emoka (personal communication, April 6, 2022) explained that youths are organized by the Anglican Church in Okpoko and given Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and internet training, which will help them earn a living. Ven. KenPaul Emoka (personal communication, April 6, 2022) explained that the move is aimed at equipping the youths with the knowledge of information and communication technology with the benefits that it offers. He further said that they have been importing telephone accessories on a small scale. It is worthy to note, also, that the Anglican mission in Okpoko engages in other forms of poverty alleviation. One of the major challenges of Okpoko is poverty. To address this challenge, the Anglican Diocese of Ogbaru, through the Bishop of the Diocese instituted an annual poverty alleviation scheme in which twenty persons receives a stipend to start up small scale businesses (Uchenna Anumoka personal communication, April 15, 2022). This is a kind of revolving loan scheme. The beneficiaries are encouraged to trade with it while their progress report is received periodically.

In the same vein, Reverend Father Theophilus Odukwe (personal communication, April 6, 2022) outlined the programmes of the Catholic Church in Okpoko towards poverty alleviation to include care for children orphaned by Human Immune Deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS), movie and music academy. The movie academy is run in conjunction with establish movie

actors and producers where talents are discovered and groomed. These identified youths are coached in various aspects of music and movie production and marketing which will enable them excel, earn a living and provide for their needs. The Churches equally provide clean water for the residents through sinking of boreholes from which the people can access clean water. These are in addition to reforming the character and morals of the people especially youths in the area. The catholic church in Okpoko is also involved in giving out small scale loans to petty traders in the area to help boost their trading activities.

Furthermore, the Church, especially the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, have food bank. This serves as a reservoir from which food items are drawn and given to the most vulnerable to ameliorate the pangs of hunger. The Church, in their capacity, have empowerment schemes which gives out some stipend to small-scale businesses and petty traders to enable them fend for themselves. These efforts of the church, according to Chief Francis Enemuo (personal communication, March 18, 2022) have made appreciable impact in the life of the people. Although the church has been active in reducing poverty in Okpoko, the problem is enormous and overwhelms the capacity of the church. The efforts of the church appear insignificant when compared to the magnitude of the problem. These interventions towards poverty alleviation by the church in Okpoko maybe little at the moment, but sustainability of such programmes overtime will lead to greater impact.

The Church and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria: The Way Forward

The failure of the government to reduce poverty in Nigeria calls for response from all social actors. These social actors include the church. Hence the role of the church in addressing poverty becomes relevant. The Church upholds the teachings of Jesus as it concerns the poor and have been striving to minister to them spiritually, mentally, physically and economically. From the days of white missionaries in Nigeria, the church has been contributing to the spiritual and economic wellbeing of the people. Lack of education and hunger are seen as manifestations of poverty and these are not lacking among the masses of Nigeria. The Church has done some commendable work in the area of education and food security. Western education was introduced into Nigeria by the missionaries. The Methodist mission, Church missionary Society (CMS), Roman Catholic Mission (RCM), Presbyterian mission among others established schools in Nigeria as far back at late 19th Century (Ajah, 2015). The trend of founding schools has been upheld by the church since the days of the missionaries. Urakpa (1996) observed that educational development has ever been synonymous with the missionary enterprise. The mission schools offered quality education and good morals. Consequently, the human capital that drove the quest for independence were mainly product of the mission school. The same human capital drove the economy of the nation in those early days. It is a known fact those whose received quality education were self-reliant and better-off economically than those without education. The Church still strives to provide quality education that will lead to economic emancipation.

To address the problem of hunger and poverty, the missionaries introduced improved system of agriculture. Demonstration farms were established and the natives trained in modern ways of farming which has the potential of improving productivity (Jakonda, 2001). In addition to introducing modern family techniques, some crops were introduced to boost productivity and income. Tomato, ginger, cocoa, and groundnut were some of the crops introduced by the missionaries. Agricultural produce become the mainstay of Nigeria's economy before the discovery of crude oil.

These remarkable achievements notwithstanding, Nigeria today still wallow in poverty. Many are unemployed and uneducated. Many among the educated have no life skill as the education they received does not arm them with the skills necessary to produce wealth and become job creators. They therefore depend on the government for jobs, which the government alone could not provide. The Church, on the other hand, appears to be overwhelmed by the situation. This is because the income of the church is limited and secondly, the church today appears to be more interested in receiving than in giving. Hence, the church is perceived as part of the problem rather than the solution to the issue of poverty in Nigeria. Mission bodies in the early days engaged in educating the people and improving agriculture which

helped reduced poverty. The church today can contribute to poverty reduction especially among the urban poor in the following way:

1. Education cannot be overemphasized. The poor needs to be educated and armed with knowledge that will enable them become productive and self-reliant. Education here means education of the head and the hands. Education of the head refers to cognitive knowledge while that of the hand refers to practical know-how. The quality of education offered in Nigeria today has remained mainly in the cognitive zone. It is more theoretical than practical. There are many graduates today who have the theoretical knowledge, but lack the practical knowledge to practice what they have learnt. The church should strive to provide education that will affect the head and the hands.
2. Another sure way the church can contribute to the reduction of poverty in Nigeria is through skill acquisition programmes. Skill acquisition is the form of training by individuals or group of individuals that can lead to the acquisition of knowledge for self-sustenance (Idoko, 2014,). Skill acquisition involves training people in different fields of trade under a legal agreement between the trainer and the trainee. Establishing skill acquisition centres equipped with the requisite manpower and equipment that will enable the trainee to acquire the needed skills for self-sustenance and wealth creation is a practical effort which the church can make in relation to poverty reduction. When the poor and unemployed are armed with necessary skills, they will be able to fend for themselves. This will reduce the prevalence of drug abuse and other vices.
3. To effectively contribute to poverty reduction, there is the need to tackle the problem of lack of access to credit facility. The church needs to setup funds that would cater for the small loans needed to drive small businesses. Materials and equipment such as sewing machine could be provided for those trained in garment making to enable them start-up something. Again, the church could organize the poor and encourage them to form cooperative societies. These societies can apply and secure government grants for agriculture and small businesses. Beneficiaries of this church funds should be monitored to ensure that the funds are not used for things other than what they were intended for.
4. Principles of finance management need to be inculcated into the unemployed before giving out funds to them. This could be done through seminars and symposia. The Church can leverage on her ability to reach the lower stratum of the society to identify and mobilize the poor within their area of influence for such programmes. They can work in conjunction with their host communities to offer these enlightenment programmes aimed at arming the poor with knowledge that are capable of lifting them out of poverty.
5. Poverty alleviation is capital intensive project. As anon-profit making organization, the church lacks adequate resources to implement far-reaching intervention. The church should, therefore reach out to both government and non-governmental agencies as well as donor agencies to source for the needed fund to execute meaningful poverty reduction interventions.

No doubt, the church was established to care for the total man. Its mission includes spiritual, social and economic emancipation of man. The early church in Acts of the Apostles embodied this concept of mission that speaks to the soul and body of man. Early disciples provided spiritual, social and material nourishment to the disciples such that no one lacked anything. Wealthy members contributed part of their wealth to ensure that all were taken care of.

Conclusion

Poverty is a great social problem in Nigeria. A lot of Nigerians live below the poverty level and the gap between the rich and the poor tends to be widening on daily basis. The Nigerian government has embarked on several poverty eradication programmes, but these have not yielded the desired result. The church, though have been active in providing relief in this area, there are still more areas to be covered. Therefore, the church needs to step up her intervention in poverty alleviation programmes by advocating

and offering better quality education that would prepare school leavers for the real world; provide skill acquisition, economic empowerment and financial education to the less privileged in the society as her way of complementing government's effort in poverty reduction.

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