

POVERTY IN NIGERIA: ITS EFFECTS ON MORAL AND SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE PEOPLE

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Abstract

My efforts in this research work have been geared towards examining poverty in Nigeria: Its effects on moral and spiritual life of the people. The study revealed that poverty had adverse effects on the health, moral, spiritual, political and cultural lives of many Nigerians. The objective of this research work is to present a way forward against poverty. The work recommended that the government at all levels of governance in Nigeria, and the church should engage in policies and business ventures that will be of immense benefits to the citizenry that will set them free from poverty. Methods of approach are historical, phenomenological, and analytical methods coupled with the review of related extant material.

Keywords: poverty, moral, spiritual, economic, cultural, political, health

Introduction

Sin ultimately blinds people to the truth about their own nature. Poverty can be God's judgment on corrupt societies, which turn their back on him. And yet the Bible makes it abundantly clear that the poor are also the object of God's special love. Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Mtt.5:3).

God, as Jesus described him, has a soft spot for the poor, because they are helpless victims of forces over which they have little control. God created man and made him the crown of his creation so that man would not experience suffering, death or depression. But man decided otherwise for himself. The above comment may not be limited to Nigeria as well as Africa per se, but may likely be useful to other political, economic, spiritual and cultural-geographical areas of the world where substantially similar phenomena may be found. Individualism is not relevant to the development of humanity. Sense of community spirit helps to eradicate poverty.

Therefore, the aim of this research work is to unravel the situation surrounding poverty in Nigeria. To achieve this, I shall be x-raying some causal factors that are involved in the issue.

Conceptual framework

To Olubayo-Fatiregun and Aderonmu (2010), poverty is not simply a lack of adequate income. The eradication of poverty is a moral, ethical, political and economical imperative, rooted in the principles governing the United Nations. To live a life free from poverty and hunger is one of the human rights and fundamental freedom enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Article 25 (1) of the Declaration states that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social service.”

The United Nations (2006) characterized poverty as follows “poverty has various manifestations including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger, and malnutrition; ill-health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services” increased morbidity and mortality from illness, homelessness and inadequate housing, unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision making and civic, social and cultural life. Poverty is always characterized by a degrading state of pity and powerlessness.

Food and Agriculture organ of united Nation (2008-2009) started that, children, especially girls, are expected to suffer major health and educational setbacks as a result of the crisis, shrinking household budget forces families to pull children out of school with girls more likely than boys affected (World Bank, 2009b). Poor women are more likely to die in child bearing than rich, water and sanitation related diseases are a major cause of ill health particularly among children.

To Olubayo-Fatiregun and Aderonmu (2010), poverty has a strong link with environmental health and healthful living of individual. Poverty makes people more vulnerable to ill-health and poor living, hence as the common saying “health is wealth and wealth is health”. Among others the poor are more likely to experience poor healthful living as a result of several variables such as poor feeding diet, and poor living conditions. The poor in Nigeria are more likely to be found in the relatively deprived rural areas and urban slums where high quality health services and where environmental condition/sanitation are at lowest ebb. Poor health and poor living affects productivity and thereby reduces income and tends to diminish quality life and longevity.

According to Hornsby-Smith (2006), poverty is a relative concept and is measured in terms of indicators of deprivation of 'what the general public perceives as acceptable minimum standards of living' and income poverty is defined in terms of resources which are insufficient to enable an individual to participate in the mainstream of his or her society'. The phrase "the poor" shall be taken to mean persons, families and groups of persons whose resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the member states in which they live. The unemployed were more at-risk of poverty than any other group.

Many families only avoid hardship through the joint contribution of two breadwinners, and the evidence suggests that the numbers in poverty would rise considerably were it not for the contribution of married women...the extra wage often does no more than bring the joint household income up to an acceptable level in compensation for the low wages of the partner' (Hornsby-Smith, 2006,p.213).

People who are poor often have multiple disadvantages of low or inadequate income, wealth, education, qualifications and skills, poor housing and health, all of which effectively exclude them from full participation in the everyday life of society and in its decision-making processes. Social exclusion from society is effectively a denial of the human rights and dignity of those who are excluded and is, therefore, a matter of social injustice.

It is suggested that a Christian vision of the dignity of each individual human person, the need to promote the common good of all God's people and solidarity between them, the recognition of the principle of subsidiarity which ensures that social policies properly respect the rights and competencies of individuals, families, and local communities, and the need to take particular account of the needs of the poor, disadvantaged, weak, disabled and marginalized in society, is essential for the full flourishing and development of people in society.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study include:

- To carefully x-ray the causal factors of poverty in Nigeria.
- To investigate the effects of poverty on the citizenry.
- To arouse the consciousness of the remedies to poverty in Nigeria.
- To study the role of the early missionaries in ameliorating poverty in Nigeria.
- To examine the implications of the government policies towards eradication of poverty in Nigeria.

Significance of the study

The significance of this research work basically stems from the fact that it addresses the issue that threatened the collective existence of Nigeria as a country, and offers a valid and insightful resource related extant material for further studies on poverty in Nigeria for future religious, sociological, and anthropological scholars especially church historiographers who can consult such documents in order to gain useful information on the topic.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Causal Factors of Poverty in Modern Nigeria

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) averred that 53.7% of Nigerian population are poor.

Government policies in Nigeria do not always improve the living conditions of the poor but of the rich. This is because the poor do not have access to influence policies and their makers. The net effect of government policies is the further intensification of the impoverished population. In Nigeria, the liberalization of the economy especially in the withdrawal of subsidies on a wide range of public provided or subsidized goods and services. Thus part of the strategies the poor explore to survive include early marriage, sexual harassment, trafficking in women for sexual exploitation, child abuse, child abandonment, pornography and force labour. Nigeria is a leading oil-producing nation and highly endowed in terms of various natural resources, the majority of her people are economically, politically, morally, spiritually and educationally poor. Education and good health encourage productive human resource attracts high income. Poverty eradication is the ultimate to attain sustainable healthful living.

The problem of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is an overall development problem that should be analyzed from the perspective of sustainable human development paradigm. The relevant indicators in the context are therefore the Human Poverty Index (HPI) and the related measure of human development, the human development index (HDI). These have always been taken into account in the UNDP'S design of national reduction strategies in such countries as Benin, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa. This has not been the case in Nigerian which shares virtually the same development challenges as these countries. The statistical information on profit profiles in Nigeria have all along been compiled based on the notion of income rather than human poverty.

According to Nmah (2012), as regards political processes, the political structures of any nation determine the level of conflicts that are within it and the abuse of power by those in authority. The relegation of the rule of law and the bastardisation of the legal structure produce banditry, and general lawlessness. When 'cowboys' (or immoral, ungodly and school drop outs) become operator of a legal system and governance they do not understand the tendency is that authority is no longer democratic. When honesty, transparency and accountability are sacrificed on the altar of "power at all cost" (as in Nigeria especially during elections) there is bound to be conflict which will have all the ingredients to turn violent. This will result to influx of refugees or Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs). This in turn will result to malnutrition and abject poverty among the IDPs.

In respect of religious institutions, we have to realize that religion in Nigeria forms the centre point of the life of any individual. Men and women have always believed in the only God. In some cases in multiple gods for multiple needs of everyday life. Religion has always played that meeting point between body and soul. Religion is one of the reference points that bind a group of people together. It created a situation of "them and us". A sense of belonging that transcends ethnicity, religious belief builds on the innermost feelings of an individual and the fraternal feelings of collective identity. The same religion sows also a seed of discord, bigotry, segregation or discrimination in the Nigerian society. Religious faith has too often been the language of the powerful, the excuse for oppression, and the alibi for atrocity thereby engendering poverty among spiritually barren Nigerians. Religious extremism has caused the alienation of people from their ancestral home and turning them into IDPs or strangers in their country. This is because such victims could no longer have access to their ancestral land and economic crops.

Nigerian economic systems and structures are in a terrible shape. Some people say that a hungry man is an angry man. The Holy Bible goes further to say that a man must provide for his family (1 Tim. 5:8). Therefore a weak or strong economy determines the level of conflict that may arise. The provision of an equitable economic structure and an enabling environment with the supply of basic needs enrich the growth of the society. A buoyant economy that boasts of investment capital, employment opportunities and adequate supply of goods and services promote equitable distribution of resources among the generality of the people. Cracks begin to appear when there is exploitation of both human and mineral resources to the detriment of the economic infrastructure. Unemployment, food scarcity, fraud and mismanagement becomes seeds for conflict and poverty. Inevitably, as soon as

such seeds are planted, there is a perceived atmosphere of apprehension. Insecurity becomes an issue, an unusual human behaviour as characterized by brigandage, crime and prostitution culminate in conflict which in turn aggravate malnutrition and poverty in the society.

Socio-cultural process determines who we are, the way we live and the manner in which we socially relate to one another. The quality of life of a community is determined by the level of group identity, collective agreement on participatory roles, tolerance of differences and respect for individual space, health-care systems and social services improve on the quality of life and generate a sense of belonging. This feeling of inclusiveness starts to erode when there is an apparent lack of honesty, and mistrust begin to take the place of group interest. At this point where there the very elements that hold together the fabric of the society begin to tear there is cause for concern.

With regard to human security, survival is one of the basic instincts that man has. When people feel threatened the need for defense arises. In a typical peaceful community setting, children are allowed to run around freely going in and out of each other's homes with little or no fear of impending danger. Herdsmen, politicians, political thugs and religious extremists have made human security in Nigerian unrealistic dream. In a society like Nigeria where there is insecurity and huge youth unemployment, there is an increase in the dynamics of violence. To reduce the incidence of insecurity a workable policy for security has to be put in place. To remedy a bad situation, there has to be some reintegration, reform, disarmament of warring parties and a retraining of security forces to be able to operate within the confinement of international standard and best practices in a post-conflict era. This will also make them to be relevant for the modern security needs of the society.

Sin is another factor that engenders poverty. Sin ultimately blinds people to the truth about their own nature. We forget that because we are made in the image of a creator, we can find fulfillment only when we engage in creative and productive work. Laziness, as the book of Proverbs tells us (Prov. 6:6-11, 20:13; 10:4), means poverty. There are many other factors namely geographical, historical, cultural, moral and ideological, which contribute to poverty or affluence. But generally the societies where poverty has been the norm for centuries are those which have not had the biblical attitudes towards God, the created order, man and work (Keeley, 1988).

Poverty can be God's judgment on societies which turn their back on him. And yet the Bible makes it abundantly clear that the poor are also the object of God's special love. Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Mtt 5:3). God, as Jesus described him, has a soft spot for the

poor, because they are helpless victims of forces over which they have little control viz external forces such as powerful oppressors or natural calamities (on any of which, such as floods caused by deforestation, landslides, drought may be the result of the thoughtlessness and greed of their own ancestors or climate change). Again, internal attitudes such as fear, fatalism, laziness, spiritual barrenness, and immorality, developing over generations and robbing individuals, and societies of the initiative, creativity, confidence and thrift which are necessary for economic enterprise. Abject poverty in the final analysis is the powerlessness of individuals or societies to help themselves. They need a saviour.

Poverty and its effects on the populace

God meant mankind to like in a garden, sin has sent him to the slums. The gospel is the power of God to save us from sin, therefore from poverty as well. Jesus often interpreted his ministry as “bringing good news to the poor” (Mt. 11:5; LK. 4:18). There are three major ways in which sin produces poverty. Sin separates people from the true God. But because humanity cannot live without God, we invent false gods. Often people worship creation rather than the creator. Societies that worship creation lose that ability to subdue and manage it which is essential for economic prosperity. Sin sets brother against brother. People begin to exploit each other. In previous generations for example, it was direct exploitation, through unjust trade terms, maladministration, terrorism, herdsman killings, corruption, injustice, and poor workers’ wages, through which people perpetuate the poverty of the poorer countries, communities and societies alongside the downtrodden people. One of the most devastating results of sin in the system is its subtlety. The wealthy women of Amos’ day urged their husbands to earn what they needed for their affluent life-style. It did not bother them that their affluence depended on legal oppression of the poor. God saw the sin in the system and sent his prophet to condemn it: “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan... who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, ‘Bring that we may drink’” (Am. 4:1). According to the scripture, to participate uncritically in unjust systems is displeasing to God. This amount also in sharing the guilt.

Poverty leads to drug addiction, poor health, slums and mal-nutrition.

Some selected remedies of poverty in Nigerian society

Christians need to respond by practical concern, giving money, time and resources for relief work, missions, and for building up local economies. The government should make policies that are human-oriented geared towards provision of affordable shelter, food, water, health, education, accessible information technology centre, and social development such as civic centre,

viewing centre, recreation facilities, parks among others. It should also provide adequate physical security for various communities against external and internal aggressions, while the church should provide spiritual security against witchcraft and angry deities and spirits. Services aimed at continuously securing and maintaining community-owned essential means of production and distribution for purposes of socializing members into age-sex based division of labour; to periodize farming activities and to intersperse market and farm days judiciously; to provide security for and encouragement of specialized craftsmen and other occupational groups of weavers, blacksmiths, potters, carvers, hunters among others.

According to Nwosu (1998), while it is legitimate to decry the factors that have produced the economic disasters in which many Nigerians find themselves, it is equally appropriate to identify with the various programmes intended to alleviate the economic hardship including a participation in economic ventures. The church's participation in economic ventures would fulfill an important deuteronomist legislation which formed the basis of the communal life organization of the early church none among you shall be poor (Deut. 15:4). The modern church could achieve it by engaging in economic ventures that would produce the required wealth and eliminate poverty. The gospel of salvation must radically take a spiritual and material turn, a turn towards the evolution of the theology of economic liberation. The church's engagement in business ventures would, if managed by Christians in true spirit of Christianity, mean more money accruing to the church for the purpose of maintaining itself in spirituality, commerce and civilization and carrying out the mandate to feed the hungry and clothe the naked (Is. 58:7). It would also lead to less financial burden on the average poor church goers. Secondly, the mission to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:18-20) or the church to evangelize the world-would be possible in a spiritually and economically dynamic and viable society (Nmah, 2010). The foundation of American and European civilization is centred in the faith in Christ. American and European missionaries would not have come to Africa at the time they did if the church and states of Europe and America were then as poor as African states are today. No wonder American motto is, "In God we trust". Ultimately the production of wealth must be seen within the plan of the creator who never decreed poverty but promised unending prosperity (Deut. 5:33, 28:63, 29:9; 1Kgs. 2:3; Prov. 28:25; Gal. 3:9; 2Chro.14:7; 31:21; Josh. 1:7-8) inclusive of economic well-being to those who obey his Law in all things. Just as the conquest of national poverty was the social question of the 19th century, so the conquest of international poverty with its intolerable gap in prosperity is the challenge of the third millennium. From the outset it should be noted that "the poverty of the developing nations has many causes. Every mono-casual explanation and any attempt at solutions based there on would

sidestep the real problems” (Sautter, 1983, p.131). At the same time, in an economy which has grown world-wide and where nations are interdependent to a greater or lesser degree, nobody can exempt himself from responsibility for the developing nations. “Interdependent must be transformed into solidarity” between the rich nations and the poor, but also between the developing nations themselves. It is economic development and global solidarity. The threats to the environment, which build up on an ever growing scale through the ruinous depletion of the natural resources in the developing countries, are a source of serious apprehension for all nations of the world. A decisive change in the environmental policy of the developing nations cannot be expected, unless alternative sources of income open up for them. Here ecological requirements and development aid intersect. Moreover poverty is one of the principal causes of the world-wide migration and refugee drift in recent time, which can likewise be countered only through development; provision of shelter, and food, employment, and greater security stability in the nations of origin (Peschke, 1999).

The cause of superior power of the industrialized nations and the powerlessness of the developing countries is, at least directly, not so much the wealth of the ones and the poverty of the others, but rather the social and civilisatory backlog such as illiteracy, lack in proficiency, group allegiances of the latter, which hinders them from using their potential in manpower and natural resources to the full. The developed nations must help the underdeveloped. The main thrust of the economic progress of a nation comes from its small family businesses.

According to Ukpong (1990), the sustainable national development should include (a) to raise the standard of living of people by generating and distributing equitably wealth and resources through improved techniques, agriculture, strong institutions, qualitative employment and technology; (b) to achieve strong political and economic independence by taking direct control of productive forces of the economy and to raise effectiveness; (c) attainment of self-reliance, self-supporting and self-propagation through sustained Bible and plough (that is agriculture) programme; (d) to gain international recognition and respect through honest fighting of corruption and service to the people; (e) to attain human dignity and freedom by developing the huge human resources in Nigeria and by provision of qualitative employment for the teeming unemployed and under-employed youths.

It is reasonable to believe that the attainment of such objectives can boost the dignity of any country as well as engender pride in the citizenry. The greatness of a country is not measured by the large number of people as in

Nigeria, but the quality of human beings and quality of leaders that are found in Nigeria. This depends also on their faith in God.

National development must be human-oriented in nature. Growth is not a special preserve of any particular discipline. It may be reflected in educational growth, human growth, and economic growth and so on. Economic growth usually means an appreciable in the output of goods and services per head (Okeke, 1990). What will encourage sustainable national development includes acquisition of modern capital equipment necessary for production; the availability and development of natural resources, and responsible human resources.

In order to eliminate poverty in Nigeria, first and most important is the Christian gospel. This is the foundation for everything else. The second means is agriculture because it contributed to the necessities of life and provided a constructive occupation. In the third place is commerce that should stimulate local production and create demand for imports (Nmah, 2011), and fourthly "education", according to Fafunwa (1974), "is to develop the person's latent physical skills, character, to inculcate respect for elders, and those in position of authority, to develop intellectual skills, to acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour; and sense of belonging" (p.20).

In spite of their piestic theology, the early missionaries came from a culture which kept only one eye fixed on heaven, while the other was focused quite firmly on the earth. The advanced technology and high standard of living which were beginning to emerge as beneficial effects of the industrial revolution in the United Kingdom, were regarded as benefits which God bestowed upon his Christian people. Therefore, to Ogbu (1978), in the first human relations between British and Nigeria, the sharp distinction between missions, spiritual and economic empowerment was not strictly observed. At this era criminalities were not so much. People fear God, work hard to survive and the leaders were interested in the welfare of their people. The respective government of Nigeria can harness national security by the provision of jobs and food to the people through agriculture and investment in industries.

For the church and government in Nigeria to be relevant and to make a realistic positive impact on the lives of the people they must concern themselves with their spiritual and economic well-being. This will go a long way in curtailing insecurity in the land. The current mass unemployment, underemployment, corruption, militancy, economic mismanagement, religio-political riots and poverty stricken situation of Nigerian society call not only for the voices of God's people to redress the ill-the cause of the economic

quagmire-but also for a direct contribution from every quarter to improve the economic conditions of the poverty stricken youths. To put it differently, to Nwosu (1998), while it is legitimate to decry the factors that have produced the economic calamities in which many Nigerians find themselves, it is equally appropriate to identify with various programmes intended to alleviate the economic hardship including participation in economic ventures. The mission to make disciples of all nations (Mtt. 28:18-20) or the church to evangelize the Nigerians would be possible in spiritually, politically and economically dynamic and viable society.

Recommendations

The moral, political, cultural and spiritual presuppositions and realities of poverty normally provide the ground upon which scholars will research on. In view of the lessons learnt from this, the following recommendations are put forward as the contributions of this research work.

1. Security is the bedrock of real freedom or independence. Nigerian government should be serious with security issues in respective of clan, language, tribe or creed. The emancipation of people from poverty depends solely on security of lives and property. Every Nigerian should also be interested in security matters. The security agents should not be used for political thuggery, or domestic servants or for economic or political gains by political office holders. Security agents should be independent, impartial apolitical and responsible group.
2. We are, as Nigerians, to stand up for the politics that unites us.
3. Opportunity in Nigeria should not be for selected few or for many, but for every person.
4. Government policies at all levels should target the able youths and human development through employment, skill acquisition and soft loan rather than spreading N5,000 or N10,000 to selected few. The policy makers should also aim at developing humanity through education.
5. Poverty is enhanced in Nigeria by low standard of education, by tuition, inflation, unemployment and corruption. Therefore, there should be free education, honest fight against corruption and devaluation of Nigerian currency.
6. Housing crisis by high cost of building materials. The government should reduce the cost of building materials and make them affordable to low income earners. It should also get a housing ladder.
7. Workers' welfare is non negotiable. Minimum wage is not a luxury, but a necessity. Money in the pocket of hardworking workers is needful and imperative. The workers in Nigeria endure so much hardtimes without remonstrating whereas they make great sacrifices for the growth of the nation. To be a worker in Nigeria is to be a perpetual

slave to the employer. This is one of the determining factors responsible for corruption in Nigeria. Hence there should be adequate remuneration for Nigerian workers that will serve as incentive and motivation of workers for greater productivity.

8. As regards economy, it needs technology. Many of the communities are left behind in the issue of globalization. Therefore, the government needs to connect such communities in ideological globalization and patriotism and to tackle injustices that hold the people back from forging ahead economically, socially, culturally, politically and religiously.

Methodology

This research work employed the use of primary and secondary sources to obtain data. The primary sources involved oral interviews while secondary sources entail books, journals, artifacts, diaries, primate and public brochures, homilies, archives, archaeological data and so on. The research work is also based on historical, phenomenological and analytical approaches.

Conclusion

Christians believe in the essential equality of dignity of all human beings. It follows that their social concern is with the elimination of those inequalities or conditions which inhibit or detract from the capability of realizing fully that equal dignity. In concrete terms this means that, in spite of inevitable human diversity, some measure of the capability of participating equally in the social, economic, political and cultural dimensions of life in society is necessary in the interest of social justice. The ethical case for equality is that present economic and social structures of inequality inhibit the achievement of that equality of dignity and full participation in society, legally, politically and socially.

In sum, this research work presents, "Poverty in Nigeria: its effects on moral and spiritual life of the society" on the level of poverty, its effects on the masses, its causal factors, its effects on the Nigerian morality, spirituality, politics, economic, and culture among others. Furthermore, as I pointed out in this paper, the Nigerian government and the church have to enhance the living standard of the populace through quality leadership, agriculture, skill acquisition, employment of abled youths, enhancing the value of Nigerian currency and adequate security. If Nigerian government will be serious with the fighting of corruption, provision of adequate security, human development, better remuneration of workers, and quality education, poverty will be a history in the Nigerian society. The poor masses status and identity will be improved. Despair and depression among the 53.7% that are poor Nigerians will be things of the past.

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