

The Church and Poverty Alleviation Programme in Nigeria

by

Ngozi Peace Ngwoke

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

Poverty has been pervasive and widespread among developing countries. It has been a serious challenge to various levels of government in Nigeria. Despite measures taken by successive governments in Nigeria to arrest the menace of poverty, the incidence of poverty is still ravaging the country. The paper examines the extent of crime affecting poverty alleviation programme in Nigeria. This paper evaluates the mandate of the Christian Church in poverty alleviation. The study utilized the descriptive phenomenological method of qualitative research. The objective of the study is to critique the several attempts of government poverty alleviation policies, and to advocate for the systematic elimination of poverty in Nigeria through the way the church contributes. The study makes use of descriptive phenomenological methodology to examine the factors behind the increasing rate of poverty in Nigeria despite the efforts of the government to eradicate it and seek how the influence of the church can contribute positively in addressing the issue. The author recommends among other that if the church with its divine purpose and will for the nation, is use by the government to act as a moral check in delivering poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria it will lead to the desired successful achievement of reducing poverty rate in the country and concludes that if there is sincerity of management, accountability and monitoring, the goal of reducing the rising poverty is possible.

Keywords: Church, Poverty, The Poor, Nigerian Government, Corruption.

Introduction

Poverty is an established reality facing humanity and indeed visible challenge all around the society. It does not accord respect to any religious creed or ideology, since religious people are humans, they are also subjected to the scourge of poverty and its discomfort. Poverty is defined by United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization in two ways: absolute and relative poverty. They define absolute poverty in relation to the amount of money necessary to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, while relative poverty is the measures of poverty in relation to the economic status of other members of the society: people are poor if they fall below prevailing standards of living in a given societal context (UNESCO, 2017).

In Nigeria, the latest poverty report by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), shows that out of the total population of 167 million Nigerians, 112 million representing 67.1 per cent are poor. According to Olanrewaju (2017), Nigeria will overtake India as the country with the most people in extreme poverty by February 2018. Moreover, according to [World Bank standards](#), living in extreme poverty are living on less than \$1.90 (N680) per day. The poverty situation in Nigeria has grown to the level where some families cannot feed twice a day, the number of unemployed youth keep rising every day. Furthermore, some, especial those in the rural areas do not have access to basic amenities of life like good water, access to education and basic health care, etc. It has led to hunger and lack of health care, and some dropping out of school.

However, the Nigerian government has put in several efforts with meaningful poverty alleviation programmes aimed at curbing poverty across the length and breadth of Nigeria with programmes like: Agriculture Development Project (ADP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Graduate Internship Scheme (SURE-P), YouWin, The Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF), The N-Power Programme, and Government Enterprise Empowerment Programme (GEEP). Aiyedogbon and Ohwofasa (2012) emphasized that the situation is more critical considering that in spite of the vast resources committed to poverty alleviation by every successive administration; no obvious achievement has been accomplished in this direction.

In the light of the failure of government programme, there is need to examine the possible measure of the church in this regard. The Church is a building where group of individuals comes together to form an assembly for the purpose of carrying out the ceremonial and ritual aspect of religion. In this context, the church is the militant church. The Church through various poverty alleviation programmes has been playing some roles in reducing the poverty rate in Nigeria by engaging in poverty alleviation programmes like skill acquisition programmes, scholarship programmes, farming, provision of food, clothing, and water to the poor around them, yet there is still need for the church to do more. Lack of regularity from the Church leaders is one of the major contributing factors why poverty still persists. This explains why preachers keep getting richer while the poverty rate amongst its congregation keeps increasing. Considering the multiplicity of membership of the Church with its pluralistic nature, the Church in Nigeria is face with serious challenge of attending to the poverty situation of its members.

It is in this light that this work examines several poverty alleviation programmes carried out by the church and the government, and the factors responsible for its ineffectiveness in reducing the poverty rate in Nigeria and the way forward. The study makes use of descriptive phenomenological methodology to examine the factors behind the increasing rate of poverty in Nigeria despite the efforts of the government and the church. The work will be focused on the secondary source of data collection to seek how the influence of the church can contribute positively in addressing the issue of poverty in Nigeria.

Poverty and its Causes

To effectively alleviate poverty, one needs to understand poverty. It entails broad knowledge of poverty and the suffering condition of people in poverty. It is one of the most tasking and serious problem facing humanity. Any definition to justify the approach toward poverty must identify the measurement of poverty and the causes in order to identify the means of alleviating poverty. Poverty has been viewed by several scholars with their various identified evidence. World Bank Report (2000) views poverty as the inability of a person to attain a minimum standard of living and high status in a society. Hence, viewing those people whose standard of living are low and those who possess low societal status as people in poverty. UNDP (1996) in their definition, states that poverty is a lack of productive resources, income, and capacities which contributes to individual and/or group isolation, vulnerability, powerlessness, economic, political and social discrimination, and participation in unsustainable livelihoods. These two views are shared by Taiwo and Agwu, (2016 p.19) who defined poverty as:

a condition "where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his/her basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, is unable to meet social and economic obligations, lacks gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem; and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure (such as education, health, potable water and sanitation), and consequently has limited chance of advancing his/her welfare to the limit of his/her potentials and capabilities".

Poverty has various manifestations, including no access or limited access to education, health facility, hunger, malnutrition, safe residential and occupational environments. According to Elijah & Uffort (2007 p.3), poverty has been perceived by many as not just lack of money, food, and assets but also a lack of access to education and healthcare and lack of security, dignity, and independence. However, a person's perception of poverty is a function of his present experience, the condition of his environment, his vocation and his definition of the good life. Olumbe (2003 p.61) avers that there is need to view poverty as multiple deprivations which take into account political, cultural and spiritual aspects but not in terms of income, which views poverty only in reference to economic deprivation.

Dynamically, poverty can also be a view from either absolute or relative form. According to Oladipo (2000 p.146), absolute poverty refers to formally defined poverty appearance while relative poverty refers to one's position or that of a group in relation to others. In 1995 the United Nations defined absolute poverty as a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, and information. Therefore absolute poverty depends not only on income but also on access to services. For scholars advocating relative poverty, it is a concept that generally refers to the phenomenon of relative deprivation. It is the condition where people do not have enough income to meet basic needs, such as access to services and sanitation facilities. According to Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (2009), Relative poverty refers to individuals or groups lack of resources when compared with that of other members of the society. Townsend (1979 p.53) has argued that those who have 'resources so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or

family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities' are relatively poor. Thus, for him, relative poverty applies to those people who cannot afford the amenities and activities that are customary. Hence, the concept of relative poverty is used to measure the degree of poverty. Accordingly, people are poor because they are deprived of the opportunities, comforts, and self-respect regarded as normal in the community to which they belong.

The causes of poverty can be attributed to different multidimensional forces. Damas&Israt (2004 p.9) viewed the causes of poverty as follows; unemployment, high population growth rate, poor human resources development, natural disaster, Social inequality, Laziness, Warfare, Corruption, pervasive illiteracy and widespread diseases. A lazy person will always be poor even after empowering him. Insurgency is another main cause of poverty. It leads to the destruction of properties like; Houses, Farmland, Businesses, etc. Taiwo and Agwu (2016 p.20) viewed the causes of poverty in two broad schools of thought; Low economic growth and Market Imperfections. They went further to express that the low economic growth is associated with increased unemployment and underemployment. When the income of those affected may generally not be sufficient for them to maintain an adequate standard of living. On the other hand, market imperfection has to do with institutional distortions which would not make for the equal opportunity to productive assets. Based on these views of the multidimensional nature of the causes of poverty, a holistic approach to poverty alleviation is needed.

Poverty is complex and needs to be addressed holistically. The church is well placed to provide a holistic response to poverty in the following three areas. The church has the mandate to care for the poor, to alleviate suffering, and to stand for justice. Jesus witnessed the state of poverty amongst the people and proclaimed the Gospel of liberation against socio-economic injustices and political oppression. The biblical affirms that all are equally valued and have a part to play in God's unfolding story, according to dignity and significance to all irrespective of their socio-economic standing. However, what is now known as holistic development has been the approach of the church from its inception in Nigeria. The churches that are embarking on this noble initiative are drawing inspiration from the Bible. The Bible has so much to say about the poor and how society should take care of them. The church from its inception to Nigeria by the missionaries came in with the gospel of our Lord Jesus with various programs to help the poor, providing health centres, and schools for the poor. Olumbe, (2003) note that, the ministry of Jesus as preached by the Church brings out a holistic gospel, which advocates both physical and spiritual freedom. It is a gospel, which has a general emphasis on ministry to the poor in society by addressing all their social, political, economic and spiritual needs. Olumbe argues further that the early Church had poor people but through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they developed systems to effectively minister to them through the common sharing of resources and as shown by the first few chapters of the Acts of the Apostles; the rich Christians ensured that the poor among them were taken care of. Christians were urged to do good not to their fellow believers, but to all people.

Poverty Alleviation Programme by the Government

In order to tackle poverty challenges in Nigeria, the government has put in several efforts with meaningful poverty alleviation programs since its independence. Government's efforts to tackle rural poverty in Nigeria have a relatively long history and have varied largely with each new regime. Despite the efforts of the Nigerian government in alleviating poverty, the proportion of Nigerians living in poverty is increasing every year as shown in Table 1 below. The proportion of the population living below the poverty line increased significantly from 1960 to 2010.

Table 1: Nigeria Population in poverty, 1960 – 2010

Year	Poverty Incidence (%)	Estimated Population (Million)	Population in poverty (Million)
1960	15	45.2	6.8
1980	27.2	65	17.1
1985	43.6	75	34.7
1992	42.7	91.5	39.2
1996	65.6	102.3	67.1
2004	54.4	126.3	68.7
2010	69.0	163	112.47

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Harmonized Nigeria Living Standard Survey, 2010.

In 1960, the government rolled out poverty alleviation program centred on education. This was seen as the key to the economic, technological and intellectual development of the nation and was referred as, 'show the light, and the people will find the way' by the First Nigerian President, the late Nnamdi Azikwe. This program equipped Nigerians with quality education and kept the poverty level at 15%. Then, government moved to next level in 1973, with the establishment of Agriculture Development Project (ADP) to provide credit facilities for the development of agricultural projects, in order to promote integrated rural developments with the aim to facilitate increased food production and increase the income of the rural people (Forac & Benedict, 2011 p.300). It was partly financed and executed by the World Bank but became obsolete.

Another poverty alleviation program emerged during the regime of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo (1976-1979) called Operation Feed the Nation (OFN). The programme has the specific focus of increasing food production on the premises that availability of cheap food will mean higher nutrition level and invariably lead to national growth and development with the aim of reducing the poverty level from 15%. OFN lasted until Shehu Shagari's government took over in 1979.

Shegu Shagari (1979-1983) shared almost the same poverty reduction idea with his predecessor. He came up with his own project named the Green Revolution, which also emphasized on food production. Poverty level rise to 27%. The programme became more

regime specific because there was hardly any continuity with those initiated by previous governments.

The military regime of Gen. Muhammad Buhari (1983-1985) did not have a specific poverty alleviation programme as it clearly focused on fighting indiscipline and corruption with the initiative better known as WAI of War Against Indiscipline. This worsens the poverty situation in Nigeria, leading to high increase margin of poverty rate from 27.2% to 43.6% by the end of his regime in 1985.

Gen. Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) introduced a lot of poverty alleviation programs such as; Peoples Bank, Directorates of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Structural Adjustment Programme and National Directorate of Employment (NDE). Most of these programmes collapsed at one point or the other but the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) formed by Babangida regime is still till date. It was designed and implemented to combat mass unemployment and articulate policies aimed at developing work programmes with labour intensive potentials. From the impact of the programmes and its staying power, NDE is a scheme that could be adjudged as the most successful of Babangida's poverty alleviation program in Nigeria. It is on record that hundreds of thousands of youths have benefited from the NDE scheme through its four programmed approaches that includes: Vocational Acquisition Training (673,000), Entrepreneurial (Business) Training (372,366), Training for Rural Employment and Training for Labour-Based Works Programme. This contributed to the reduction of Nigeria poverty rate from 43.6% to 42.7%.

The regime of late General Sani Abacha (1993-1998) introduced a lot of poverty alleviation programs called the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP). Nigeria's quest for a way out of debilitating poverty, as this was the period that marked Nigeria's relapse into the global bracket of 25 poorest countries. This gave rise to the significant increase of Nigeria poverty rate from 42.7% to 65.6%.

The government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2006) set up Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) in 2000 with the purpose of creating jobs for the unemployed in view of rising youth restiveness. PAP was implemented in a manner that received criticism as it was accused of shoddiness and corruption. An investigation panel committee headed by Prof. Ango Abbdulahi was set up to review the programme. Problems identified with the programme included over-centralization, over-politicization, irregular payment, uncoordinated management as well as high-level corruption. Based on the recommendations of the Committee Poverty Alleviation Programme was changed to National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP) with the involvement of all stakeholders. NAPEP involved all the stakeholders in poverty alleviation in Nigeria namely the federal, state and local governments, civil society organizations, research institutions, the organized private sector, women groups and concerned individuals. The basic objective of NAPEP was to tackle absolute poverty and to eradicate them. In efforts to achieve this goal, NAPEP was split into four schemes which are; Youth Empowerments Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Schemes (SOWESS and the National Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NPDCS). In 2004, Obasanjo with the aim to addressing the

menace of poverty in the country keyed into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and subsequently produced a policy document called the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDs) to further see to the achievement of millennium development goals. NEEDs aims are to achieve the following goals; wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction and value re-orientation. The NEEDs as a national policy focused on meeting some of the objectives of the MDGs, especially poverty alleviation. These high committed poverty alleviation programs contributed positively to the reduction of Nigeria poverty rate from 65.6% to 54.4%.

The government of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan (2011-2015) in his quest to bring every Nigerian out of poverty, rolled out Transformation Agenda's with key objectives resting on three main pillars: fiscal consolidation and optimization; strong inclusive non-inflationary growth; and Job creation. He started in 2011 with four core development priority areas: good governance comprising security, public service reform, anti-corruption, economic policy, foreign policy and diplomacy; human capital development comprising education, health, labour and productivity, women and youth development; infrastructure development comprising power, transport, housing, water and irrigation, industries; Real economy sector development comprising agriculture, manufacturing, oil and gas, solid minerals. His Job creation and inclusive growth agenda was implemented to tackle unemployment which was identified as one of the contributing factors to the high poverty rate in Nigeria, he rolled out the following programs: Community Service Scheme (SURE-P) which is designed to engage 320,000 youth in labour intensive work such as construction and rehabilitation of social and economic infrastructure; Graduate Internship Scheme (SURE-P) which has its aims to attach 50,000 graduates to competent firms that will enhance skills development towards employability; YouWin! The programme which is designed to support 3,600 young existing or aspiring entrepreneurs over three years with grants, mentoring, business registration, supporting the creation of up to 110,000 jobs for fellow young people. These impacted positively as those people who accessed these programs were moved out of poverty.

The current government of Muhammad Buhari (2015-2018) in his fight against poverty has set up, four Poverty Alleviation. The Special Advisor to the President on Social Protection, Mrs. Maryam Uwais, in her speech on January 19, 2018 said that the Federal Government has designed a four-point National Social Investment Programme (N-SIP), including Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (CCT) which involves the direct transfer of N5,000 to the targeted poor and vulnerable households; The Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF) which is design to assist vulnerable families, feed their classes, primary 1-3 school children one nutritious meal a day and provides an incentive to send them to school which is targeted to feed 5.5 million children; The N-Power Programme designed to put 500,000 young Nigerian graduates on employment and empower or train 100,000 of non-graduates with necessary tools to create, develop and build projects that will change our communities, economy and nation; and Government Enterprise Empowerment Programme (GEEP), which is targeted to financial inclusion and empowerment loans programme to deliver maximum impact to the economically underrepresented groups that targets about 1.6 million beneficiaries. This effort will

indeed play a great role if well implemented and if delivered to the targeted poor. It is hard to imagine that with all these efforts of the past and present government, Nigeria poverty rate is still very high. Olanrewaju (2017) said that Nigeria will overtake India as the country with the most people in extreme poverty by February 2018. This calls for the urgent need to identify and address the reason behind the failure of efforts of Nigeria government in the quest to eradicate poverty.

The Church Effort in Alleviating Poverty in Nigeria

The indisputably bright part of history is that Christian missionaries brought the message of spiritual redemption and they also ministered to the physical needs of the people. In many places, they introduced new staple crops and the use of animal power for farming, formal education vocational skills training and modern healthcare services were pioneered by the church. The management of these services subsequently passed from the missionaries to the nationals. The church has also made a significant impression in the area of provision of safe water in rural communities, in the provision of boreholes, hand dug wells, protection of springs and rain-water harvesting techniques. Currently, some churches are still doing some poverty alleviation programs in other to arrest the increasing rate of poverty growth in Nigeria. In attempt to review the current poverty alleviation programs carried out by the church in Nigerian, the researcher selected five denominations using stratified random sampling. The selected churches are: Anglican Church of Nigeria, The Redeemed Christian Church of God, The Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria, Faith Tabernacle Congregation Nigeria, and The Word of life Bible Church.

Anglican Church of Nigeria:

They do the following program to alleviate poverty:

Early training of the poor youth through skill acquisition workshop, after which they will empower the trained people financially, they also offer scholarship to identified children that have no one to train them. Thou, this is not done as a regular program by the church, they also have welfare programme which is run by the welfare committee who encourages the branch churches to support the poor at all levels, and they provide employment to their members through agricultural project they established.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God:

They do the following program to alleviate poverty:

Widow's welfare program; this covers financial support, food and clothing support and Student's welfare scheme, this involves financial support and other needs as they may arise.

In Faith Tabernacle Congregation:

They do the following program to alleviate poverty:

Monthly Financial support to widows and orphan, and other less privilege people in the church, Scholarship program in the church Secondary school to their members who cannot afford to pay school fee, and they also render Skill Acquisition workshop and training only at their Lagos District Church.

The Word of life Bible Church:

They organise the following Poverty Alleviation Programs

For the past 10 years running. They give out free 6 cars, 20 tricycles (popularly called Keke), 100 commercial food grinding machines and loads of consolation prizes to winners after lucky dip draw. This empowerment/ poverty alleviation program is usually held on the 26th of December (BOXING DAY).

The Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria:

The Roman Catholic Church embarked on concrete developmental programmes to fight poverty such as; Justice and Peace Development of Enugu Catholic Diocese under Monsignor Prof. Obiora Ike which has done so much in this direction. All its projects are seen to be real common people oriented and they directly address the issue of poverty. He also renders scholarship programme to youth who cannot be able to carter for the needed financial requirement to further their education.

Also, a well known Catholic priest Rev. Ejike C. Mbaka runs a poverty alleviation program by paying tuition fee for the poor and the less privileged. He runs this through the charity arm of his Adoration Ministry Enugu known as Multi-life Savers for the Less Privileged People. He pays tuition fees for over 6,000 indigent students. They also do several poverty alleviation programs through various instituted bodies namely; Caritas, St. Vincent de Paul, and Multi-life Savers for the Less Privileged People.

Caritas Nigeria with its vision to provide a harmonious environment where everyone enjoys fullness of life, are putting in efforts in taken care of the poor's wellbeing in Nigeria. As the official relief and development agency of the Catholic Church, Caritas Nigeria responded to the needs of the poor in the society by providing them with relief materials, building water and sanitation facilities in rural areas, provision of agricultural inputs and skills acquisition, and provision of health facilities. They also provide support to orphans in order to assist the families who have lost their economically active heads.

St. Vincent de Paul is one of the major poverty alleviation organization or agency of the Catholic Church with its concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying those structures, societal and legislative, that cause and perpetuate poverty. This mission manifests itself in the Society's admonition to end Poverty through systemic change. St. Vincent de Paul identifies those issues that are critical to those living in poverty and uses the communities and the elected representatives to help develop strategies and tactics that will provide the most effective and efficient means to reduce or eliminate poverty. They held on to this slogan, **"If you can see Jesus Christ in the face of a suffering stranger, why not join us"**. St. Vincent de Paul is driven with the mission to ensure those impacted by poverty have the skills and resources to achieve their full potential. They also provide job training and assistance to help individuals find better employment opportunities.

The Catholic Church in Benue State, Nigeria, established massive orchards not just for the benefit of the early missionaries, but also taught basic agricultural

Many other churches and or groups within them have been engaging in one form of scheme or the other that advances loans to members with the intention to reduce the effect of poverty among members. These loans are usually repaid due to respect for the church or its leadership or due to some form of control or discipline in cases of payment

default. Sometimes, such groups register as cooperative societies and attract soft loans which they then repay at some later time.

Factors Responsible for Failure of Poverty Alleviation Programme in Nigeria

It is alarming that despite the measures taken by successive and current governments in Nigeria to arrest the incidence of poverty in the country, poverty level keeps increasing instead of reducing. Some factors undermining the performance of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria are:

1. The excessive corruption in Nigeria is a serious challenge to poverty alleviation programmes. In Nigeria, funds and materials meant for execution of poverty alleviation programs are diverted into private pockets by the officials in charge or relatives of officials under various aliases as beneficiaries, thus making the program not to achieve its aim of reducing poverty. They accept applications from intending beneficiaries without due and proper identification and screening procedures, coupled with the failure to periodically check on recipients to determine continued eligibility and the non-investigation and prosecution of fraud cases. In the end, it is the poor masses that get poorer.

2. There is no proper classification of the poor group. There is no policy or document that classifies the people that belong to the poor group. This challenge has opened room for some people that are not really in the class of poor to benefit from the poverty alleviation program, reducing the chances of the real poor people. Hence making it difficult to reach the poor and alleviate them from their poverty state.

3. Challenge of Proper identification. There is no unified identification Mechanism (ID cards) for each citizen with well-detailed information. People use fake identity card to claim materials meant for the poor.

4. Inadequate involvement of the beneficiaries in the formulation and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes has eroded its effectiveness. In most cases, the programmes are implemented top-down. The opinions of the target groups are not sought. The policymakers do not care to know the nature of their problems and how they wish the problems to be solved. This may lead to overestimation or underestimation of the problems and misplaced priorities.

5. Lack of awareness of poverty alleviation programmes in the rural areas is another obstacle to its performance. Information about such programmes terminates in the cities while the illiterate poor in the villages do not know what is happening (Adawo, 2010 p.16).

6. Lack of infrastructural facilities is a major obstacle to poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria. No country can tackle poverty without adequate infrastructural facilities such as water, power supply, and good road network, etc. These infrastructural facilities affect the productivity level of any business. Since the level of infrastructural development in Nigeria is very poor, this results in low level of production and excessive poverty.

7. Another problem with the poverty alleviation programme in Nigeria is that it does not really help the recipients in the long run. Instead of providing short-term

assistance to put the recipient on the road to self-sufficiency, it becomes a way of life. Most recipients rightly or wrongly consider these grants their piece of the national economic cake that is never be accounted for, this leads them to a lifestyle of unemployment and not taking any initiative. This issue arises because the program is not been monitored and also as new administrations are elected into office, they abandon past programmes, never attempt to recover loan advances, and agency officials are never held responsible or liable for any misdeeds.

8. Still another problem is that poverty alleviation programmes in the past became unduly burdensome. Colossal sums are used to set up the structures for these programmes, but since people default on payment of loans given in past schemes without any machinery to monitor this, the number of people queuing up for assistance has more than tripled. This overtime, become burdensome for the diligent, hardworking and committed taxpayers whose tax naira it used to initiate and fund such programmes.

Recommendations:

The aim of alleviating poverty by the Nigerian government has been a tasking role as the poverty rate of the nation keep increasing despite their effort. However, for the task to yield positive result, it is imperative for programmes and strategies for alleviating poverty in Nigeria to incorporate the following:

1 Proper identification and classification of the poor will help for effective and efficient targeting so as to achieve better result. For proper identification of the poor, government should develop a unify identification Mechanism (ID cards) for each citizen with well detailed information. For clear classification of the categories of people that are poor, government should develop and implement policy that specifies the categories of people that are poor.

2 Distinguish extreme poor from other poor. This will help in designing programs that will have positive impact in the life of those that are extremely poor and different programme for those that have move from extreme poverty but are still poor.

3 Operations of all poverty reduction programmes need to be monitored on quarterly basis to control any diversion of the materials. Managers of programme should ensure proper accountability of allocated resources. This will help in ensuring that the resources were fully directed to the poor to avoid diversion of the resources and also help in the discovery of what ought to be done at the right time.

4 If other Churches participate in alleviating poverty the way Catholic Church do, it will go a long way in reducing the poverty rate in Nigeria. They should not just concentrate in erecting big magnificent building as church auditorium and buying of private jet without involving in the mission of alleviating poverty of their members.

5 Poverty alleviation programmes should be structured to minimise fraud. Although fraud will never be totally eliminated, but poverty alleviation programmes should be structured in such a way that loopholes that allow this are restricted. Strictly screening procedures for applicants should be put in place, as well as periodic rechecking of the eligibility of beneficiaries. Enforcement of penalties against abusers should be

implemented to discourage people from such act. Agencies should be held accountable and should operate with due fairness and transparency in the administration of funds.

6 The church with its divine purpose and will for the nation, should be use by the government to act as a moral check in delivering poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria.

7 The church should impact the life of truth, moral and honest to Nigerians by Means of official statements from ecumenical bodies like CAN, ecclesiastical councils, critical and corrective sermons, and so on. This will in turn reduce corruption and unjust systems which affect the implementation of poverty alleviation program.

8 Church should involve its members in voluntary charity services of rendering humanitarian services to the poor. The church is seen to be more preferable initiators and administrators of poverty alleviation programmes. Government should, therefore, also encourage and support the churches in their efforts to mobilise their members to initiate programmes aimed at alleviating poverty.

9 Availability of electricity, water, and good road network for easy accessibility to and from rural areas for promotion of commercial and economic activities should be made a priority project by the Nigeria government.

10 It is also important to carryout research and survey before introduction any poverty reduction programme. This will help in identifying what is really needed to be done so as to have better results. Hence poverty reduction program should be taken to places based on the need of the poor in that location. The idea of operating on generalized program or guise work sometimes results to implementation of poverty reduction program that has been done by other organization, thereby resulting to unfruitful result.

11 Government should partner with the Church in engaging the poor or less privileges with regular skill acquisition, business management program and empower them financially.

12 Poverty alleviation programmes should encourage families to take care of their own. They should educate family on the reason to practice family planning. Hence, they should bear children that they will be able to carter for and not bearing many children they will not be able to even feed. This will help reduce the number of people in poverty. The Church should uphold this in their teaching as by Paul in the scripture affirm that if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel (1 Tim. 5:8)

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that the issue of poverty is one that requires the church to be an active and significant player in this project of alleviating poverty in Nigeria. The study has critically examined poverty alleviation activities in Nigeria and was able to show that the continuous increase in poverty in Nigeria in spite of poverty alleviation programme and huge budgetary allocation stem from the pattern of programme, corruption, inconsistence of policies, improper management and monitoring of the program. Poverty issues in Nigeria cannot be effectively addressed at different levels in isolation from the churches. Perhaps churches should see poverty alleviation as a part of their mission of evangelisation, since not only spiritual but also material salvation is

needed to truly free someone. The church attitude of locking away tithe money in banks should change. They should embed the attitude of making the fund available to their members in form of loans and other poverty alleviation measures, and the churches should be able to build on their greatest strengths which are trust and commitment rather than dependency. Churches should also motivate their rich members to create employment and empower the poor members.

References

- Adawo, M. A. (2011). Poverty reduction in Nigeria: a necessary agenda. *Current Research Journal of Economic Theory*, 3(1), 14-19.
- Aiyedogbon, J. O., & Ohwofasa, B. O. (2012). Poverty and youth Unemployment in Nigeria, 1987-2011. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 3(20).
- Ajakaiye, D. O. I., & Olomola, A. (Eds.). (2003). *Poverty in Nigeria: A multi-dimensional perspective*. Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) with support of Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa (SISERA).
- Damas P. & Israt R. (2004). Vulnerability and Poverty; What are the causes and how they are related? *International Doctoral Studies*, Zef, Bonn.
- Elijah, O. A., & Uffört, L. (2007). Comparative analysis of the relationship between poverty and underground economy in the highly developed, transition and developing countries. MPRA, Retrieved from <https://mpr.ub.uni-muenchen.de/2054/>
- Hartin, P. J. (1999). *A Spirituality of Perfection: Faith in Action in the Letter of James*. Liturgical Press.
- International Day for Poverty Alleviation: How Possible? (2017, October 22), Vanguard. Retrieved from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/10/international-day-poverty-alleviation-possible/>.

- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2010). Harmonized Nigeria Living Standard Survey 1960-2010. NBS.
- Olanrewaju Eweniyi (2017, October). Nigeria Is Set To Become The Poverty Capital Of The World By 2018. Konbini, Retrieved from <http://www.konbini.com/ng/lifestyle/nigeria-poverty-capital-world-2018/>.
- Okhiria, O. A. & Obadeyi, J. A. (2015). Poverty, an African epidemic: Empirical evidence of Nigeria. *Developing Country Studies*, 5(6): 29-39
- Oladipo, J. (2000). The role of the church in poverty alleviation in Africa. *Transformation*, 17(4), 146-152.
- Olumbe, D. (2003). Effects of poverty on church growth in Africa: with particular reference to Kenya. *AICMAR Bulletin*, 1, 57-80.
- Scott, J., & Marshall, G. (Eds.).(2009). *A dictionary of sociology*. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Taiwo, J. N., & Agwu, M. E. (2016). Problems and prospects of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria. *International Journal of Business and Management Review*, 4(6), 18-30.
- Townsend, P. (1979). *Poverty in the United Kingdom: a survey of household resources and standards of living*. University of California Press.
- UNDP (1996). *Progress Against Poverty: a report on activities since Copenhagen*. New York: UNDP.
- UNESCO (2017). *LEARNING TO LIVE TOGETHER*. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/poverty/>
- United Nations (1995), *The Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, World Summit for Social Development*, 6-12 March 1995, New York, United Nations
- World Bank (2000). *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty*. Washington, DC: World Bank