

CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS AND ECONOMIC STABILITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In Nigeria, millions of the citizens are living in abject poverty as the economy has been fluctuating from independence to the present time. Some factors have contributed to the fall of Nigeria's economic status among which are corruption and bad governance. Various methods have been employed and several experts from different fields have been involved to find solutions to the dwindling economy yet all to no avail. This prompted this research to look at another perspective to propound solution to Nigeria's economic downturn. The method employed was historical in nature. The study considered Christian Associations of Nigeria as a tool to proffering likely solutions that may drastically reduce the menace of economic instability in Nigeria. The paper concluded that Christian Associations of Nigeria can be a force in transforming the Nigeria economic problems in various ways. The Association has been playing positive impacts not only among Christians but to the nation at large through its various programmes such as youths and women empowerments, poverty alleviation development programmes and leadership trainings. The paper concluded that the impacts of the Christian Association of Nigeria on the Nigerian society are capable of enhancing economic stability in Nigeria if judiciously explored.

Key words: Christian Associations, Economic Stability, Nigeria.

Overview of Economy and Economic Instability in Nigeria

Nigeria has huge strategic significance to Africa and the world at large. Nigeria is the fourteenth largest oil exporting country in the world, endowed with numerous mineral resources and it is Africa's most populous country with an estimated population of about 150 million with a land mass of 923,768 square kilometers. Nigeria ought to be one of the world leading economies, despite her huge natural resources, unfortunately, Nigeria is still considered to be a poor country with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of about \$374.3 billion, engulfed with socio-economic problems which have caused poverty, conflict in the country and also hinder her growth. The growth of the country is still hampered by consumptive cultures, weak institutions and fragile political structures (U.S Department of State, 2011).

After over two decades of stability, the country entered a recession in 2016, attributed to a confluence of factors: negative economic shocks, inconsistent policies, and security challenges (African Economic Outlook, 2017). This recession exposed underlying vulnerabilities, including excess liquidity, sluggish GDP growth, volatile inflation, fluctuating external reserves, and inconsistent exchange rates. Additionally, the reliance on crude oil revenue and untapped non-oil sources have further complicated the implementation of effective monetary and fiscal policies (Musasa, 2012).

Factors affecting Economic Stability

Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960 and became a republic in 1963. Consequently, the economy was still tied to apron of the colonial masters who continued to influence the level of growth of the various economic sectors of the economy. The challenges to stability in Nigeria can be seen in the political, social and economic dimensions of the society. Poor governance and weak institutions have been an integral part of Nigeria's experience since independence with difficult economic environments due to inadequate road infrastructure, inefficient ports, severe power outages and worst of all, endemic corruption in government (Giwa-Amu, 2011). The negative effects of economic instability of a country may be on the overall welfare of the citizens. The following are some of the root causes of economic problems in Nigerians, although the list is in-exhaustive.

Poor Energy supply: Energy is the backbone of any nation, essential element for economic stability, and a power source for economics. Nigeria is the continent's most famous oil-producing country which along with Libya, accounts for two-thirds of Africa's crude oil reserves and ranks second to Algeria in natural gas. Oladepo (2012), asserted that 60% to 70% of Nigerian population does not have access to electricity. The standard of living of a given country can be directly related to per capita energy consumption. Energy crisis of a particular country may be due to rapid population growth and the increase in the standard of living. The per capita energy consumption is a determinant of per capita income as well as a measure of the prosperity of a nation (Rai, 2004). Council for Renewable Energy Nigeria (2009) attested that the energy crisis which has engulfed Nigeria for almost two decades, has been enormous and has largely contributed to the incidence of poverty by paralyzing industrial and commercial activities during this period. The efficiency of energy leads to important social benefits, such as reducing the energy bills for poor households. Nigeria's economic growth is also constrained by insufficient electricity generation capacity, which results in a lack of a reliable and affordable supply of power.

Corruption: Chimakonam (2011) asserts that Corruption is a global problem and no country of the world is totally excluded from its menacing grip. Adewale (2011) posits that although corruption is a universal phenomenon, its magnitude and effects are more severe and deep-seated in Nigeria. A vast numerous problem Nigeria is encountering today are rooted in two major factors, bad leadership and corruption. Various sectors of Nigeria economy, especially the oil sector are tainted by corruption. In 2012 global report on corruption, Transparency International ranked Nigeria as 139th position out of 176 countries, 35th most corrupt country in the world and scored 27 out of a maximum of 100 marks (Liolio, 2013). It is unfortunate that most of Nigeria's political leaders, stakeholders and other divisional heads are diverting most of the nation's resources which could have been utilized for meaningful development, buying properties in

foreign countries leaving the poor masses who voted them in behind in abject poverty. Corruption is really bringing a great setback and retrogression on Nigeria's economy. Solutions to some of the ranging problems confronting the economic stability in Nigeria could have been solved by the government and the citizens but corruption is a monster that has eaten deep into the nook and cranny of the nation.

Corruption exists in the public and private sectors, profit and nonprofit as well as charitable organizations. It is a significant obstacle to businesses in Nigeria, as companies are very likely to encounter bribery and other corrupt practices. Thus, corruption affects business operations, hinders economic growth, employment and investments (Šumah, 2018). According to (Transparency International, 2014), corruption has a direct impact on economic growth and development and indirect effects on a country's economic performance by affecting many factors fueling economic growth, such as investment, taxation, composition and effectiveness of public expenditure.

Ethnic and religious differences

Nigeria's diverse religious landscape, with regional variations, has accentuated ethnic and regional distinctions. This complex interplay of faith and identity, as Osita (2004) notes, has been a significant factor in sectarian conflicts. Religion's deep influence on Nigerian society is further highlighted by Enwerem (1995), who emphasizes its impact on various aspects, including economic development and health. Paden (2008) underscores the intensity of religious identity in Nigeria, suggesting it is among the highest globally. Characterized by a regionally diverse religious tapestry, Nigeria grapples with the intricate relationship between faith, ethnicity, and regionalism. This interplay, as Osita (2004) argues, has intensified these distinctions and fueled sectarian tensions. Religion's profound influence extends beyond the individual, permeating the fabric of Nigerian society as Enwerem (1995) emphasizes. Paden (2008) further underscores the intensity of religious identity in Nigeria, highlighting its significant role in shaping national discourse and political dynamics. However, religion's influence also extends beyond these tensions, impacting various aspects of society as Enwerem (1995) highlights.

Paden (2008) further emphasizes the intensity of religious identity in Nigeria, suggesting it is a crucial factor to consider in navigating the complexities of national identity and governance. Nigeria's diverse social landscape with over 221 million inhabitants and an estimated 250-400 ethnic groups fosters a complex interplay of identity, tradition, and conflict. While majorities exist such as Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, and Ibibio, numerous other groups contribute to the nation's rich tapestry. However, this diversity can also be a source of tension, with family, educational, legal, religious, and political differences fueling communal conflicts. Religion, particularly the Christian-Muslim divide occupies a central role in these clashes.

Insecurity

Insecurity as a result of criminal activities individually or corporately created insecurity and breach of peace that are likely to or indeed affect legitimate social and economic activities in the country (Akintokunbo, 2011). The problem of insecurity is disastrous to the economic growth in Nigeria and it does not even create a conducive atmosphere for investors. Little wonder foreign investors are leaving Nigeria for other countries with lower rate of insecurity.

National security is said to be where the well-being, democratic process, mechanism of governance, beliefs and values of the nation and her citizen are perpetually improved and secured. Jegede (2011) opined that national security is a state of safety which permits a healthy environment and guarantees respect for lives and property. This revolves around the idea of protection and the interest of a nation. Maier (1990) and Yahaya (2012) defined national security as a capacity to control domestic and foreign conditions that the public opinion of a given community considered necessary to enjoy its self-determination or autonomy, prosperity and well-being. When the safety of a nation is being threatened and insecure, it will affect all virtually everything including the economic stability of that country. No investor, whether domestic or foreign, will be inspired to invest in a risky and insecure environment. The insecure situation of Nigeria has resulted in the redirection of investors away from Nigeria to countries with lower risk (Chukwu, 2019).

Therefore, the rising levels of insecurity and anti-national activities poses a significant challenge to national rules and regulations, human rights and in particular have a significant negative impact on the economy, affecting price, output, employment, trade balance, poverty, inequality, defence expenditure, government budget patterns, socio-political environment and several others (Ishola, 2019). Terrorist activities stifles the growth of economic growth of a country and increases the cost of doing business through higher wages and bring about the uncertainties that distort the equilibrium resource allocation within a country by influencing individual's savings, investment and consumption behaviour (Brodeur, 2018). Insecurity also bring about dryness in investment, increases unemployment and dwindles government revenue. Boko Haram's insurgency and tensions between Muslim Fulani herders and Christian farmers stand as stark examples, threatening traditional leadership, national security, and economic stability.

Poverty and inequality: Falana (2013) asserted that poverty and inequality in Nigeria are not due to lack of resources, but to the ill-use and allocation of such resources. Continued widespread corruption and the emergence of a political elite out of touch with the daily struggles of the average Nigerian have conspired to ensure the cost of governance remains astronomical. According to the human rights lawyer, Femi Falana, it is said to note that most Nigerians never take cognizance of the war being waged by state governments against the poor and disadvantaged citizens. The National Bureau of statistics (2012) opined that Across Nigeria's 36 states and the federal capital territory, economic inequality finds expression in the daily struggles of a large majority of the poor for survival in the face of the accumulation of obscene amounts of wealth by small number of individuals. While more than 112 million people were living in abject poverty in 2010. Forbes data (2016) ranked the richest Nigerian man would take 42 years to spend all of his wealth at 1 million per day. Poverty in Nigeria is a contradiction because it has been growing in the context of an expanding economy where the benefits have been reaped by a minority of people and have bypassed the majority of population.

The paradox of growth in Nigeria is that as the country gets richer, only a few benefit and the majority continues to suffer from poverty and deprivation. Former Finance Minister Okonjo Iweala noted that. "...in Nigeria, it is clear that the top 10 percent of the population is capturing most of the growth there and the people at the bottom are being left behind. If we don't put our minds to this problem the whole economy may be in danger". The disparity is such that the

amount of money that the richest Nigerian man can earn annually from wealth is sufficient to lift 2 million people out of poverty from one year (Iweala, 2013).

Poor health system: Nigeria's economic prosperity hinges on a robust healthcare system, yet inadequate infrastructure, funding, and personnel create significant barriers to quality and affordable care for its citizens. Understaffed hospitals with low doctor-to-patient ratios struggle to manage the burden of illnesses exacerbated by malnutrition, poor hygiene, and unsafe water in many regions. Furthermore, systemic corruption has led to the circulation of ineffective medications and substandard facilities, further jeopardizing public health and hindering the nation's economic potential.

Poor transportation infrastructure

Good transport network of a country helps to bring about rapid growth in economic stability of a country, of which Nigeria still has some challenges in the area of roads, railways, airports and sea ports. Many roads are still inaccessible in Nigeria, due to damages, traffic congestion, insecurity and other ranging issues. There are great challenges in other transportation sectors like railways, airports and sea ports which the governments needs to look into.

The Advent of Christianity and Christian Association of Nigeria

The spread of Christianity in Nigeria can be traced back to the efforts of freed slaves from America and Great Britain. These individuals played a key role in establishing and expanding Christian missions in the West African nation, particularly in regions like Yoruba land, the Niger Delta, and the Cross River basin. The year 1841 marked the official start of modern missionary activity in Nigeria, spearheaded by Bishop Ajayi Crowther, a former slave who was consecrated as the first African bishop by British abolitionists. Since its introduction, Christianity in Nigeria has undergone several phases of development, leading to the establishment and proliferation of numerous churches across the country. Galadima and Turaki (2001) highlighted the five periods of Christianity in Nigeria as follow:

- i. Introduction of Latin Christianity (15th and 16th centuries)
- ii. Denominationalism and missionary era (19th century onwards)
- iii. Evolution of independent churches
- iv. Formation of Indigenous African Churches
- v. Emergence of Pentecostal and charismatic movements

Christian Religious Associations are numerous Christian denominations in Nigeria. As at 2011, Pew Research confirmed that the total population of Christians in Nigeria was far much more than that of any other African country. Christian Association of Nigeria was founded on 27th August, 1976 to serve as a pressure group in the nation whenever a major policy which affects the Christian body or the generality of the country is made by the government. Minchakpu and Obed (2000) highlight the formation of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) as a positive outcome of this growth. Williams (1995) metaphorically described Christian Association of Nigeria as an "umbrella" for Christians in Nigeria. As Christian churches are becoming increasingly on a daily basis in Nigeria, this body was also created to unify the numerous Christian denominations to speak with one voice especially as to the issue of religious position in the 1979 constitution and matters relating to religious activities in primary and secondary schools. Christian Association of Nigeria is a voluntary association where members

are allowed their doctrinal autonomy except in things that are contrary to Christian faith (Nigeria's Christian Digest, 1990). Summarily, Christian Association of Nigeria is an association of churches and not of individuals and people become members of CAN in so far as they belong to any of the churches that are members of association. Christian Association of Nigeria consists of five blocs which are:

- i. Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria consists of Catholic churches in Nigeria only.
- ii. The Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), the membership includes all the orthodox churches like Anglican Communion of Nigeria, Methodist Church of Nigeria, The Nigerian Baptist Convention, Church of the Lord Aladura, Presbyterian Church, African Church, Salvation Army, etc.
- iii. Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN) comprises of churches like Christ Apostolic Church, Gospel Apostolic Church, Foursquare Church, and The Apostolic Church.
Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) – made up of Pentecostal churches. This includes Church of God Mission founded by Arch-Bishop Benson Andrew Idahosa, The Redeemed Evangelical Mission (TREM), Mountain of Fire Ministries, Living Faith Ministries, Christ Embassy, Deeper Life Christian Ministry, Redeemed Christian Church of God and lot more. Some of these churches were founded in the 1970s and these Pentecostal churches are known for their fundamentalist learning, include prominent figures like William Folorunso Kumuyi of the Deeper Life Ministry and Arch Bishop Benson Andrew Idahosa of the Church of God Mission.
- iv. The Evangelical Church of West Africa\ Tekan. Churches under these blocs includes The Evangelical Church of West Africa now Evangelical Church Winning All. Tekan is an association of churches in Nigeria, established in 1955 including various denominations such as Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN) church that is found in the northern Nigeria. TEKAN focuses on evangelism, discipleship, education, and community development initiatives.
- v. The Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) prominent in this group is the Nigerian Association of Aladura Churches, the membership includes churches that have their root in Nigeria such as the Celestial Church Christ, a group of Cherubim and Seraphim Society of Nigeria, Gospel Baptist Church of Nigeria, etc. The Aladura churches, as their name implies, are characterized by their commitment to prayer as well as the indigenization of the Christian faith to African religious idiosyncrasies. Historically and geographically, they are all Christian denominations and were welcomed into CAN (Ogbonyomi, 1990).

It is to be noted that the birth of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) which divided the Christian church into five major groups aided the growth of the churches in Nigeria. However, CAN's commitment to inclusivity extends beyond denominations, as evidenced by the establishment of specialized wings for women and youth. The CAN Women's Wing, known as WOWICAN actively encourages Nigerian women to participate in politics and challenge the male-dominated landscape (Inter Press Service, 4 September 1998). Similarly, a CAN Youth Wing has been established to cater for the needs and concerns of younger members within the Christian community.

Impact of Christian Religious Associations on Economic Stability

Christian Association of Nigeria have done more in bringing about social religious and human development and change than any other human agent. Even though Christian missions pioneered western education, most mission societies did so very reluctantly. Missionary activities in Nigeria were indeed powerful tools for religious and social change and also brought great human development, social formations and transformations. Christian missions pioneered Christian literature ministry and translation in Nigeria. They also helped in putting African languages into writing and grammar. They Printed, sold and distributed Christian literature as well as general literature through their translation work and bookshops. They also pioneered Christian journalism and developed social critics and greatly influenced nationalist's movements. The impact of Christian work is also seen in every spheres of life like culture, religion, politics, economics, ethnicity or race etc. The major contributions of Christian missions in the area of education has been literacy, social, moral, and spiritual up-bringing and general development of the peoples and societies. Education was the most potent tool for the transformation of African societies and also the most effective tool of evangelism.

The Growth of the Church has brought development to the nation. The social impact of this growth is seen in the increase of the number of churches all over the Country which established Nursery and primary schools, Secondary Schools and Universities that provide job opportunities for many people. Some of such Universities established by mission Church include Redeemer's University (Redeem), Ajayi Crowther University (Anglican), Babcock University (Seventh Day Adventist), Bowen University (Baptist); Joseph Ayo Babalola University (CAC), Methodist University, Ondo Covenant University and Catholic University among others. Teaching Hospitals and Mission hospitals were also established by churches. All these provide job opportunities for people and enhance economic stability of the nation.

Conclusion

The government of Nigeria has a significant role to play, but cannot do it all since Nigerian economic development has not yet been assured. However, this study considered the Christian Associations of Nigeria as a tool to proffering likely solutions that may drastically reduce if not totally eradicate the menace of economic instability in Nigeria. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) plays a multi-faceted and consequential role in shaping Nigeria's economic stability. Its contributions range from direct economic initiatives like microfinance and healthcare to indirect influences through promoting ethical values and interfaith dialogue. While CAN's focus on political advocacy at times draws criticism, its overall impact on the economy deserves recognition and consideration within the broader context of Nigeria's development.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations by the researcher:-

- i. Government should collaborate effectively with CAN and leverage its contributions, the government should engage in dialogue: Regularly consult with CAN on economic policy decisions and consider its perspectives on poverty reduction, job creation, and infrastructure development.
- ii. Support for CAN's initiatives: Government, Philanthropists and NGOs should assist in providing resources and technical assistance to strengthen CAN's economic development programs and social welfare activities.

- iii. CAN should promote religious tolerance: CAN should actively foster interfaith dialogue and collaboration to create a more stable and inclusive environment for economic growth.
- iv. Research institutions: To contribute to a deeper understanding of CAN's economic impact, research institutions could conduct rigorous research utilizing quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the effectiveness of CAN's initiatives and policy advocacy efforts.
- v. Facilitate knowledge sharing: Disseminate research findings and promote dialogue among policymakers, practitioners, and academics to inform best practices.
- vi. Invest in tertiary healthcare education to increase the number of medical professionals, provide subsidies to private healthcare and invest in medical insurance to lower the cost of medical services.
- vii. CAN should embark on building low cost housing estates that would be affordable for masses to rent.
- viii. CAN should purchase hectares of land for the means of Agriculture, purposely for crop plantation or livestock rearing. This will also create job opportunities for the youths.

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