

# ROLE OF THE CHURCHES IN WEALTH CREATION AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

By

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## Abstract

Throughout history, religious organizations have been a prominent part of shaping the society. Christianity has influenced creative and controlling aspects of early societies and significantly affected early forms of government. Christian heritage, in part, shaped many countries' cultural identity and values, including their economy. Nigeria has huge strategic importance to the continent of Africa and to the globe at large. Nigeria nation is about the most populous country in Africa with a population of more than 200 million and is blessed with many mineral resources including oil/gas, gold, lead zing, limestone, salt, etc. Nigeria is still considered to be a poor country with a low gross domestic product. Day in day out, several socio-economic related crises loom and abject poverty has engulfed the citizenry. This socio-economic problem has caused many of our youth to run to other economic advanced countries and the development of the country continue to be hampered because of its weak institutions, consumptive cultures, fragile and political structures. This paper examined the role of the church in wealth creation and employment opportunities. The churches to promote wealth creation and employment opportunities within their congregations and communities is of great significance and that they can achieve this through a range of initiatives and collaborations that empower individuals, foster entrepreneurship and contribute to sustainable economic development. This work therefore recommended that Churches should discourage indolence, facilitate wealth creation, create more employment opportunities to reduce poverty in our society.

**Keywords:** Churches, wealth creation, employment opportunities.

## Introduction

The role of churches go beyond spiritual guidance to encompass active participation in fostering economic stability within their congregations and communities. In a nation facing various economic challenges, including unemployment and poverty, churches can serve as catalysts for positive change by creating wealth and employment opportunities. Churches are well-positioned

to initiate and support initiatives that not only uplift their congregants but also contribute to the broader economic well-being of Nigeria.

Nigeria is grappling with such problems such as illiteracy, hunger, poor health condition, humiliation, unemployment and expectations of accelerated development seem difficult to realize. Citizens of Nigeria are feeling frustrated, not cared for, basic amenities to keep life going are not seen while corruption and nepotism keep growing in the hands of the political gladiators. Nigeria economic prospects are now in grim and the economy is in recession (Eboh, 2016), while corruption is on the high side demoralizing every aspect of the government (Nwabughio, 2016). The state of the nation has greatly affected her quest for improved quality of life of her citizens as poverty; unemployment and starvation still pervade the nook and cranny of the country.

### **Church**

The church goes beyond physical building to include the people that come together to worship, adore and pray to whom they see and believe to be their object worship, that is the supernatural/invisible being. Northville (2008) opines that the word Church is from a compound word derived from the verb ekkaleo. He explained further that the prepositional prefix ek means out and kales, means to call, these in turn make up the compound word ekklesia (Church) meaning called out. Elwell (1996) in supporting his view argues that the most common word for church in the New Testament Greek is eklesia: which means the called out ones. The noun would then be a called-out group or an assembly. Therefore, etymologically the term Church can be defined as the assembly of called-out people.

### **Church Leaders**

Clergy or religious leaders, commonly referred to as church leaders, occupy significant positions within religious organizations and communities. Their responsibilities extend beyond the realm of spirituality and encompass various aspects related to the well-being of their congregations.

The role of church leaders involves delivering sermons and teachings based on religious texts to guide and foster the spiritual growth of their congregations. Depending on the denomination, these leaders may also administer sacraments such as baptism, communion, weddings, and funerals (Akanji, 2010). Moreover, they provide individuals facing personal challenges, crises, or grief with emotional and spiritual support. Visiting sick, home-bound or struggling members of the congregation is also part of their duties.

Church leaders actively participate in outreach programmes aimed at addressing the needs of the local community through charitable activities and social services. Some leaders engage in dialogue with representatives of other faiths to foster understanding and cooperation. Additionally, leaders play a role in the governance structure of the church, making decisions pertaining to policies, finances, and organizational matters. In larger congregations, they oversee and coordinate the activities of staff members, including associate pastors, administrators, and support staff (Ameh, 2018).

Facilitating religious education programmes such as Sunday school, Bible study, and discipleship training is another responsibility of church leaders. They may also lead or supervise ministries focused on the spiritual development of children and youth. Furthermore, church

leaders conduct worship services, encompassing elements such as prayer, hymns, and other liturgical practices. They preside over special religious ceremonies like weddings, baptisms and confirmations. Some church leaders actively advocate for social justice issues, voicing their opinions on matters related to ethics, equality and human rights. They may also participate in initiatives aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of the community.

Church leaders actively engage in evangelistic efforts, aiming to share their faith with others and attract new members to the congregation. Some leaders even organize or participate in mission trips to address global humanitarian needs. It is worth noting that the specific duties of church leaders can vary significantly, influenced by factors such as denomination, tradition and the size of the religious community they serve. Furthermore, different titles such as pastor, priest, minister, reverend, bishop and others may indicate distinct roles and responsibilities within different religious contexts.

### **Nigerian Economic System**

Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960 and became a republic in 1963. Nigeria adopted the economic system namely mixed economy of Britain, her colonial master. Thus, Nigeria, on her own, did not choose the form of economic system that was based on the characteristics behaviour of Nigerians. However, as a developing country that had been for long ruled by the colonial masters, Nigeria had no option at independence than to dance according to her masters. The independence was purely political independence and not economic independence. 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 (Ojo, 2019).

### **Roles of Church Against Indolence**

Indolence refers to a tendency or habit of being lazy or avoiding work and activity. In the context of the roles of church in Nigeria concerning indolence, there are several ways in which they may address and mitigate this issue. Church can deliver sermons and teachings that emphasize the importance of hard work, diligence and responsibility. Biblical references and parables that highlight the virtues of industriousness and the consequences of indolence may be incorporated into these messages. Churches play a crucial role in providing moral and ethical guidance to their congregations. This includes promoting a strong work ethic and discouraging behaviours that contribute to indolence.

Churches can initiate programmes that empower their members with skills, knowledge, and resources to actively participate in economic activities. Training sessions on entrepreneurship, vocational skills and financial literacy can be organized to equip individuals with the tools needed to overcome indolence. In the same vein, churches often engage in social outreach programmes, including support for the unemployed or those facing economic challenges. Providing assistance, counseling and resources to those in need can address underlying issues contributing to indolence. Also, churches can collaborate with local businesses to create job opportunities for their members. They can facilitate partnerships between the church and local employers to contribute to economic stability and reduce indolence.

It is important for churches to approach the issue of indolence with sensitivity and understanding, recognizing that socio-economic factors and individual circumstances can contribute to this behaviour.

### **Roles of Churches in Poverty Reduction**

Poverty is commonly defined as a state of insufficiency or incapacity to afford the fundamental necessities of life. It is often associated with rural regions characterized by low levels of production and economic activities. Consequently, the income level in most rural communities is meagre, resulting in an inability to satisfy one's needs (Uche & Paul, 2022). Essentially, poverty denotes the absence of adequate resources to provide for the basic requisites of life (Okalow, 2022). These fundamental needs encompass food, clothing and shelter. According to the World Bank (2001), an individual is deemed poor if their income falls below a certain minimum level required to meet basic needs. Furthermore, poverty describes the condition of lacking a customary or socially acceptable amount of wealth or material possessions. The World Bank (2001) encapsulates this absence as a dearth of opportunity, dis-empowerment and insecurity. Consequently, the impoverished individuals are rendered virtually inactive in society (Ucha, 2010). Their limited empowerment constrains their choices in nearly every aspect, while their lack of security exposes them to diseases, violence and eviction.

Despite Nigeria's abundant agricultural resources and lucrative oil wealth, poverty continues to afflict a significant portion of its population. Nigeria ranks as the tenth largest producer of crude oil globally and the sixth largest exporter among the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (Odeh, 2011). Additionally, the country possesses vast deposits of solid minerals that have largely remained untapped. However, Nigeria's natural endowments have failed to translate into improved quality of life and prosperity for its citizens, leading to its current status as one of the world's poorest nations (Ekpe, 2011). Poverty is endemic in Nigeria, with seventy percent of Nigerians living on less than US \$1.25 per day (Aidelunuoghene, 2014).

This falls below the international poverty threshold of 1.90 US dollars per day. The impact of poverty in Nigeria is evident not only in poor health and low life expectancy but also in the prevalence of crime. Ayegba (2015) suggests that crimes such as human trafficking, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery and various insurgencies can be attributed to poverty and unemployment. Moreover, a significant number of Nigerians are compelled to migrate to Western countries in an effort to escape poverty and joblessness. Consequently, the nation loses a substantial pool of human resources annually, as many professionals seek better working conditions and quality of life outside the borders of Nigeria.

The incapacity of the various poverty alleviation initiatives implemented by the government signifies that the government alone is incapable of eradicating poverty in Nigeria. This necessitates the involvement of all societal actors, including churches. The role of churches is crucial in the reduction of poverty and in exemplifying the love of Christ to those living in extreme poverty. As followers of Jesus Christ, the church adheres to the teachings of Christ, which wholeheartedly advocate for concern and support for the impoverished. As part of its mission, the church must integrate spiritual considerations with the material needs of individuals. This concern has been pursued by the church, particularly by the early missionaries in Nigeria. For example, ignorance has been identified as one of the fundamental causes of poverty. Since

the days of the missionaries, the church has been dedicated to improving the literacy levels of the population. Urakpa (1996) outlined the involvement of the Anglican Church in educational development in eastern Nigeria. Other missionary organizations, such as the Roman Catholic Mission, have also made significant contributions in the field of education. Jakonda (2011) observes that missionaries introduced crops such as cocoa, ginger, groundnut, tomatoes, and cotton, which contributed to the growth of the economy and the income of the people. Similarly, white missionaries introduced crops like cassava to Nigeria. The introduction of improved agricultural practices resulted in increased production and improved living standards for the population. Through education, healthcare services, agriculture and trade, the early missionaries positively impacted the income of the native population in Nigeria.

In the modern era, churches have continued to play important roles in society, particularly in addressing poverty and the plight of the poor. Churches are dedicated to freeing humanity from hunger, suffering, oppression and animosity, all of which are rooted in human selfishness (Achunike, 2004). In their capacities, churches have implemented empowerment schemes that provide stipends to small-scale businesses and petty traders, enabling members to support themselves. According to Chief Francis Enemu (2022), these efforts have made a commendable impact on the lives of the people.

### **Roles of Churches in Wealth Creation**

Wealth creation is the act of enhancing the economic prosperity and success of a family, country, group or individual. The underlying concept is that there needs to be an activity that leads to an increase in financial resources, profits, assets, goods, education, skills and positive attitudes in order for wealth creation to occur. The act of developing an individual's proficiency in various fields such as carpentry, weaving, engineering, medicine and agriculture contributes to wealth creation and is essential for achieving greater success. Aboagye (2020) has emphasized that wealth creation also involves the cultivation of attributes such as love, kindness, goodness, honesty, patience and gentleness. Furthermore, wealth creation encompasses a distributive dimension that permeates all stages of the process, encompassing generation, outcomes, and allocation for consumption and investment purposes.

ICICI Prudential Life Insurance defines wealth creation as the process of building wealth through the utilization of various financial products and strategies. By investing in financial products for an extended period, individuals can achieve higher returns. Expanding on this definition, Bhatt (2023) describes wealth creation as the gradual accumulation of assets, investments and resources over time. It encompasses strategic planning, risk-taking and a long-term investment perspective to fulfil financial goals. As part of its mission, the church has a responsibility to empower its members to engage in activities aimed at poverty reduction and wealth creation. The promotion of wealth creation as a key strategy for addressing poverty is a central concern for the churches. They encourage and support their members and the wider community to participate in endeavours that contribute to poverty reduction and the creation of wealth.

The mention of the term 'wealth' in the Bible first occurs when it is said of Abram, who later became Abraham, that he had become exceedingly wealthy in livestock, silver and gold (Gen 13:2). The question arises: how did Abraham acquire his wealth? The simple answer may be that

God granted him the ability to create the wealth he accumulated over time (Dt. 8:17-18). It is fundamentally understood that God is the ultimate source of wealth. Individuals, families, communities and nations must therefore utilize wealth to enhance the standard of living and improve the conditions of the less privileged. It is essential to note that the Bible does not inherently condemn wealth. Rather, it condemns the unethical acquisition of wealth. In fact, God blesses his followers with wealth. It is evident that Abraham was blessed because of his close relationship with God (Gen 13:2). Job was also blessed with immense wealth (Job 42:10). God blesses the endeavours of his people and grants them the ability to create wealth (Ps 90:17).

The role of churches in wealth creation in Nigeria can be examined from several angles. On the one hand, there are churches that focus on spiritual growth and personal development, which can indirectly lead to wealth creation. On the other hand, churches take active roles in promoting entrepreneurship and financial literacy among their members. The role of churches in wealth creation in Nigeria is a complex issue that depends on many factors, including the denomination, location and leadership style adopted by the churches in question. There is a need for a balanced approach that promotes both spiritual and material well-being while also addressing social and economic inequalities.

Wealth creation as a major strategy in reducing poverty is a central concern to many churches. Churches encourage and support their members and the wider society to engage in wealth creation and poverty reduction activities. Many churches are promoting wealth creation by equipping individuals and groups with basic skills, farming, weaving and batik making. They are also enhancing access to credit through the promotion of cooperative credit unions and micro-finance. Moreover, several churches are engaged in motivating their members to improve upon their socio-economic conditions through preaching, teaching, seminars and conferences.

### **Roles of Churches in Combating Unemployment**

Unemployment, a term denoting the condition of individuals who possess the ability to work and actively seek employment but are unable to secure a job, encompasses those individuals within the workforce who are engaged in work that does not align with their qualifications (CFI Team, n.d.). The state of unemployment arises when an individual possesses the willingness and capability to engage in work, yet remains without a compensated occupation. The issue of unemployment in Nigeria plays a significant role in perpetuating poverty within the nation. A strong correlation is evident between unemployment and poverty, as the absence of employment opportunities depletes individuals' sources of sustenance, rendering them incapable of meeting their basic needs (Ucha, 2010).

With unemployment, the standard of living diminishes, while the cost of living continues to rise. Numerous Nigerians lack the opportunity to secure employment and even those who possess an education in Nigeria struggle to find work. Each year, thousands of individuals graduate from tertiary institutions without viable job prospects. Education no longer guarantees employment as it once did, as observed by the World Bank (2008). This reality particularly holds true within the context of Nigeria. The report further reveals that unemployment rates in Africa are higher among individuals with higher education and among those from affluent households who prioritize their family's wealth over seeking employment. In Nigeria, churches possess the potential to address the issue of unemployment through the implementation of various strategies:

1. Skills Development: Churches can establish training programmes and workshops aimed at equipping members with the necessary skills for employment or entrepreneurship.
2. Job Placement Assistance: Collaborating with local businesses, churches can facilitate connections between job seekers within the church community and available employment opportunities.
3. Entrepreneurship Support: Churches can provide guidance and encouragement to members interested in entrepreneurship, offering advice on small business management and access to resources.
4. Microfinance Initiatives: By establishing programmes that provide small loans to aspiring entrepreneurs, churches can enable individuals to initiate or expand their businesses.
5. Career Counselling: Offering services that guide individuals in making informed decisions regarding their careers, churches can provide advice on relevant education and training.
6. Youth Empowerment Programmes: Developing programmes targeted towards young individuals, churches can provide mentorship, training and support to address the issue of youth unemployment. Thus, churches in Nigeria possess the capacity to play a pivotal role in addressing the issue of unemployment through the implementation of various strategies.

## **Summary**

### **Roles of Churches in wealth creation and employment opportunities**

Churches possess the capacity to contribute to the attainment of economic stability in Nigeria through various means, notwithstanding their primary focus on spiritual matters. They have the ability to indirectly influence economic stability by undertaking several roles. These roles encompass the promotion of ethical business practices, provision of financial education, support for entrepreneurship development, initiation or backing of community development projects, advocacy for social justice, engagement in charitable activities, provision of spiritual support, collaboration with government and NGOs, and the promotion of a strong work ethic (Adeleke & Oladele, 2020). Churches can engage in social welfare activities such as providing food, healthcare and educational support to the underprivileged.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the role of churches in Nigeria in promoting wealth creation and employment opportunities for their members and other members of the communities is of great significance. They can achieve this through a range of initiatives and collaborations that empower individuals, foster entrepreneurship and contribute to sustainable economic development. By imparting entrepreneurial training, facilitating access to financial resources and promoting ethical business practices, churches can equip their members with the necessary tools to thrive economically. Moreover, by engaging in community development projects, supporting small-scale agriculture and providing job placement services, churches can effectively address local economic challenges and create opportunities for growth. Additional ways in which churches can contribute to economic stability include promoting financial literacy and advocating for inclusive economic policies. The involvement of church leaders in economic stability initiatives can have a positive impact on individuals, families and communities, thereby contributing to the broader goal of socio-economic development in Nigeria.

## Recommendations

Churches should implement empowerment programs and initiatives. These initiatives should aim to equip church members with the necessary skills and resources to become self-reliant in their financial endeavours. Additionally, churches should discourage indolence, facilitate wealth creation and business opportunities. Church members should also engage in small-scale businesses and shun every act of indolence. Lastly, government and civil societies should partner together with the churches to carry out programmes and initiatives that will result into economic stability in Nigeria.

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