



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**Poverty Alleviation Policies of Selected Churches in Anambra State,
Nigeria**

Emmanuel Orok Duke¹ | Justus Onyebuchi Okafor²

¹ Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
University of Calabar, Calabar
Cross River State – Nigeria
e_duke2001@yahoo.com

² Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
University of Calabar
Calabar, Nigeria.
okaforjustus771@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Poverty is a social problem. Its alleviation has been one of the major issues that occupy a significant place in the scale of preference of developmental policies of several nations, international organizations, church and other interested stakeholders. Thus, the thrust of this work centers on poverty alleviation strategies of selected Churches in Anambra State: namely how this institution participates in some economic activities, skill acquisition programmes, and empowerment programmes, among others in view of controlling the scourge of poverty. The research methods employed here are: both qualitative and quantitative - survey and documentary research methods of data collection. The survey method collects data through designed research questionnaire and oral interview with some respondents respectively, while in qualitative approach is the content analysis of written sources such as books, journal articles and online sources that are relevant to the research. The findings of this research show that poverty is human-induced problem manifested in the mismanagement of resources and other forms of ills. Selected churches in Anambra State has reduced the effects of poverty through its collaboration with the State and Non-Governmental Organizations in poverty reduction programmes.

INTRODUCTION

The reality of poverty alleviation cannot be adequately treated without linking it to that of the social problem called poverty. In fact, these two concepts are very closely related and their degree of interrelatedness cannot be overemphasized. According to Sedmak, “The first issue is that of defining poverty and poverty alleviation, unfortunately, there is no consensus on both questions, but it is clear that they are somehow connected in a way that every concept of poverty alleviation includes a concept of poverty, but not the other way around” (2). Even though there is no generally accepted definition of the concept of poverty due to its complexity. However, an inclusive and broad definition by the World Bank Report according to Ndiyo sees poverty as the state of not being able to meet the basic physical needs (food, health care, education, clothing, shelter, *et cetera*) and non-physical needs (participation, identity, etcetera) required for a meaningful life (12). The condition of poverty is a social problem affecting people of varying ages and gender groups. Beeghley sees a social problem as:

a harmful condition identified by a significant number of people and recognized politically as needing improvement. According to this definition, social problems have three aspects that should be discussed. (1) An objective part shows the extent of harm. (2) A subjective component indicates that a harmful condition has been identified and political debate ensued. And (3) an optimistic aspect suggests that people believe the condition can be improved (5).

The Church is one of the agents of poverty alleviation in the society and is being motivated by several factors such as theological background, social teaching and many others, it perceives the social problem as a reality that needs human collaboration for effective control. The theological background is one of the primary factors that motivate the Church's participation in poverty alleviation policies. There are other instances in the Scripture where God through some of His servants condemn social injustice, oppression and marginalization against the poor. Morris, commenting on Christian service writes that, “James has a biting criticism of the rich who oppress the poor, he is sure that they will come into judgement” James 5:1-6 (314).

Another factor that encourages the Church's involvement in the work of poverty alleviation is the Roman Catholic social teaching. Bane explains that these are ecclesiastical teaching documents that emanate from the bishops and primarily from the Pope (14). These documents are equally relevant to other Churches and organizations, especially for their advocacy for the right of human beings created in the divine image. In this regard, Bane writes that;

Catholic social teachings like some secular philosophies begin with a basic commitment to the equal dignity of all men and women as creatures of God, to the notion that human flourishing must be worked out in community, and to the proposition that all God's gifts are to be used for the

good of all humanity. They also articulate a special concern and love for the commitment to the promotion of Justice (15).

The basic idea underlying the concept of poverty alleviation is the search for controls to the problem of poverty. There are various terminologies used in describing these controls. Sedmak's exposition on the abstract idea of poverty alleviation points to the fact that the alleviation attached to poverty is used in a metaphorical sense showing the idea of making the pain or problem associated with poverty less severe and consequently brings relief to the poor (272). Moreover, the following analogy on poverty reduction and water in a container explains this clearer, Sedmak writes that,

Poverty reduction suggests that poverty is a quantifiable entity comparable, for example to the amount of water in a bucket or the water holding capacity of the bucket. The water level can be measured by adding or siphoning off amounts, the level can be adjusted to a satisfactory level which when applied to poverty, would mean that a degree and type of intervention can be employed to reduce the pressure and achieve an acceptable or satisfying mode of living (272).

FORMS OF POVERTY

The different types of poverty depend either on the degree of their intensity or on their causes. Some of them include: absolute poverty, relative poverty, cyclical and collective poverty. The poverty line (which is the income or consumption determinant that shows the statistical line of demarcation at which an individual is regarded as being poor or not and is very paramount in determining the concept of absolute poverty and, to some extent, that of the relative poverty). It is estimated universally at about US\$ 1 – US\$ 1.9 a day, although this can vary depending on some country's decision. Absolute poverty falls below the poverty line whereas relative poverty stands relatively above the absolute level. Gaisbauer and Kapferer, citing Cruz *et al.*, note that "absolute poverty is a concept that was introduced by the President of the World Bank Group, Robert McNamara, in the early 1970s as a condition of life so degraded by disease, illiteracy, malnutrition, and squalor as to deny its victims' basic human necessities" (172). While relative poverty, as the name implies, is contingent on the nature of deprivation. Relative poverty is primarily measured in relation to the income level of a given society or country. Like absolute poverty, relative poverty equally points to the issue of limited income. In making reference to Neuhauser's work, Townsend suggests that any income level below 50 or 60% of the average income falls within the level of relative poverty (156).

Poverty can further be classified into cyclical and collective poverty based on its duration which tends to be temporal or permanent in nature. In this regard, Hoilberg and Levy write that cyclical poverty refers to short-term poverty that affects many persons in society by natural phenomenon or poor agricultural planning. On the other hand, according to them collective poverty is long-term poverty that affects a greater portion of the population and is usually caused by economic underdevelopment due to insufficient resources to support the teeming population adequately, they added that collective poverty can be transferable from a generation to another (13538-13539).

THE MEASUREMENT OF POVERTY RATE

There are various methods of measuring poverty and these depend mainly on the nature of the material or instrument used. Generally, two methods that equally correspond to the nature of the material or instrument of measurement are prevalently used: the monetary and non-monetary methods. The monetary approach depends solely on the monetary unit as its instrument of measurement while the non-monetary approach includes the use of the monetary unit and other components of the multi-faced nature of the concept of poverty, for instance, the social and political exclusion aspects of the concept of poverty.

i) The Monetary Method of Measuring Poverty

Bosco-Ki *et al.* explain the monetary approach of poverty measurement using the utilitarian view of welfarism. Here, the level of satisfaction determines the corresponding level of welfare. However, since utility is an abstract concept, they substituted utility with tangible or measurable materials or resources like income and expenditure. Hence, poverty, from this utilitarian perspective is simply a lack of monetary resources needed for the satisfaction of the basic needs of life (82). The monetary worth of assets or belongings, especially in this contemporary period, is an apparent reality since the possessions of a greater percentage of all forms of assets including human and capital assets respond progressively to money. For instance, acquiring qualitative education or participating actively in present-day politics depends largely on the financial capacity of the participants.

ii) The Mon-monetary Method of Measuring Poverty

The non-monetary approach to poverty measurement as mentioned earlier includes the use of monetary unit of measurement and other variables of the multi-varied nature of the concept of poverty like political exclusion. Concerning this, Sedmark explains the non-monetary approach to poverty measurement in terms of social exclusion and deprivation of capacities. It points to the exclusion and denial of all forms of social benefits and associations (267-268). This is multi-dimensional in nature since it incorporates the use of income and other socio-economic and political variables in its approach to the issue of poverty. A typical example of a non-monetary approach to poverty measurement is the Human Development Index (HDI) developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). On this point, Ndiyo writes that,

The human development index is the most recent composite index devised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which measures the relative extent of deprivation in a country compared to the global standard incorporating both income and non-income factors. The extent of deprivation is computed for a country for each of the indexes in the period defined as the ratio of the difference between the country's index with regard to the global maximum and that of the difference between the global maximum and the country's" minimum (40).

However, one significant problem with it is that of quantifying capabilities which are sometimes difficult to compute empirically.

CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS OF POVERTY

There are several causes of poverty ranging from socio-political, economic, natural and human-induced and ethical factors. According to Chisinga, some of the causes of poverty consist of some deficiencies in socio-political, economic and agricultural benefits. Some instances here include inadequate education and health services, excessive population growth and low agricultural outputs and returns (76). These deficiencies really aggravate the problem of poverty in various ways, such as where low education and poor health limit the human capability and potential to function efficiently, and, in the long term, result to poverty.

Some political and social institutions are indirectly responsible for the problem of poverty in many societies because of unjust political and social policies that result in various forms of deprivation. In line with the foregoing, Khan contends that political and social systems are largely and morally responsible for the problem of poverty in many societies, especially in the areas of political and social alienation. Khan's analysis centres on the fact that negligence of duty by the political and social institutions is a form of injustice that contributes greatly towards the menace of poverty (214). An important ethical dimension to the problem of poverty is corruption. Chetwynd *et al.* argue that although corruption does not generate poverty directly but that it has some direct adverse effects on economic and governance factors and that in turn result in poverty in the lives of some poor groups in the society (1).

Humanly induced factors are instrumental in generating poverty. Human-induced havoc like incessant insecurity and violence can lead to the condition of poverty. For instance, the nefarious activities of the Boko Haram sect in some parts of Nigeria has led to the impoverishment of people who live in the affected area. An example given by Jaja shows that the activities of this religious sect have undermined the socio-economic activities in the affected regions to the extent that commercial banks have been compelled to change their normal operational hours of 8:00 am – 4:00 pm to 9:00 am – 12:00 noon. Moreover, Jaja added that people and some investors are relocating from these hunted zones to more peaceful zones (291). By inference, this mayhem is causing serious poverty in the lives of the inhabitants of these regions and to the government due to the enormous loss of lives and properties and the money that is being spent by the government in combating this crime. Poverty is one of the factors that contribute to the increase in crime waves of all kinds. Many individuals have taken to crime as situational or conditional employment and means of livelihood. These crimes can occur in various forms such as armed robbery, kidnapping, internet hacking and many others this crime constitutes a serious threat to human lives, properties and the development of the society. For this reason, Agbaeze, and Onwuka argue that any government that takes poverty alleviation seriously will in the run reduce crimes in society (27).

Gaisbauer and Kapferer opine that the social dichotomy that exists between the poor and non-poor tend to dehumanize the human person. They note that the relatively poor are grouped as lower-class citizens. This classification of the relatively poor as lower-class citizens constitutes a serious abuse to the dignity of human beings (176). This stratification delimits the access of the lower citizens from basic facilities of life. Dale avers that the poor are adversely affected in several ways such as inadequate medical care

and nutrition, emotional problems, more diseases, early death, poor accommodation, and so on. Moreover, he narrates how the poor suffer from underpaid, jobs, sometimes with occupational hazards and again that the poor have less economic and political influence than other people (723-724). Since poverty is a social problem, religion has the social capital for controlling this menace. Sherkat observes that with the help of religious socialization, religious institutions can use their value-laden means in transforming society, thereby reducing the effects of this social problem (151).

The Church and Poverty Alleviation in Anambra State

The hierocratic influence of religion, and Christianity in particular, shapes human behavior positively. Since poverty is caused by selfish human decisions, Hall argues that religious orientations can shape the lifestyles of people thereby serving as a means of social control over issues like poverty (369).

To achieve one of the primary objectives of this work which is to fathom the poverty alleviation strategies of some selected churches in Anambra State. Four hundred (400) questionnaires were distributed to the members of selected Churches in Anambra State. But two hundred and ninety-six (296) questionnaires were returned. This means that the return rate was 74%. The results were analysed and presented as shown in the following tables. Some information obtained from the personal interview was equally integrated into the discussion.

TABLE 1

Showing Respondents' Opinions on the Church Partnership with the State as Very Useful in Solving the Problem of Poverty in Anambra State

	Frequency	Percentage
SA	162	54.7%
A	97	32.8%
D	27	9%
SD	10	3.4%
Total	296	100%

Table 1 shows the degree of the respondents' opinions on the claim that the Church partnership with the State is very useful in solving the problem of poverty in Anambra State. This favourable response is partly consequent upon the goodwill of the people towards the church. Thus, 162(54.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the Church's partnership with the State is very useful in solving the problem of poverty in Anambra State. 97(32.8%) of the respondents merely agreed with the claim. Besides, 27(9%) of the respondents disagreed that Church partnership with the State is very useful in controlling the social problem of poverty in Anambra State, while 10(3.4%) of the respondents strongly disagreed with the claim. The result in Table 1 revealed that 162(54.7%) agreed that Church partnership with the State is very useful in solving the problem of poverty in Anambra State formed the highest frequency distribution. The total ratio of the frequencies and the corresponding percentages of strongly agreed and agreed i.e. 259(87.5%) is greater

than that of the total ratio of the frequencies and the corresponding percentages of disagreed and strongly agreed i.e., 37(12.4%) in the table above. Consequently, it implies that the Church's partnership with the State is therefore useful in solving the problem of poverty in Anambra State.

Furthermore, Nnoruka, in a personal interview with the researchers revealed that the Church is receiving a substantial amount of support from the State government in one of their farms called MASDEVAN Farm at Urum, Catholic Diocese of Akwa in Anambra State. This farm has given employment and trained many people in their various departments (*Oral Interview, 26/02/2018*).

As a follow-up, question 2 determines whether the Church's partnership with some private organizations is equally essential in the control of poverty in the State. The results are shown in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2
Showing Respondents' Opinions on the Church's Partnership with some Private Organization as Equally Essential in the Control of Poverty in the State

	Frequency	Percentage
SA	107	36.1%
A	152	51.4%
D	30	10.1%
SD	7	2.4%
Total	296	100%

Table 2 responses immediately above show that Church's partnership with some private organization is equally essential in controlling the poverty-index of the Anambra State. From the table that, 107(36.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the Church's partnership with some private organization is essential in the reduction of poverty in the State. Also, 152(51.4%) of the respondents merely agreed with the claim. In opposition to the foregoing, 30(10.1%) of the respondents disagreed with it, while 7(2.4%) of the respondents strongly disagreed with this position. The results in Table 2 revealed that 152(51.4%) of the respondents agreed that the Church's partnership with some private organization is equally essential in diminishing the level of poverty in the State had the highest frequency distribution.

Further analysis of all the ratios of the respondents who supported the claim that is, Strongly Agreed + Agreed) i.e. 259(87.5%) to those who opposed it (i.e. Disagreed + Strongly Disagreed) i.e. 30(10.1%) + 7(2.4%) = 37(12.5%) in Table 2 showed that majority of the respondents have a similar opinion concerning Church's partnership with some private organizations as an essential means of reducing the rate of poverty in the State. This is in line with one of the poverty alleviation policies of some churches noted above. Thus, Elekwa observes that about 44 youths were empowered by the Anglican

Church Welfare Scheme in conjunction with support from the government and some private organizations. He further writes that the beneficiaries were selected from three councils of Abuja Municipal, Bwari and Kuje and were empowered with items such as sewing machine, grinding machine generators, pumping machine, among others (Online Source, <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng> accessed 20/10/2019). Furthermore, an Oral Interview with Nwafor, the Project officer, Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral, Awka showed that Church partnership with some private organizations is equally essential in poverty reduction in Anambra State. The interviewee narrated that the Catholic Church through (JDPC) also partners with Hifa, a Non-Governmental Organization in Austria for the empowerment of the poor in the area of education and that presently they have up to 120 students benefitting from this programme (27/02/2018).

Question 3 on the questionnaire ascertains the validity of the claim that the Church's rehabilitation programmes are necessary for reducing the rate of poverty in Anambra State and the results are presented in the table below.

TABLE 3

Showing Respondents’ Opinions on the Church’s Rehabilitation Programmes as Reducing the Rate of Poverty in Anambra State

	Frequency	Percentage
SA	63	21.3%
A	163	55.1%
D	54	18.2%
SD	15	5.1%
Total	296	100%

Table 3 shows how the respondents react to the claim that the Church’s rehabilitation programmes are reducing the rate of poverty in Anambra State. It is discovered from the table, 63 (21.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the Church rehabilitation programmes are reducing the rate of poverty in Anambra State. Likewise, 163(55.1%) of the respondents merely agreed with that claim. But on the contrary, 54(18.2%) of the respondents disagreed with that claim, while 15(5.1%) of the respondent strongly disagreed with it. The summary of this table implies that 163(55.1%) of the respondents agreed that the church rehabilitation programmes are reducing the rate of poverty in Anambra State formed the highest frequency distribution.

Furthermore, the majority of the respondents 226(76.4%) of the respondents: 63(21.3%) who strongly agreed and the 163(55.1%) that merely agreed supported the claim that the Church rehabilitation programmes are essential in reducing the rate of poverty in Anambra State. Nevertheless, only 69(23.3%) of the respondents comprising the 54(18.2%) disagreed and the 15(5.1%) strongly disagreed opposed the claim. Based on this majority opinion, it can be rightly held that church rehabilitation programmes are essential to the reduction of the rate of poverty in Anambra State. The overall result in

Table 3 above is in agreement with the Philemon Ministries Project of the Protestant Church Kenya in Kangemi. Here, Ndemo explains that this is a re-integration project especially for the ex-convicts, where they are helped to be reintegrated and reconciled back to the society including their family. This is done through orientation, especially in the area of crafts they learned while in prison and according to him, some older ones among them make up to \$500 from the sale of their products within six months (454).

TABLE 4
Showing Respondents' Opinions on the Church's Involvement in some Economic Activities as being Crucial to Poverty Eradication Programme in Anambra State

	Frequency	Percentage
SA	99	33.4%
A	131	44.3%
D	34	11.5%
SD	32	10.8%
Total	296	100%

Table 4 on the above page shows the degree of the respondents' opinions on the proposition that Church's involvement in some economic activities is crucial to the poverty eradication programme. As can be gleaned from the table, 99(33.4%) of the respondents strongly agreed that church involvement in some economic activities is critical poverty eradication programme. Similarly, 131(44.3%) of the respondents merely agreed with this position. Furthermore, 34(11.5%) of the respondents disagreed with this claim, while 32(10.8%) of the respondent strongly disagreed with it. Table 4 revealed that 131(44.3%) of the respondents agreed that Church involvement in some economic activities is important to the poverty eradication programme formed the highest frequency distribution. This avers that the Church does not only have the social capital to control poverty, it also the resources to do so.

In addition to the aforementioned analyses, the data presented in Table 4 show that the majority opinion of 240(47.7%) comprising of the 99(33.4%) that strongly agreed and the 131(44.3%) that merely agreed outnumbered with a very great difference that of those that opposed that very claim, and this showed very vividly that Church involvement in some economic activities is an essential poverty eradication programme. An Oral Interview with Arinze further validates this claim. The interviewee narrated that the Anglican Cathedral Church of Saint John, Ekwulobia, in Anambra State engages in several economic activities as one of the ways of controlling the problem of poverty in the State, especially in the area unemployment. He explained that some of these economic activities include the production of Lampada Sachet and Bottled Water in Agulu-Ezechukwu, Aguata Diocesan Printing Press in Oko, Cassava Processing Plant in Okpoeze, Piggery Farm in Ezira, among others (23/02/2018).

TABLE 5**Showing Respondents' Opinions on the Church's Health Service in the State as Affordable to the Poor**

	Frequency	Percentage
SA	41	13.9%
A	78	26.4%
D	104	35.1%
SD	73	24.7%
Total	296	100%

The results in Table 5 show the respondent's view on the assertion that the Church's health service in the State is affordable to the poor and hence helps in the reduction of health-related poverty. 41(13.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the church health service in the state is affordable to the poor. 78(26.4%) of the respondents merely agreed with that claim. 104(35.1%) of the respondents disagreed with it, while 73(24.7%) of the respondent strongly disagreed with the claim. This implies that 104(35.1%) of the respondents who disagreed that the Church health service in the state is affordable to the poor formed the highest frequency distribution.

Furthermore, Table 5 also revealed that the number of respondents that supported the view that the Church's health service in the state is not affordable to the poor, i.e. $104(35.1\%) + 73(24.7\%) = 177(59.8\%)$ are greater than those that consented to it, that is, $41(13.9\%) + 78(26.4\%) = 119(40.3\%)$ showing also that the Church health service in the state is not affordable to the poor. This is not supposed to be the case since the State Government has, on many occasions, offered substantial support to some Churches in the State as part of its poverty alleviation policies. This is because the former state government, under Mr. Peter Obi, spent a huge sum of money in their efforts to support the Churches in some of their poverty alleviation programmes. On one of such several interventions, the State government presented cheques totaling ₦743 million and ₦1.450 billion to both the Anglican Archbishop of the Province on the Niger and the Archbishop of Onitsha Catholic Diocese (Obi, 142). Moreover, the state government presented other tangible cheques to several other mission hospitals in the state and some of them include a cheque of 30 million nairas to the Catholic Bishop of Awka Diocese, Paulinus Ezeokafor for the construction of modern maternity at the visitation hospital, Umuchu. Furthermore, cheques of 30 million nairas each were given to the Anglican Diocesan Hospital, Umunze and Child Healthcare Centre, Ugwuagba respectively for the construction of maternities in their hospital (Obi, 206-207).

The sixth and last table probes the claim that the empowerment of the members of the Church is equally an essential anti-poverty policy.

TABLE 6**Showing Respondents' Opinions on the Empowerment of the Members of the Church's as Equally a Part of Anti-poverty Policy**

	Frequency	Percentage
SA	123	41.6%
A	134	45.3%
D	31	10.5%
SD	8	2.7%
Total	296	100%

Table 6 shows how the Respondents' opinions evaluate the claim that the empowerment of the members of the Church is equally part of anti-poverty policy. The table shows that 123(41.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the empowerment of the members of the Church is an important anti-poverty policy. While 134(45.3%) of the respondents merely agreed with it. However, 31(10.5%) of the respondents disagreed with that claim, while 8(2.7%) of the respondent strongly disagreed with it. Therefore, 134(45.3%) of the respondents that merely agreed that the empowerment of the members of the church is equally an essential anti-poverty policy constituted the highest frequency distribution.

Further analysis of all the figures in Table 6 above shows that the number of the respondents with positive view concerning the question in that table as can be derived from their total frequencies and the corresponding percentages, that is $123(41.6\%) + 134(45.3\%) = 257(86.9\%)$ exceeded that of those with negative responses to the same question as can equally be seen from their frequencies and percentages respectively, that is, $31(10.5\%) + 8(2.7\%) = 39(13.2\%)$, showing that empowerment of the members of the church is equally an important anti-poverty policy.

In an Oral Interview with Nwafor, the Respondent explained that their Church (Saint Michael's and All Angels Anglican Church, Ifite-Awka) has several welfare and empowerment schemes and that some of them include the grant package where the Church gives money to some of her members to start a small-scale business, soft loan, bailout fund –where the person may not necessarily be poor or indigent but may even be a working-class citizen and sometimes maybe in dire need of money to solve some pressing needs such as children's school fees, house rent, among other things. He explained further that the grant is given once the applicant becomes successful in an interview by the Monitoring Committee instituted by the church (27/02/2018).

CONCLUSION

The social teachings of the Church resonate with the ecclesiastical corporate responsibility towards the poor. Indeed, the poor will always be in human society because of structural injustice, corruption, mismanagement of resources, and other adversities that plague humankind. Thus, the Church has an important role to play in the reduction of Nigerian poverty-index. Its social capital and ability to properly manage the development of the less privileged and the poor make ecclesiastical institutions veritable partner in the poverty alleviation initiatives. Thus, this work shows that the Church has reduced the

poverty-index of people in Anambra State through partnering with NGOs and the government in its Justice, Development and Peace Department and similar bodies. However, this research indicates that much needs to be done as regards the subsidizing the medical care in its hospitals so that the poor could receive health services they can afford.

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