

The Role of the Church in Annexing Entrepreneurship for Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Poverty implies lack, shortage, and deficiency, among others, depicting the need for material and capital resources. Poverty in Nigerian society has brought about underdevelopment and a persistent increase in crime rate among the Nigerian youth, thus leading to insecurity of lives and properties. The good act of poverty alleviation is a series of actions, plans, and or endeavours put in place by society, individuals, and or government to eradicate poverty among the members of the society. As a way of fighting against poverty, the teaching of entrepreneurship has permeated the church landscape, whereby the church now becomes leading personnel in entrepreneurship discourse in the society to eradicate poverty among church members and society in general through its entrepreneurship and skill acquisition programs. The paper examined the church's role in poverty alleviation in Nigeria by annexing entrepreneurship. The primary focus of the church was the Redeemed Christian Church of God. The study employed historical, descriptive, and participatory observation methods. It was discovered that the teaching of entrepreneurship is common among 21st-century Nigerian churches where members are educated on the importance of being self-independent, self-reliant, self-improvement, and the ability to make wealth, which is targeted at poverty alleviation. Hence, the study recommended that Nigerian churches engage in more elaborate programs, such as collaborating with organizations or firms to promote entrepreneurial spirit aimed at poverty alleviation.

KEYWORDS

Church; Entrepreneurship; Nigeria; Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG); Poverty Alleviation.

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Introduction

Poverty in the Nigerian society impedes growth and sustainable development. Over the years, the rate of poverty has been on a high increase, affecting the production level and increasing the level of crime rate within the Nigerian society. Poverty in Nigeria and the world at large is approaching the level of an epidemic. Globally, billions of people are living in extreme poverty. According to the World Bank's definition of poverty, around one billion people make less than \$1.90 daily. A household's daily income is less than \$2.50 for half of the world's population³. Uche and Udogu⁴ opined that poverty is the inability to pay the necessities of existence. It is typically linked to rural locations with low economic activity and production levels. Most rural areas have low income levels due to limited financial and productive activity, which makes it difficult for residents to meet their basic needs. Although poverty has always existed, its importance has evolved over time.

Ngwoke⁵ -opined that Nigeria's poverty crisis has gotten so bad that some families are unable to feed their children twice a day, and the percentage of young people without jobs is constantly increasing. In addition, several people, particularly those living in rural areas, lack access to necessities such as clean water, basic healthcare, and education. The results are hunger, lack of access to healthcare, and some student dropouts. In fact, the economic situation within Nigerian society keeps deteriorating day after day.

According to Kunhiyop⁶ "Africa is the only part of the developing world where living standards have fallen over the past decade." Most African nations, including Nigeria, have seen a steady but unabated deterioration in their standard of living. Due to the high increase in the poverty rate and the continuous imbalances within the Nigerian society, the need to be self-skilled with different entrepreneurial skills such as business skill, leadership skill, communication and listening skills, and other handiworks leads to self-independence, self-reliance and self-provision of individuals or groups of individuals, thus, has become the turning point of Nigerian economic maladies. Despite the growth of entrepreneurial discourse and adoption within the school system and society generally, the poverty rate keeps pushing beyond a bearing point in Nigeria, therefore putting the future of Nigeria at stake. Almost every household in Nigerian society has enrolled their children in learning one handiwork or the other, such as tailoring, carpentry, shoemaking, computer skills, printing, and hairdressing/barbing, among several others, after returning from their various schools.

The church is a society within a society and an organisation within a larger organisation that houses a great population through its theology and promise of a glorious future. Since the church controls a larger percentage of the population, it becomes necessary to organise programmes and intervene in eradicating poverty through its diverse theology of peace, hope and prosperity. The church is known for its spiritual business, which finds expression in evangelism

³ ADDISION, T. & DEMMEY, L. *The Alleviation of Poverty under Structural Adjustment*. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2009. p. 18.

⁴ UCHE, C. O.; UDOGU, P. A. "The Role of the Church in Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria." *Nigerian Journal of Arts and Humanities (NJAHA)*, Volume 2 Number 1, p. 26-35, 2022. p. 26.

⁵ NGWOKE, N. P. "The Church and Poverty Alleviation Programme in Nigeria". *Andah Journal*, Vol.11, p. 43-56, 2018. p. 44.

⁶ KUNHIYOP, S. W. *Contemporary Issues Facing Christians in Africa*. Jos: Baraka Press and Publishers Ltd., 2003. p. 50-55.

or mission engagements. It has been among the important stakeholders contributing to society's socio-political, spiritual and economic development. Nigeria is a home for most evangelicals in West Africa. However, there is a paradigm shift in the church theology to discourse on entrepreneurship. The church is a fast-growing religious enterprise in Nigerian society.

Nigeria houses the fourth-highest concentration of evangelicals worldwide, and it may even be the third. The number of Catholics, Anglicans, orthodox Protestants, and more recent Pentecostal and Charismatic groups is increasing⁷. Elias⁸ observed that churches have spearheaded the push to educate the populace in the past. The educational system that is in place in most nations has its origins in the church. Churches like the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutherans, to mention a few, have significantly impacted many people's lives through education.

In contemporary Nigerian society, churches have engaged their members through various programmes that help alleviate poverty. In fact, leading Pentecostal churches, including the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Deeper Life Bible Church, and Living Faith Church, among others, have taken the lead in incorporating entrepreneurship in their sermons and programmes. The church not only preaches that God gives wealth but has also strategized mediums for alleviating poverty among its members. The submission of Max Webber on "Protestant Ethics" makes it clear that the church has since a long time ago incorporated economic improvement, improvement in the standard of living and poverty alleviation schemes in teachings to improve the lives of members, which in turn affects the society.

The study employed historical, descriptive, and participatory observation methods. The historical data was derived from books, journals, and online materials, which were adequately engaged within the scope of the paper. The paper adequately references the areas obtained from the historical method mentioned earlier. To further engage the discussion, the authors, through participatory observations, described the church's involvement in enhancing and liberating members from economic hardships.

The study aims to examine the church's role in annexing entrepreneurship for poverty alleviation in Nigerian society. However, it is pertinent to say what is the place of entrepreneurship among contemporary churches? Is the church encouraging entrepreneurial spirit among members? What are the roles of the church in poverty alleviation? Are there biblical inferences to entrepreneurship? The study examines the questions under the theoretical framework, definitions of terms, the church and entrepreneurship in contemporary society, roles of the church in poverty alleviation through entrepreneurship and conclusion,

Theoretical Framework

Max Weber's work on Protestant ethics charts the evolution of the church from its traditional focus to one that is more engaged with the financial security of both its members and the community in which it exists. The Protestant Ethic by Weber demonstrates how the values

⁷ Operation World (n.d).

⁸ ELIAS, M. "The role of the church in economic development and the separation of the church and the state", April 2012.

espoused by Protestant organizations affected people's behaviour in both social and commercial contexts. His discussion focused on the "sense of purpose" held by Protestants and how it related to business. Weber sets up his argument by saying nothing in modern times, Protestants are more likely to be businessmen, as well as skilled workers than are Catholics⁹. Protestants maintain strong moral standards and a business-oriented mindset, unlike Catholics. Ayantayo¹⁰ further opines that Weber's definition of capitalism embodies a spirit of development and determination that ultimately gave rise to religious piety. The ethics of the early Protestants encouraged hard work and innovation and shunned extravagant lifestyles and wastage. To Weber, work is a calling. Dairo¹¹ noted, "Only in social groups that share Protestant ethical principles can entrepreneurship flourish. This ascetic denial, which forbids the personal use of business profit and instead encourages greater investment in new ventures, combined with specialisation in one's vocation and hard work are requirements of the consecrated life." To achieve this goal, the theory's adoption for the study examines how the church upholds the doctrine of works and money theology by encouraging its members and the community to engage in profitable business ventures and develop entrepreneurial abilities, all contributing to the social order.

Definitions of Terms

a. Church

Abolaji¹² cited Anjov that the word church has different interpretations that include the following literal meaning: *ekklesia* literally means "called out," yet to what extent this sense applied in its general usage is unclear. It was a political term used to refer to an assembly of citizens who were "called out" for a particular purpose. Abolaji¹³ citing Bullinger, states that this word was used "of any assembly, but especially of citizens, or of a selection of them, burgesses." In the New Testament, the word is used 115 times, 3 of which it is translated as "assembly" and 112 as "church," it teaches that those who follow Christ are "called out" by the gospel (2 Thess. 2:13-14) NKJV). The word church as used in this study was referred to Redeemed Christian Church of God. The Redeemed Christian Church of God is a leading Pentecostal movement in Nigerian society and has spread worldwide. Adedibu¹⁴ categorised this church as a megachurch. He further states that Nigerian megachurches are known for their extravagant buildings, innovative religious practices, inventiveness, and community development projects – Nigerian megachurches' dedication to development results from the theological and socio-economic themes surrounding them.

⁹ PARSONS, T. (Trans.). *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. USA: Roxbury Publishing Company, 1996. p. viii.

¹⁰ AYANTAYO, J. K. *Sociology of Religion in African Context: a Pragmatic Approach*. Ibadan: Joystar Prints and Company, 2023. p. 91)

¹¹ DAIRO, A. O. *Entrepreneurship Skills: A Guide to Small Business Management*. Ilorin: Amazing-Grace Prints Media, 2018. p. 5.

¹² ABOLAJI S. Tosin. "The Role of Christ Apostolic Church Youth Fellowship to the Growth of CAC in Ilorin Metropolis" (B.A. diss., University of Ilorin, 2022).

¹³ ABOLAJI, 2022, p. 13

¹⁴ ADEDIBU, Babatunde Aderemi. *Nigerian Pentecostal Megachurches and Development: A Diaconal Analysis of the Redeemed Christian Church of God*. *Religions*, 14, 70, p. 1-12, 2023.

b. Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is derived from the French entrepreneur, meaning “to undertake”. It is the dynamic process of creating incremental wealth¹⁵. Dairo¹⁶ cited Abraham, argued that “entrepreneurship has to do with a conceptual approach of doing new things, within a new philosophy of value, of purpose, of utility and of quality and use which satisfies needs. Byjus¹⁷ opines that the capacity and willingness to create, plan, and manage a business venture – along with all its uncertainties – to turn a profit is what is known as entrepreneurship. The creation of new companies is the most well-known instance of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is a business discourse within the framework of the church that emphasises biblical ethics and practices in day-to-day business activities to improve the well-being of the members. Entrepreneurship aims to motivate and direct people toward financial independence and communal advancement by fusing biblical ideas with business activities. It highlights that they are divinely commanded activities, including stewardship, creativity, innovation, and ethical resource usage. Seeing business as a tool to serve God and humanity, this theological viewpoint connects entrepreneurial pursuits with a greater purpose. Turnbull¹⁸ suggested that entrepreneurship is linked to a divine enterprise. By divine enterprise, Turnbull¹⁹ means that people who make money and take risks in their businesses portray God’s nature, which is reflected in them.

In the church domain, entrepreneurship uses biblical principles and teachings to uphold ethical conduct in businesses and encourage entrepreneurial spirit in members. One of the most familiar passages used to maintain business ethics in the bible is Proverbs 11, which states, “A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight” (Proverbs 11:1, ESV). While the book of Proverbs is essential to the understanding of business ethics, Prophet Amos also re-echoes this in Amos 8:4-6:

Hear this, you who trample on the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying, ‘When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and sell the chaff of the wheat?’ (Amos 8:4-6, ESV).

Both the books of Proverbs and Amos provide evidence of a divine interest in the business of the day, where ethical and moral values must be displayed among the people of God. Entrepreneurship resonates with virtues such as honesty, transparency, innovation, risk-taking and the fear of God.

¹⁵ DAIRO, 2018, p. 11.

¹⁶ DAIRO, 2018, p. 12.

¹⁷ BYJUS, (n.d.). “Entrepreneurship – Types of Entrepreneurships.” Retrieved 29th July 2024 from <https://byjus.com/commerce/what-is-entrepreneurship/>.

¹⁸ TURNBULL, R. “A biblical theology of work, Part 4: Enterprise and entrepreneurship”, 2021. Retrieved 29th July 2024 from <https://rlo.acton.org/archives/122068-a-biblical-theology-of-work-part-4-enterprise-and-entrepreneurship.html>.

¹⁹ TURNBULL, 2021.

c. Poverty Alleviation

Alamu²⁰ asserted that poverty has some connotations, such as starvation, destitution, hunger, and suffering. Taiwo and Agwu²¹ define poverty thus:

A condition where an individual cannot adequately cater to their basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter, and cannot meet social and economic obligations. Lacks gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem; has limited access to social and economic infrastructure (such as education, health, potable water and sanitation) and consequently has a limited chance of advancing their welfare to the limit of their potential and capabilities.

The above view is corroborated by George²². George²³ opined that a lack of control over necessities for essential consumption is referred to as poverty. This typically happens when there is insufficient consumption, which results in a lack of food, clothing, shelter, and specific abilities like the ability to engage in society with dignity. On the other hand, poverty alleviation is an endeavour to ensure that a person or a society is rescued from the shackles of poverty. The term “poverty alleviation” describes the initiatives, plans, and laws designed to lessen or end poverty (ScienceDirect, n.d.). Bleisner²⁴ opined that poverty alleviation aims to put poverty, at least in its dangerous forms, behind us. This can be achieved through the efforts of the government, nongovernmental groups, private citizens, and corporate entities.

Poverty in the Nigerian society: An Impediment to Economic Development

Poverty in Nigerian society calls for serious discussions among necessary stakeholders such as the government, non-governmental agencies, developmental sectors such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) and religious organisations. The issue of poverty is a bane that has hindered the growth and development of Nigerian society. Dairo and Abolaji²⁵ cited National Bureau Statistics (2022) that:

Sixty-three per cent (63%) of persons living in Nigeria (133 million people) are multi-dimensionally poor. The National MPI is 0.257, indicating that poor people in Nigeria experience just over one-quarter of all possible deprivations. Sixty-five per cent (65%) of people with low incomes (86 million people) live in the North, while 35% (nearly 47 million) live in the South. Poverty levels across States vary significantly, with the incidence of multidimensional poverty ranging from a low of 27% in Ondo to a high of 91% in Sokoto.

²⁰ ALAMU, G. A. *Religion and Public Affairs in Nigeria*. Ilorin: K-Success Prints Media, 2021. p. 99.

²¹ TAIWO, J. N.; AGWU, M. E. “Problems and prospects of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria.” *International Journal of Business and Management Review*, 4(6), p. 18-30, 2016. p. 19.

²² GEORGE, E. “Poverty, Good Governance and Development in Nigeria” S. Orngu, S. & Wuam, T. (eds.). *Tiv Politics and National Development: Issues and Perspectives*. Lapai: Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida University, 2013.

²³ GEORGE, 2013, p. 16.

²⁴ BLEISNER, E. C. *Prosperity and Poverty: The Compassionate use of Resources in a World of Scarcity*. Westchester: Crossway, 2008. p. 185.

²⁵ DAIRO, A. O.; ABOLAJI, T. S. The Impact of Nigerian Economic Downturn on Christian Worship: A Case of African Indigenous Churches, *Religions Educator*, Vol. 22, no. 1., p. 99-107, 2023. p. 104.

Poverty has made many Nigerians live in misery. At least, an average household in Nigerian society strives to eat at most two times a day, while the masses strive to eat once a day. The reason for this rationale is because of the devastating condition of the Nigerian economy. Alamu²⁶ opines that there is nothing to cheer about in the Nigerian economy, which has been characterised by economic instability, hyperinflation and policy. He further affirmed that instead of experiencing economic growth as a nation, the opposite becomes the case. The opposite here in the submission of Alamu can be seen as economic degradation or stagnation.

Uche and Udogu²⁷ state that despite Nigeria's abundant oil and agricultural resources, poverty affects a more significant proportion of the country's population. Nigeria ranks sixth among the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in crude oil exports, and it is the world's tenth-largest producer of the commodity. Furthermore, plentiful deposits of solid minerals have mainly gone unexplored. Nigeria has regressed to become one of the world's poorest countries despite its natural resources not bringing its people a better living or greater prosperity.

Apart from inflation, another significant link to the growth and spread of poverty in Nigerian society is the issue of bad government. According to Ehusani²⁸, the so-called "all-powerful" people who amass, exploit, embezzle, misappropriate, and grow to such an elastic limit that even the nation's very concept becomes a victim of circumstances resulting from their personal choices are among the reasons for the rise in the poverty rate. Here, Nigeria splits apart, its souls take a vacation, and its people can do nothing except ponder over the past, present, and future. Alamu²⁹ further stressed the view of Ehusani that many influential people, both military and civilian, have taken control of the political and economic spheres, leaving the public with no other options. Poverty has now become "our culture." Onukwuba³⁰ observes that Nigeria has generated oil worth several hundred billion dollars since gaining independence in 1960, yet the average Nigerian has received shockingly little benefit from this prosperity. The leading cause of this scenario is that a large portion of Nigeria's enormous oil riches has been stolen or misappropriated by military and civilian administrations. Between 1960 and 1999, when President Obasanjo took office, the nation may have lost up to \$380 billion due to corruption and waste, according to the former chairman of Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission³¹.

At every election, Nigerians hope to see a messiah who can save the country from political and economic blights. However, the higher the expectations, the greater the disappointments as Nigerians continue to move into different states of financial turbulence. Since 2015, Nigeria has not experienced any economic stability; instead, it has been growing from a state of rescue to another state of rescue. That is, every election comes with the hope of rescuing the Nigerian economy from denigration. This, among several others, has not only paved the way for an increase in poverty level but has made most Nigerians a poor entity. Nigerians have exercised their right to 'street protest' to raise the government's awareness of poverty. However, these protests have, in the time past, had little or no effect, as many of these ended in deadlock.

²⁶ ALAMU, 2021, p. 124.

²⁷ UCHE; UDOGU, 2022, p. 28.

²⁸ EHUSANI, George. *Nigeria: More years eaten by locusts*. Nigeria: Adonis & Abbey Publishers, 2002, p. 155.

²⁹ ALAMU, 2021, p. 100.

³⁰ ONUKWUBA, M. C. "Poverty in Nigeria: The Role of The Church." *Journal of Positive School Psychology*. Vol. 6, No. 8, p. 1253-1260, 2022. p. 1254.

³¹ Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (BBC, 2006)

Brief History of the Redeemed Christian Church of God

The first General Overseer of The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Josiah Olufemi Akindayomi, was born in 1909 in Ondo State, Nigeria, into the Akindayomi family. Even though Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron and war, was widely worshipped where he was raised, Josiah sensed from a young age that he was unique and that there was a higher power at work. He yearned to know the real God who created the earth and all living things (RCCG History, n.d.). Adeboye³² observed that when Olufemi became literate in Yoruba and took on the name Josiah as a symbol of his Christian identity in 1927, when he was eighteen years old, he was baptised at the Anglican Church. He left the Anglican Church four years later to join the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Church in Ondo. Most of the C&S's first congregation in Ondo was made up of ex-members of the province's mainline churches when it was first launched in 1927. For the inaugural Ondo C&S, Christiana Olatunrinde was the mentor, and G. O. Fajiyé was the matron in the St. Stephen's Anglican Church in Ondo, where they both served as lay leaders.

Reverend Akindayomi was called to serve God when he was still a Cherubim and Seraphim Church member. He disregarded this calling for several years until financial setbacks forced him to confess his sins. This season marked a sea change in his relationship with God for him. With humility, he decided to submit to God's will and purpose in every way, praying for supernatural confirmation of a call to ministry. The Holy Scriptures ultimately provided him with the affirmation he was looking for. He was also becoming increasingly troubled by certain doctrinal teachings of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church by 1947, and in 1952, he was utterly convinced to resign³³. In 1952, the Redeemed Christian Church of God was established, having been chosen by the Lord to conquer the globe. The church convened at 9 Willoughby Street until they could purchase some land. They then moved to 1-5 Redemption Way, Ebute-Metta, Lagos, now the church's headquarters, formerly Cemetery Street³⁴.

Okanlawon³⁵ opines that one of Pa Akindayomi's translators, Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye, served as a mathematics lecturer at the University of Lagos, Nigeria until being controversially elected as the RCCG's General Overseer in 1981 following Pa Akindayomi's passing. The Rolls Royce Phantom, Land Rover Discovery, and Mercedes Benz Gelandewagen are among the three high-end vehicles that Adeboye possesses, and his net worth is estimated to be between 39 and 65 million US dollars. He also owns many homes and two private jets.

Currently, God continues to work wonders through the Redeemed Christian Church of God all around the world. The Holy Ghost service is a popular church event that takes place every month on the first Friday at the Redemption Camp, located at Km. 46 on the Lagos-Ibadan expressway. It is an all-night miraculous service. About 500,000 people attend the Service on

³² ADEBOYE, O. "Origin and Expansion of the Redeemed Christian Church of God". In: Faseke, M. (ed.). *Enoch Adejare Adeboye: The Story Behind the Glory*. Lagos: CIBN Press, 2011, p. 53-85.

³³ Jesus House Jamaica, n.d.

³⁴ RCCG. org., n.d.

³⁵ OKANLAWON, S. O. "Churchpreneurship in the Nigerian Socio-Economic Space with particular Reference to the Redeemed Christian Church of God and Living Faith Church Worldwide." *International Journal of Religions and Traditions (IJRT)*, Vol. 4(01) 23, p. 32-41, 2018. p. 34.

average. These days, the Holy Ghost Service is held worldwide, including in the UK, India, USA, Canada, South Africa, Australia, Dubai, Ghana, the Philippines, and many more. Adeboye³⁶ observed that the founding of the Redemption Camp and its subsequent extension serve as a key barometer for the RCCG's growth. The Redemption Camp began as a prayer camp in 1983, far from the bustle of Lagos, but it has since grown into a contemporary city. It features lovely residential areas with streets called after biblical registers and a university, bible college, elementary school, and secondary school. It features a post office, banks, supermarkets, eateries, guesthouses, and a clinic. These are all on top of the standard church facilities, which include the RCCG's ten parishes, a massive auditorium spanning three kilometres by three kilometres, dorms, and other prayer spaces.

The Roles of the Church in Poverty Alleviation through Entrepreneurship

By incorporating entrepreneurship into its ministry, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) has substantially contributed to reducing poverty in Nigeria.

1. Entrepreneurship Education and Training

Entrepreneurship Education and Training (EET) refers to the structured procedures that provide business owners with the knowledge and abilities they need to succeed in their endeavours. In other words, an entrepreneurial education and training program is perceived as a methodical process that involves imparting knowledge, training, discipline, and other techniques aimed at changing behaviour, habits, and attitudes towards a specific goal³⁷. Programs for education and training in entrepreneurship are offered by RCCG. These programmes aim to give participants the abilities and information to launch and run enterprises successfully. Regularly scheduled events include workshops, seminars, and career training sessions that cover various topics related to entrepreneurship, such as financial management, marketing tactics, and business development.

2. Financial Support and Microfinance Initiatives

Ojone³⁸ opines that providing financial services to the highly impoverished through microfinance has become a burgeoning industry. It refers to providing financial services tailored to low-income individuals' needs, such as those of micro-entrepreneurs. It relates to granting modest loans, accepting little savings deposits, and supplying essential payment services that micro-entrepreneurs and other individuals require. Through microfinance programs, the church provides small loans and grants to congregation members, allowing them to launch or grow their businesses. RCCG assists in removing one of the main obstacles to entrepreneurship: limited capital. Oladeji (2018), the Haggai Mortgage Bank is owned by the Redeemed Christian

³⁶ ADEBOYE, 2011.

³⁷ Genty et al., 2014:12.

³⁸ OJONE, J. E. "Religious Importance of Microfinance Bank: A Christian Perspective." *International Journal of Scientific and Management Research* Volume 6 Issue 07, p. 50-70, 2023. p. 52.

Church of God. The bank works “with masters’ builders to touch lives by providing quality mortgage services and homes”³⁹.

3. Mentorship and Networking Opportunities

To assist more inexperienced business owners, leaders frequently choose mentorship responsibilities. The motivation behind this mentorship stems from religious teachings about neighbourly kindness, primarily the desire to see others prosper. Entrepreneurs have the chance to network, exchange ideas, and work together on projects at regular community events, whether they take place in person or virtually. Beyond simple business transactions, there is a sense of fellowship and purpose to these relationships; they are not just transactional⁴⁰. Within the church community, RCCG links together budding entrepreneurs with seasoned businesspeople. This mentorship program creates a supportive and guidance-giving atmosphere for budding business owners by encouraging the exchange of knowledge and experience. The church also provides opportunities for members to network and work together through business conferences and activities.

4. Promotion of Ethical Business Practices

Promoting ethical business practices can be classified as Christian Social Responsibility (CSR). This classification is because Christians are taught in churches and places of gatherings to be of high moral standards in their workplaces. The idea of Christian Social Responsibility in the RCCG community is to impact the community through the display of love. As defined by the Global Sustainable Development Goals, Christian social responsibility is an externally based community relations project within the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). It also aids in demonstrating to the poor Christ’s love. Furthermore, it aids in demonstrating to the poor Christ’s love. Eight distinguishable pillars known as SHEMBAGS comprise the CSR effort. This abbreviation represents the following fields: sports, governance, art/entertainment, business, social health, education, and media (RCCG Dominion Sanctuary, n.d.). RCCG encourages moral corporate conduct grounded in Christian principles through lectures and teachings. Focusing on social responsibility, honesty, and integrity encourages business owners to operate in ways that benefit their local communities and society.

5. Support for Women and Youth Entrepreneurs

RCCG is committed to using entrepreneurship to empower women and young people. These groups confront obstacles addressed by projects and programs designed to give them the tools and assistance they need to thrive in the commercial environment. This emphasis supports young empowerment and gender equality inside the church and the larger community.

³⁹ African Union for Housing, n.d.

⁴⁰ Faster Capital, 2024.

6. Creation of Job Opportunities

The Redeemed Christian Church of God is one of the mega-churches that have contributed immensely to its society by providing jobs such as the establishment of schools, health facilities, and business centres, which are made available for rent to engage members of the community. Okanlawon (2018:34) writes:

Health institutions operated by the RCCG include, but are not limited to: Healing Stripes Hospital, Victoria Island, Lagos, Wellspring Rehabilitation Centre, Ojodu; Christ Against Drug Abuse Ministry, Ikeja (CRADAM); House of Joy, Surulere; New Life Drug Addicts Rehabilitation Centre, Lekki; Redeemed Christian Church of God Maternity Centre, Ibadan; RCCG Health Centre, Ogun State, among others.

RCCG promotes entrepreneurship, which helps to create jobs. Successful companies founded by churchgoers frequently result in the establishment of job possibilities for other community members. This promotes economic growth and development in addition to lowering unemployment. It is pertinent to say that education helps eradicate illiteracy in the Nigerian society. The establishment of primary and tertiary schools in the country has contributed to the country's educational sector, thus helping eliminate illiteracy. Some of the churches in the regions also place some students on scholarships in the rural areas.

7. Agricultural role

The church has served as landowners who temporarily gave out land portions to individuals, either church members or members of the society, to farm on or make a living from it. Agriculture is crucial to national development since it involves providing food, shelter, and clothing for members of the society. Anozie⁴¹ cited Onuora that:

Agriculture has gone a long way in producing food for man and animals in Nigeria. The church has also given its support to benefit its members and the country. Consequently, it is the source of raw materials for domestic industries and exports. Above all, agriculture has paved the way for entrepreneurs to come. Owing to this fact, it is essential for the church always to teach – all hands on the plough⁴² for economic development.

The “Bible and the Plough” principle adopted by the early missionaries aided the missionary activities in success among the people of Africa. Mega churches such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) allow church members or members of the public to cultivate land to improve their economic status. Hunger is evidence of economic illness and poverty. Thus, providing agricultural support in distributing food items gives land for temporary use. Ojighoro⁴² cited Webster that “the cultivation of cocoa was encouraged on a large scale among Christians at Agege, Ondo and Ibadan, and the success of the vast cocoa plantations at Agege

⁴¹ ANOZIE, E. E. “Christian Church: A Catalyst for Economic Development in Nigeria”, *An International Multi-disciplinary Journal*, Ethiopia Vol. 7 (4), Serial No. 31, September, 2013.

⁴² OJIGHORO, R. E. “The Role of Christianity in Nigerian Economic and Socioreligious Development.” *Abraka Journal of Religion and Philosophy*, Vol. 1 Number 1, December, 2021.

was in no small measure due to the imagination and sustained efforts of the African Church movement.”

Conclusion

Poverty has led to many mishaps, such as killing, kidnapping, stealing and other fraudulent acts in Nigerian society. The economic condition of the society continues to deteriorate as unemployment, inflation, and bad governance continue to sabotage the Nigerian economy. The hope of the masses becomes jettisoned at the expense of the milky rich who control the nation's affairs. Poverty has not only been a 'visitor' to the Nigerians but, instead, it has become the 'our culture' which at least an average Nigerian must battle within one's daily activities.

During this turbulent situation, the theology of the kingdom expansion (Heaven) through the evangelistic act of the church became so prominent. However, with the increasing rate of poverty and its undeniable effects on society and the church, the 21st-century Nigerian churches realised the need to annex entrepreneurship to its dogma. Adogame⁴³ suggested that the church should begin to pick interest in 'Spiritual Entrepreneurship' in the global south, particularly in Nigerian society, to combat poverty and its adverse effects. He further states, "Due to the harsh economic situation in Africa and the world, Pentecostal and charismatic churches should consider shifting from providing only 'spiritual food' to 'real food' for their congregations."

The church, such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God, has, over the years, championed the incorporation of entrepreneurship into church beliefs and practices. The church has been involved in poverty alleviation programmes such as entrepreneurship education and training, financial support and microfinance initiatives, mentorship and networking opportunities, promotion of ethical business practices, support for women and youth entrepreneurs, and creation of job opportunities and agricultural roles. Through these multidimensional roles, RCCG successfully incorporates entrepreneurship into its purpose and significantly contributes to poverty reduction in Nigeria. The church is a key player in changing lives and communities by providing people with the knowledge, tools, and moral basis required for successful entrepreneurship.

Recommendations

The study, after critical examination, recommends the following:

1. The church should partner with successful business tycoons to create a viable network between the church and society.
2. Encourage the creation of social companies that meet society's needs and make money simultaneously. By offering market access, coaching, and seed money, churches can help these businesses thrive and provide a long-term model for reducing poverty.

⁴³ ADOGAME, A. Churches Should Shift from Spiritual to Real Food." Retrieved 30th July 2024 from <https://run.edu.ng/churches-should-shift-from-spiritual-to-real-food-professor-of-religious-studies/>.

3. The church should further engage the government, stakeholders and developmental planners in economic matters to ensure prompt response to financial challenges in the society.
4. The church should intensify its contributions at the local and national levels to enhance national development in Nigerian society.
5. Attention should be given to special groups, such as women and youth, regarding empowerment and development.

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