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Information Dissemination and Poverty Alleviation for Sustainable Development: Role of the Church

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Abstract

Poverty is a global social problem capable of bringing the worst behaviour out of people: Corruption, sexual decadence, bribery, diseases, educational deprivation, domestic abuse, unemployment, drug abuse and many more. The aforementioned consequences of poverty are traceable to lack of information or inability of people to access relevant information needed for sustainable development. Therefore, the church has a role to play in the development of the people as they engage in providing and disseminating information that could help alleviate poverty. This study aimed at ascertaining information sources provided by the Church, the medium of information dissemination by the church, finding out strategies/programs engaged by the Church towards alleviating poverty and to suggest strategies to improve poverty alleviation in the nation. The study adopted survey research design. The population of study was Christian churches. Pastors were the respondents of the study. Data was collected using self-developed structured questionnaire. It is believed that this study will serve as an eye-opener to some Churches and other religious bodies to see the need to engage in poverty and unemployment eradication. It would also create awareness to the Nigerian government on the impact of the Church in national development and thereby support the church for its sustainability. The study therefore recommended for the Church to take responsibility in making available physical libraries and electronic information centres where people can easily access information.

Keywords

Nigerian Church, Tools, Information Dissemination, Poverty Alleviation, Sustainable Development

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Introduction

Information aids national development. Availability of timely and up-to-date information is vital in the day-to-day activities of human being because it helps in decision-making and reduce uncertainty. Access to information is a fundamental human right. The availability of the right information can go a long way in empowering individuals because information is power. Information can be available or provided either through creation or acquisition. A library is established to acquire, organize and provide access to recorded knowledge and also to disseminate it to prospective users. The accessibility of acquired information is the speed at which the output (whatever format) of the information is obtained (Aina, 2004). A library is described as a social institution where published or recorded knowledge is perused and explored. The existence of a library can help reduce uncertainty, broaden human mind and enlighten individual.

Library and information professionals have the responsibility of providing information resources in various formats for the use of their customer. They make information accessible to people and create awareness of the available information materials. To make information resources available means stocking the library with relevant materials, which can be accessed by potential users. However, there cannot be proper utilization of information if the available information is not accessible, therefore, the need for information professionals to create access to the available information. More so, information materials must first be processed; that is, organized and arranged in a particular order for easy access. The dearth of information in the society can cause havoc as the Bible says “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea. 4:6)*”. Information and knowledge are the bedrock of power. Having access to information empowers individual to take better decision in life, thereby impacting the economy of the nation. According to Onwukanjo and Joseph (2018), the availability of information resources in the library without their accessibility will render such library underutilized, so also the under-utilization of the information resources.

There is the need to alleviate poverty to enhance the quality of life of people. Religious education develops in people selfless love for humanity, which is capable of taming the menace of kidnapping and other crimes (Ilechukwu, Uchem & Asogwa, 2015). The endemic crime rate or poverty level in Nigeria could be due to lack of information available that can help in the development of individual capacity. It could also be as a result of lack of access to the available information that is capable of educating the people and re-orienting them (Onwukanjo & Joseph, 2017). It is against this background that this paper investigates what should be the role of the Church in Nigeria towards information provision and poverty

alleviation for sustainable development. Hence, the need for the provision of relevant information through the establishment of library or information centers in churches. To this end the paper is set to answer the following questions:

1. Are there information sources available in the Church?
2. What are the platforms of information dissemination used by the Church?
3. What are the perceptions of people on causes of poverty?
4. What are the strategies engaged by the Church towards poverty alleviation?
5. What suggestions can the Church take in alleviating poverty?

Statement of the Problem

Poverty is a social problem, one of the United Nations sustainable development goals is to eradicate poverty by the year 2030. National Bureau of statistics in its poverty and inequality report from September 2018 to October 2019 said 40% of Nigerians live below its poverty line of N137, 430 (\$381.75) per year. This translates to 82.9 million people in Nigerian out of a population of about 200 million. Thus, Nigeria is a country of extremes. Amidst enormous wealth, exists endemic poverty. According to world Poverty Clock, Nigeria is now regarded as the World's poverty capital, surpassing the densely populated India. Thus, this research is based on the prevalence of endemic level of poverty in Nigeria and it seeks to investigate how the Church be an instrument for its eradication. To improve the standard of living of the citizen of the nation, several stakeholders such as: Non-Governmental Organizations, governmental groups, religious bodies and peer pressure groups engage in several programmes and initiatives that can help alleviate poverty and better the lives of the people. The Church of Christ in different denominations have been organizing programmes and initiating efforts to empower their members through education, vocational training, and promoting/supporting small-scale business and providing employment to many. They also serve as avenue to providing information to people on various occasions. Poverty is not unconnected to many of the crimes carried out in the world today such as: Kidnapping, killings, human trafficking, armed robbery, various revolts and other social vices are somehow associated with poverty or the economic situation of the country (Thom-Outya, 2010, Ayegba 2015).

Review of Literature

Poverty is a financial inability or state of lacking basic requirement to live normal life. Basic requirement such as money, food, water and shelter among many others are the bane of poverty, which causes depression for the less privilege. Poverty is universally perceived as a natural catastrophe that can be used to explain the insurgence of a lot of social ills including child mortality rates, spread of HIV/Aids, increase in crime rates, historical injustices, hunger, ill health, inadequate or poor housing illiteracy, malnutrition, corruption, sexual decadence, bribery, diseases, domestic abuse and drug abuse, parental issues and unemployment. Between 1960 and 1980, the poverty level covered about twenty-eight percent of the population; by 1996, it rose alarmingly to about 66 percent of the population (Aliju, 2001).

Poverty is the situation where a person's material resources is not sufficient to meet minimum needs', another definition of poverty emphasizes more specific conditions such as 'malnutrition', 'illiteracy' and 'disease', while some also mention 'human decency' (Coudouel, *et al.*, 2002). Poverty in Nigeria has shown great tendency for astronomic rise in the past couple of decades, which gave the nations low development indicators and makes the country ranked alongside the poorest nations in the world. World Bank (2000, 2001) affirmed that about 66 per cent of the Nigerian populations now fall below the poverty line of about a dollar a day compared to 43 percent in 1985.

The pace at which churches are spreading like a wildfire in Nigeria is astronomical. This is because in Nigeria there is freedom of worship, thus, places of worship are full, pilgrimages are over-booked and there is evidence of religious fervour all over the places. From the statement above, church growth reveals dimensions of numerical increase in the number of adherents. Olulowo (2021) averred that proliferation of churches that translates into numerical growth is not bad in itself; actually, it was from inception meant to be a blessing. This is because the agenda of church planting was not a man-made idea. The idea was first pioneered by the Lord and the husband of the church himself, Jesus Christ of Nazareth in a command that he gave to his disciples over 2000 years ago popularly known as the great commission in the book of Mark 16:15-18.

During Jesus's ministry here on earth, he ministered to the total needs of men. For instance, he ministered healing to the sick, feed the hungry, and clothed the naked. Jesus was also seen to be defending the woman caught in adultery gender discrimination and victimization of her generation, he talked about and secured freedom of man from sin, Devil and his cohorts (Acts 10:38, Mk 5:15, Mt 16:9, John 8:3-11,36 and Luke 1:71-74). Those that accused the woman caught in adultery were all guilty of sin of

injustice for parading only the woman to be stoned to death according to the requirement of the law because it takes two people to commit the sin of adultery. They spared the man and brought only the woman to be judged, that was why when Jesus requested that “whosoever has not committed sin among her accusers should first stone her”, nobody could; because their conscience smote them. They all left the scene one after the other because they were equally guilty of sin of injustice and several other hidden sins.

Poverty due to unemployment can get amplified if poor individuals tend to experience discontinuous, short employment spells throughout their lifetime (Aassve, *et al.*, 2005). As against when there is a steady employment, it prevents dominance of poverty and enables individuals to imagine better career prospects that allow higher expected future income. This ease borrowing and investment in one’s own skills and knowledge (human capital), as well as social capital (Ulimwengu, 2008). Reinstadler and Ray (2010) argue that unemployment rate can have a direct and indirect impact on poverty. Unemployment rate increases the likelihood of individual unemployment and an indirect effect through the negative impact of the unemployment rate on the wage bargaining power of the employed, which are at higher threat of being fired or receiving a lower wage when the unemployment rate rises.

Human Capital Theory

A comprehensive study of poverty requires an effective theoretical understanding of the causes and effective methods of reducing poverty. This study anchors on Human capital theory. The theory relies on the assumptions of perfect competition and market equilibrium entailing a strong relationship between wages and marginal productivity (Townsend, 1979). The demand side of the labour market is determined by a number of characteristics or skills that workers can supply. The importance placed on the set of skills workers are equipped with gave rise to the development and spread of human capital theory. One strand of neoclassical economics accordingly focuses on individual choices in relation to education, training and mobility (as determinants of human capital) to explain differences in incomes, albeit still with little to no reference to the role played by other factors such as economic institutions and social norms. Adult education may have an important role to play for those whose skills are in low demand and/or have not benefited from normal schooling (Scott, *et al.*, 2000). Conversely, not investing in one’s own skills risks perpetuating low pay and, therefore, poverty, and further raises the aforementioned cost of investing in human capital, thereby reinforcing the vicious cycle (Pemberton, *et al.*, 2013).

Methodology

The study employed a survey research design. Population of study covers the different types of Christian churches we have in Nigeria, that is, the Mainline, evangelical, and the Pentecostal churches. Data was collected using self-structured questionnaire with Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.77. A total of 150 questionnaire were distributed to Pastors and Ministers in the Churches with an overall response rate of 71%. Data gathered was analyzed using descriptive statistics of simple percentages, mean and standard deviation with the aid of SPSS version 21. The study was carried in Lagos and Ogun state, Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used to get respondents from each of the Church category. Table 1a shows the distribution of questionnaire to the respondents and the return rate of questionnaire based on the Church category while Table 1b reveals the list of participating churches.

Table 1a: Return rate of questionnaire distributed

S/N	Church Category	No. distributed	No. returned	Return rate
1.	Evangelical churches	50	43	86.0%
2.	Pentecostal churches	30	17	56.7%
3.	Mainline churches	20	10	50.0%

Table 1b: List of participating churches

S/N	Church Category	Name of church
1.	Evangelical churches	Baptist Church
		ECWA
2.	Pentecostal churches	Living Faith Church
3.	Mainline churches	Anglican Church

Results and Analysis

Figure 1: Respondents Church Category (N=71)

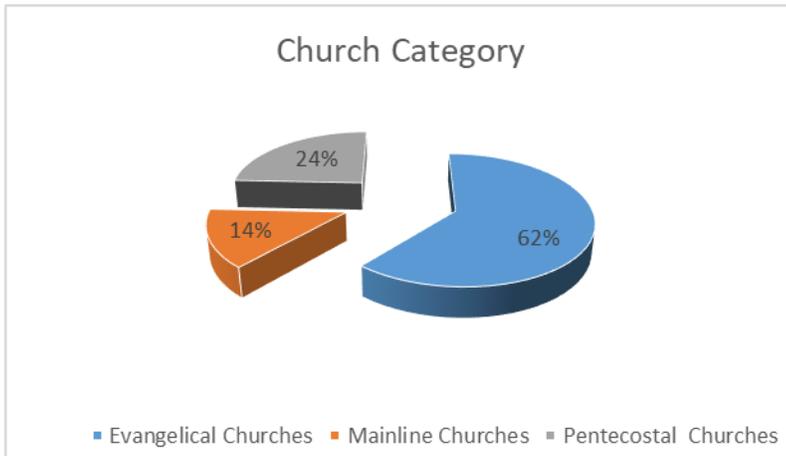


Figure 1 shows the distribution of sampled respondents by Church categorization. Figure 1 shows that majority of the respondents 43 (61.4 %) are the Evangelical Churches, followed by Pentecostals 17 (24.3 %), while the minority are Mainline Churches 10 (14.3 %) respondents.

Figure 2: Respondents' Gender (N=71)

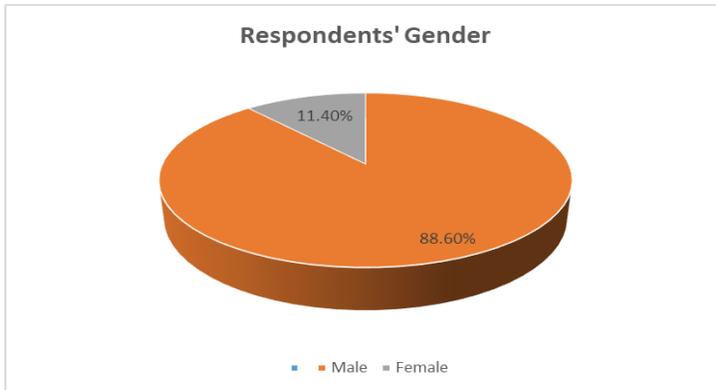


Figure 2 shows the composition of respondents by Gender. Figure 2 shows that majority of the respondents 61(88.6%) are the Male respondents, while the minority are Females 10 (11.4%) respondents. This is expected as Church leadership is male dominated.

Figure 3: Respondents' Duration of Engagement: (N=71)

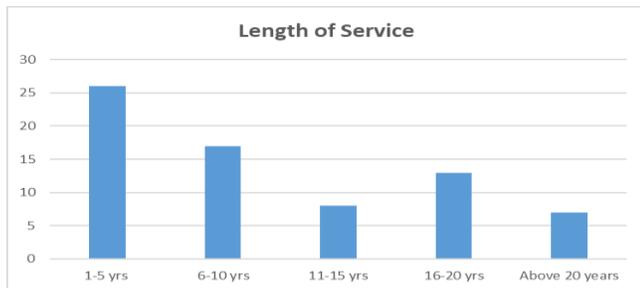


Figure 3 shows the composition of respondents by length of service or duration of engagement in the Church. The results shows that majority of the respondents 26 (36.6 %) have been serving for 1-5years, followed by 17 (23.9%) respondents that have been serving for between 6-10years, followed by 8 (11.3%) respondents who have been serving between 11-15 years while 13 (18.3%) have been serving between 16-20 years; those that have served for over 20 years constituted 7 (9.9 %) each.

Figure 4: Respondents' Church average attendance (N=71)

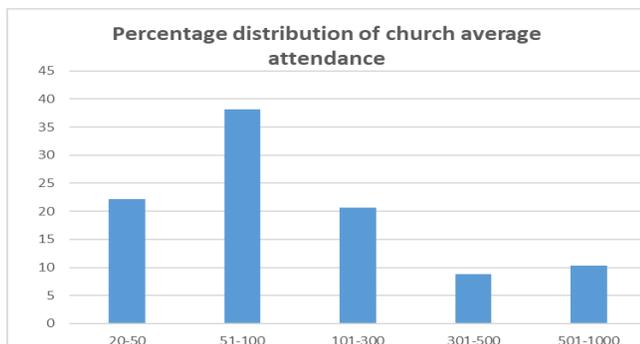


Figure 4 shows the composition of the respondents' Church average attendance. The result shows that 38.2% of the respondents had between 51-100 average church attendance; followed by 22.1% of respondents that recorded average church attendance of 20-50; 20.6% of the respondents recorded average church attendance that is between 101-300, while 10.3% of the respondents reported having between 501-1000 average church attendance. The minority (8.8%) of the respondents had an average church attendance between 301-500.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of availability of information resources in the Church

S/N	Kind of information	Available (%)	Not available (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
1.	Educational	88.9	11.1	1.89	.317
2.	Health and Medical	75.4	24.6	1.75	.434
3.	Vocational training opportunity	74.1	25.9	1.74	.442
4.	Employment opportunity	71.9	28.1	1.72	.453
5.	Business opportunity	71.7	28.3	1.72	.454
6.	Advertisement leaflets/Bills	60.7	39.3	1.61	.493
7.	Financial/Loan	54.6	45.8	1.54	.502
8.	Assets/Building	26.8	63.2	1.37	.487
9.	Daily newspaper	29.6	70.4	1.30	.461
10.	Sport	28.1	71.9	1.28	.453

Table 2 reveals that information that pertains to education (Mean=1.89) was top on the list of the available information type that people seek for, followed by health and medical information (Mean=1.75) and then vocational training opportunity (Mean=1.74). Employment and business opportunity information are highly sought after by people having Mean =1.72 each. The result shows that information on sport (Mean=1.28), Daily newspapers (Mean=1.30) and Assets/building were not available (Mean=1.37).

Table 3: Platforms of information dissemination

S/N	Platform of information dissemination	Yes (%)	No (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
1.	Announcement in Church	98.6	1.4	1.99	.120
2.	Social media e.g. WhatsApp	95.6	4.4	1.96	.2069
3.	Face book	84.7	15.3	1.85	.3626
4.	Church billboard	79.4	20.6	1.79	.408
5.	Email	58.5	41.5	1.59	.4975
6.	Church website	42.9	57.1	1.43	.4994
7.	Church library via Print media	31.9	68.1	1.32	.471
8.	Twitter	25.5	75.5	1.25	.44014
9.	Radio	19.6	80.4	1.20	.5554

10.	Television	18.5	81.5	1.19	.90518
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Table 3 reveals that announcement in church services (Mean=1.99) was top on the list of the available platform for information dissemination, followed by Whats App messages (Mean=1.96) and then through Facebook (Mean=1.85). Church billboard (Mean =1.79), Email (Mean=1.58) are the most used platforms for disseminating information, whereas the following platforms are less used for information dissemination: Church website (Mean=1.43), Church library (Mean 1.32), Twitter (Mean =1.25), while Radio (Mean=1.20) and Television (Mean=1.19) were the least used platforms to disseminate information to the people.

Table 4: Strategies engaged by the Church towards poverty alleviation

S/N	Strategies	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
1.	Welfare of Church members	81.4	17.1	1.4	0.0	3.80	.4374
2.	Welfare programs outside Church	81.4	17.1	1.4	0.0	3.80	.4374
3.	Eradication of hunger and ignorance	84.3	10.0	4.3	1.4	3.77	.5940
4.	Caring for the poor	80.0	17.1	1.4	1.4	3.76	.5500
5.	Providing for the poor	71.0	27.5	0.0	1.4	3.68	.5555
6.	Advocacy for workers' emolument	69.6	27.5	2.9	0.0	3.67	.5332
7.	Social teaching	67.6	29.4	1.5	1.5	3.63	.5961
8.	Reaching the remote areas through evangelism and outreaches	52.2	36.2	10.1	1.4	3.39	.7320

Table 4 reveals Strategies for Church involvement in Poverty alleviation programmes such as Welfare of Church members (Mean=3.80) and Welfare programs outside the Church (Mean=3.80) were top on the list of the Strategies for Church involvement in Poverty alleviation programmes, followed by Eradication of hunger and ignorance (Mean=3.77) and Caring for the poor (Mean=3.76). Providing for the poor (Mean =3.68), Advocacy for workers' emolument (Mean=3.67), Social teaching (Mean= 3.63), Reaching the

remote areas through evangelism (Mean=3.39) is the least used of the strategies for Church involvement in Poverty alleviation programmes.

Table 5: Perception of respondents on causes of poverty

S/N	Causes of Poverty	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
1.	Unequal distribution of wealth	0.0	43.5	5.8	50.7	3.45	.6072
2.	Government policies that undermine social justice	0.0	42.6	7.4	50.0	3.43	.6305
3.	Disobedience to God	44.9	27.7	14.5	2.9	3.25	.8112
4.	Poverty is not due to laziness	34.8	37.7	20.3	7.2	3.00	.924
5.	Poverty is not accidental	23.5	52.9	10.3	13.2	2.87	.929
6.	Lack of formal education/Illiteracy	25.7	42.9	24.3	7.1	2.87	.8834
7.	Human freedom that leads to disdain for God	17.6	47.1	30.9	4.4	2.78	.7888

Table 5 revealed Causes of Poverty such as unequal distribution of wealth (Mean=3.45), Government policies that undermine social justice (Mean=3.43) and Disobedience to God (Mean=3.25) were top on the list of the Causes of Poverty, followed by Poverty is not due to laziness (Mean=3.00). Poverty is not accidental and Lack of formal education/Illiteracy both had (Mean=2.87). Human freedom that leads to disdain for God (Mean =3.78) was the least factor that cause poverty.

Table 6: Suggestions on what the Church can do to alleviate poverty

S/N	Suggestions	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
1.	Church should offer basic social services to the public	62.7	37.3	0	0	3.63	.4873
2.	Church should organize vocational/skill acquisition training to people	58.8	36.8	4.4	0	3.54	.5842
3.	Provision of humanitarian relief	65.2	27.3	1.5	6.1	3.52	.8085
4.	Church can provide medical services to people	52.2	46.3	1.5	0	3.51	.5330
5.	Church can give civic education/enlightenment	52.2	46.3	1.5	0	3.51	.5330

	programme on family planning						
6.	Church can provide free education or scholarships to people	50.0	44.1	5.9	0	3.44	.6080

Table 6 revealed possible suggestions on several things the church could do to alleviate poverty such as offering basic social services to the public (Mean=3.63) was top on the list, followed by organizing vocational/skill acquisition training to people (Mean=3.54), provision of humanitarian relief (Mean=3.52). Provision of medical services and Giving of Civic education/enlightenment programme on family planning were respectively having (Mean =3.51) while provision of free education or scholarships to people by the Church (Mean=3.44) is the least of possible suggestions on several things the church could do to alleviate poverty.

Discussion of findings

Findings on strategies for Church involvement in poverty alleviation programmes showed that engaging in welfare of Church members is the most used strategies as a means for poverty alleviation by the church. The report agrees with Onah, Okwuosa and Uroko (2018) who argues that the Church as an important and influential social actor that has a rich history of social teachings and actions that could be used in the Nigerian context. Christian denominations adhere to the teachings of Jesus Christ that uphold in an unequivocal term options for the poor (Luke 4:18, Mt 25:34–36, Luke 6:20– 21, John 13:34). Apart from feeding the poor spiritually, the Church also has moral duty to attend to the material needs of the poor. On the strategies for Church involvement in Poverty alleviation programmes, majority of the respondents affirmed that general welfare of Church for the non-members is the second most used strategies as a means of poverty alleviation employed by the church. This report was equally affirmed by Onah, Okwuosa & Uroko (2018), the moral duty of the Church is not limited to the poor in the church alone but also to the poor outside the church (Galatians 6:10). The sharing of material things in the Church with non-members is a way by which the Church shares the love of God they serve to their world who have not known or met with God thereby increasing the rate at which non-believers submit to the Lordship of Jesus. This also enhances the numerical growth of the church, followed by Eradication of hunger and ignorance.

The church always gets involved in caring for the poor within and outside the church by helping them find permanent means of eradicating hunger and ignorance through personal empowerment and

training. This helps them to be able to provide for their personal needs and also in helping someone else that they are now better than to meet their needs also. The church's option for the poor is part of its vocation in the world (Oborji, 2012). Acceptance of Christianity and her ideals transforms people's life spiritually, changes people's status and makes people responsible to give back to others as they share with them out of Gods bountifulness and goodness. Respondents also advocated for prompt and constant payment of workers' emolument, the report of the majority of the respondent is in agreement with the Old Testament Biblical injunction that says that "a labourer is worthy of his reward" (I Timothy 5:18; James 5:4). The least used of all the strategies by the church in poverty alleviation is reaching the remote areas through evangelism this is probably because of the endemic rate of poverty especially in the remote areas of Nigeria. Poverty has been identified as a serious problem in Nigeria (Action Aid Nigeria, 2015; Taiwo & Agwu, 2016; Ucha, 2010). Poverty in remote areas is characterized by insufficient income and inadequate food intake, lack basic healthcare, lack shelter and safe drinking water, poor environmental cleanliness, lack access to basic education and skills, are ignorant of fundamental human rights and lack access to information (Barnes 2010).

Findings of the study revealed that disobedience to God is the leading cause of poverty. It is not paying attention to God's word or instructions and it is sinful. The result also revealed that government policies that undermine social justice also ranked equal with disobedience to God as causes of poverty. This agrees with the fact that the phenomenon of 'sin' is a disordered or disrupted relationship with God; it also implies wrongful actions or deeds affecting one's fellow humans (McFarland 2011:473). Sin can be personal or communal. The sin of the world is designated to be social sin. Social sin is a sin that runs through time and space infecting both persons and institutions. The term social sin is mostly used to denote sin as a social occurrence (O'Keefe 1990:27). He understands social sin as follows: structures put in place by government in form of laws or policies that oppress human beings, violate human dignity, stifle freedom, and impose gross inequality. It also connotes situations established by institutions that promote and facilitate individual acts of selfishness and the complicity or silent acquiescence of persons who do not take responsibility for the evil done.

The causes of poverty that are top on the list are, unequal distribution of wealth and government policies that undermine social justice. When there is unequal distribution of wealth in the society, it can lead to inter-generational transmission of unequal economic and social opportunities, thereby, creating

poverty traps, wasting human potential, and resulting in less dynamic, and less creative societies' (UNDESA, 2013, p. 22). Inequalities can also have a negative impact on almost all sectors in the society. Income inequality affects the pace at which growth enables poverty reduction (Ravallion 2004). Incontinuity in governance that leads to wastage due to abandoned projects and lack of implementation of policies inadvertently cause poverty among the citizens.

Majority of the respondents affirmed that poverty is not accidental. This agrees with Nelson Mandela who opined that Poverty is not an accident. Just like slavery and apartheid, it is man-made and can be removed by the actions of human beings. Poverty is not due to laziness. The report of the majority of respondents affirmed that poverty is not due to laziness. This is in agreement with the national public opinion poll taken in November 2015 by Chile's Centre for Public Studies (CEP, 2015) which showed that minority of respondents representing 41% of the survey respondents felt that one of the most common cause of poverty was that people were lazy and lacked initiative. The view was more common in rural areas (49.2%) than in urban areas (38.8%).

Lack of formal education/illiteracy is the least of the Causes of Poverty. Illiteracy leads to poverty due to the fact that individuals with low level of literacy are more likely to experience little employment opportunities and lower income. As a result, they often face welfare dependency, low self-esteem, and higher levels of crime. Poverty and education are inextricably linked, because people living in poverty may stop going to school so they can work, which leaves them without literacy and numeracy skills they need to further their careers.

Possible suggestions on what the church could do to alleviate poverty include: offering basic social services to the public, organizing vocational/skill acquisition training to people, provision of humanitarian relief, provision of medical services and imparting civic education and enlightenment programme on family planning. Also, people suggested provision of free education or scholarships to people by the Church. This concurs with the study by Kariuki (2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Poverty is a social vice that should be eradicated in the society so as to experience sustainable development in Nigeria. The Church through its corporate social responsibility has been involved in alleviating poverty in the community they are based. Information provision and dissemination help in no small matter in eradicating poverty in the society. The advent of technology and social media use serve as great and quick

avenue in making people informed and empowered to make decision that would better their lot. Information service delivery is a powerful tool that can be used to empower people. There cannot be any reasonable sustainable development without effective information service delivery.

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Church should set up information resource centers/library where people can consult and access information to eradicate poverty which would help to develop them economically. Poverty eradication information should be provided, packaged to targeted groups and be disseminated via appropriate platforms.
2. The Church through her social ministry department must be unreservedly committed to helping in the training/retraining of youths that the industries have described as unemployable by organizing vocational/skill acquisition to upgrade their knowledge.
3. Church should use social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Email to disseminate information to members and also to the people in general.
4. There should be equal distribution of wealth and Nigeria government should formulate policies that geared towards economic development of the nation by providing necessary social amenities across board.
5. The Church should be committed to mobilizing professional teachers in the church during the long vacation to organize vacation schools, where students will be trained and empowered to make right choices of career.

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