

**POVERTY FACTOR AS A CONSTRAINT TO CHRISTIAN  
DEVELOPMENT IN A RURAL COMMUNITY**

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## ABSTRACT

By most accounts, the standard of living and quality of life of most Nigerians are in deterioration. This distribution of poverty is among rural and urban residents, Christians and non-Christian alike. The victims of poverty are constrained to be effective in their various spheres of secular and spiritual lives.

This study is set to examine in particular the constraints posed to Christian development in a rural community with a view to suggest corresponding, rational, calculated, organised and verifiable strategy for evolving ways for churches to alleviate it. Included in the objectives are to identify the major causes and effects of poverty among rural dwellers in general and rural Christians in particular and to identify the major constraints that poverty has on Christian development.

The study was carried out in a rural setting. One of the Baptist Associations' in Ogbomoso Baptist Conference was chosen as the study area ("Gbe Jesu Ga" Baptist Association). The association is located in "Oriire Local Government Area of Oyo State. The methodology used in carrying out the study include the use of questionnaires to obtain information from the rural Christians in Baptist Churches. Personal interviews and observations were also used.

All the eighteen churches in the Association were sampled. The number of questionnaires administered in each of the churches in the Association is a function of the number of congregational members. The biggest church in the Association were administered with fifteen questionnaires, while the smallest ones had five of their members sampled. Included in the questionnaires were questions through which social, economic and demographic information could be obtained. Respondents were also expected to indicate

what the causes and the effects of poverty were in their own opinions. Moreover, they were to indicate whether they were poor or not.

The rural christians, from the research findings were found not to be significantly different from non-christians in the area. For example, they engage in primary production activities, they have large family size, some are polygamists, poor educational background, very low income among others. All these are pointers to the basic characteristics of the rural space economy and which are major causes of poverty. Other causes of poverty as revealed by the research include laziness, government neglect and not paying tithes. The work identified that the effects of poverty on rural christians are enormous. These effects have both social, economic, spiritual and physical dimensions. For instance, poverty can cause divorce, anger, being unable to practice hospitality and not paying tithes and offering among others.

The work further identified that both the individual christian, church of God and government have parts to play at reducing poverty. In particular is the churches roles at ameliorating poverty if the present unemployment rate of Pastors finishing from Pastor schools will be stopped. The study observed that, those who need the service of pastors most are those who could not afford to call one because of poverty. The work suggest, among other things that one, two ore more churches could combine to call a pastor in order to improve the spiritual quality and in turn the quality of life if rural dwellers.

## 4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made to alleviate poverty among the rural Christians. If the rural Christians remain poor as they are, the light and salt which the Holy Bible calls them cannot be exhibited. This is because there is every tendency that they will be engaging in vices that make the power of the gospel less effective.

From the church level, each of the churches in the rural area, how small it may be, needs an experienced and spiritually matured pastors. Since some of these churches do not have economic power to call a pastor, the Association and the Conference must shoulder part of the needed financial commitment to calling pastor. Perhaps, this is where the Convention

must have to examine the idea of posting pastors. The havoc done to the gospel in the rural area is enough and it must be stopped. Where the pastor is poor, because his church is poor, some of them are no more pastors but farmers.

One other suggestion in this regard is that, two or more churches that are closer may combine to employ a pastor that would meet the social and spiritual needs of those churches. The present situation where churches are pastorless calls for concern.

The church upon calling a pastor should therefore through symposia, seminars, workshops, educate its members on the social, economic and most importantly, spiritual advantages of monogamy, moderate manageable family size, in addition to actually presenting the word of God in an undiluted manner.

The Church further needs to establish educational institution especially, sound basic primary education. Since knowledge is received through education and knowledge is power, sound education will stop the extension of poverty to generations yet unborn. It is further advised, that the church pastor and parents would have to monitor the activities of teachers in government schools in their vicinity.

The church should as well encourage their members to be hard working. Moreover, small scale ventures could be embarked upon. Church should send members to workshop organised by Social Ministries Department of the Nigerian Baptist Convention through Conferences and Associations. We should also encourage members to improve themselves through the vocational centres of the Baptist Convention. Christian should also persevere in their present situation. They should believe that through prayer and hard work, there is hope in the future.

The Government has vivid roles to play if poverty will be ameliorated. In the first case, storage facilities should be provided at strategic locations in each of the local governments that are rural. The spate of waste during the peak harvesting periods of farm products should be discouraged.

Furthermore, government should find a way of stabilising the price of farm products. This will encourage farmers to continue to produce. The writers experience over the last three years had shown that the farmers had suffered due to ridiculously low price which the farmers were selling their farm products. This had discouraged them to put all their human and financial resources to farming, their only occupation. The resultant effects is the scarcity of food that we are experiencing in Nigeria now.

There is the need for the government to put the roads in the rural areas in good condition. Most of the rural roads are seasonal in nature. During the raining season, some of the roads are impassible making it difficult to transport farm produce to the markets. A lot of the produce are wasted especially the perishable ones like tomatoes, vegetables, mangoes etc.

There is the need also for the government to develop agro-allied industry. In the study area, their main produce is tomatoes. During the peak period of harvesting, the prices will be so low and the farmers will be helpless. Some would be wasted. If however, tomatoes could be processed into 'tin tomatoes', waste will be avoided, prices will stabilise and this will encourage farmers to produce at optimum level and will eventually improved their lots economically.

To achieve all these, it is suggested that Christians should participate effectively in partisan politics. Nobody will know all these problems except those that had lived in rural

areas at one time or the other. If all these suggestions are implemented, it is envisaged that

- Churches in rural areas would witness a way out of present poverty level. If this is not taken seriously some of churches in the area may 'die' a natural death as the youths are already fleeing the poverty ridden rural areas.