



The Church as an Agent of Change: Alleviating Poverty Among its Members

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the Church can help reduce poverty among its people from spiritual and socio-economic aspects. As a church social work unit, the discussion begins with analyzing various theological values that shape the Church's theology on poverty from scriptural and ethical perspectives. This is the Church's historical and contemporary involvement in combating poverty, highlighting its centuries-long eharity, education, and justice advocacy. Efforts Further into the article, the author examines churches' modern methods to eradicate poverty, explicitly focusing on microfinance, vocational training, and community development. These efforts highlight the churches' mobility and creativity in addressing contemporary issues. However, the discussion also evaluates challenges the churches encounter, including limited capacity to mobilize the resources, changing social culture, and the need to court institutional support. Therefore, the article concludes with practical recommendations that center on the Church's efforts to combat poverty. The article emphasizes the importance of collaborating with external stakeholders, incorporating innovation, and creating environments that meet community work needs. By implementing these strategies, the Church can strengthen its position as a leading force in driving change toward poverty alleviation within communities.

ARTICLE'S INFO

Article No.: 012825015

Type: Research

Full Text: [PDF](#), [PHP](#), [EPUB](#), [MP3](#)

DOI: [10.15580/gjss.2025.1.012825015](https://doi.org/10.15580/gjss.2025.1.012825015)

Accepted: 23/01/2025

Published: 31/01/2025

Keywords: Church, Agent of Change, Alleviation, Poverty, Faith-based Community, Development

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Article's QR code



1. Introduction

The eradication of poverty is one of the most significant challenges today; it affects society and individuals in every way. These challenges range from the complete absence of material things to restrictions on education, access to medical care, and spiritual and physical development opportunities.¹ To faith-based communities, especially the Church, poverty is not only a social economic vice but also a spiritual and relational vice. From this two-sided point of view, the Church stands as a responder to immediate wants and, at the same time, a long-term solution provider.² The Catholic Church has been at the forefront of the fight against poverty for centuries, rooted in theological thought and the practical practice of caring for the poor.³ The Church has always aimed to combine belief and practice from the formation of early churches, where people shared their money to feed the poor, to the contemporary crusades against poverty as a systemic problem. However, in modern society, combating poverty requires a more comprehensive approach that addresses its core causes.⁴ This introduction lays the groundwork for the author's exploration of the Church's role in combating poverty. The study aims to identify the purpose and scope of a study of the Church and poverty based on a theoretical view of poverty in the church context and provides an outline of the theological, historical, and practical dimensions of the Church's response to poverty complexity.

1.1. Understanding Poverty in the Church Context

Hunger is not solely a result of a lack of financial resources; it is a complex issue that affects society in numerous ways.⁵ They face restricted access to fundamental rights, such as education, health, and social rights, which collectively represent the denial of an individual's right to the fullest extent of their potential. The Church views poverty as a more comprehensive concept, encompassing material, spiritual, and interpersonal aspects.⁶ This broad conception pays

attention to the necessities of life and the soul and makes poverty an environmental issue and a battle within.

Traditionally, the Church has permanently enshrined a place of shelter, especially for people in need of help. It has held people in need, comforted them, and given them hope for decades. This role stems from the scriptures and theology, which mandate Christians to care for the needy as their primary responsibility.⁷ Verses such as Matthew 25:35-40 command Christians to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick; therefore, the Church has a divine responsibility to address poverty as a biblical imperative, not a charitable effort.⁸ Church circles tend to overemphasize the relational dimension of poverty, emphasizing the need to reconcile broken relationships with God, self, others, and the entire community. Therefore, they perceive poverty as not only material deprivation but also isolation, necessitating an inclusive approach to combat.⁹ Churches, being religious institutions, qualify to deal with this multi-dimensional approach to poverty by offering spiritual direction, fellowship, and material support.

1.2. Purpose and Scope of the Study

This contribution seeks to assess the role of the Church in poverty reduction as a social reconciler, historically, theologically, and practically. It aims to provide an Ubuntu perspective on how churches, as organizational religious bodies, have responded to poverty issues and the potential that these agencies bring. To do this, the study first examines the biblical principles that require the Church to address poverty eradication. Some of these principles outline the moral and ethical justifications for the importance of poverty eradication in the Church's mission. The discussion then shifts to the role of churches in poverty reduction and the early development of their relief, welfare, advocacy, and social development missions. The article also examines the various current trends churches are implementing to combat poverty in modern society. This includes organizations such as microfinance programs, vocational

¹ Lamrabat, Amine. "Promoting Empowerment of People in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment." (2013).

² Ayoo, Collins. "Poverty reduction strategies in developing countries." *Rural Development-Education, Sustainability, Multifunctionality* (2022): 17-57.

³ Cohick, Lynn H. "Poverty and its causes in the early church." *Poverty in the early church and today: A conversation* (2019): 16-27.

⁴ Bedford-Strohm, Heinrich. "Poverty and public theology: Advocacy of the church in pluralistic society." *International Journal of Public Theology* 2, no. 2 (2008): 144-162.

⁵ Redón Lago, Alba. "Hidden hunger in the current world: causes, consequences and solutions to a global public health challenge and a particular look at Spain." (2021).

⁶ Pandey, Aviyan. "Food wastage: Causes, impacts and solutions." *Sci. Herit. J* 5 (2021): 17-20.

⁷ Magezi, Vhumani. "History and developments of pastoral care in Africa: A survey and proposition for effective contextual pastoral caregiving." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019).

⁸ Mushunje, Regis. "The Temptations of The Son of God According to Matthew 4: 1-11." (2003).

⁹ Parker, Aly. "Can't Buy Me Love: Funding Marriage Promotion Versus Listening to Real Needs in Breaking the Cycle of Poverty." *S. Cal. Rev. L. & Soc. Just.* 18 (2008): 493.

training, and community projects, demonstrating the Church's ability to meet the challenges of today's world.

However, any discussion about the Church's strategies to combat poverty would be incomplete without addressing the problems within the Church itself. Challenges derived from organizational characteristics: Churches are likely to experience resource limitations, and societal needs or demands may be in opposition to the efforts and goals of the Church. The Church methodologically scrutinizes the difficulties encountered to present a comprehensive analysis and fair findings. Last, the Study makes practical recommendations that could help improve the Church's efficiency in addressing poverty issues. Therefore, we designed the focus on interaction, creativity, and contextual applicability to equip faith-based organizations with the tools to bring about sustainable, positive change for the people they serve. This article contributes to the discourse on faith-based anti-poverty initiatives, offering significant insights from theological integration with historical and contemporary practices. It challenges church leaders, practitioners, and scholars to think about how the Church can remain relevant to its mission of being an agent of hope for the oppressed and a harbinger of societal change.

2. Theological Foundations for Poverty Alleviation

2.1. Scriptural Mandates for Caring for the Poor

Biblical teaching on respecting the poor is a cornerstone of Christianity and church duty. The understanding of the Scripture is about compassion, justice, and stewardship and its call to the people of God to attend to the deprived.

Compassion and justice: Passages such as Proverbs 19:17 Out of all the states, the one that affirms, 'He who is charitable to the poor is charitable to me,' establish kindness and charity not as human virtues but as gifts to God Himself.¹⁰ Similarly, Matthew 25:35-40 underscores the prophetic responsibility that exists to provide for the needy while, at the same time, equating acts of kindness to eternal value. Jesus says that doing good to people with low incomes is like doing it to Him; it is the same thing.¹¹ This teaching is a turn on caring for the poor—not as a benevolent gesture of the powerful but as a divine commission.

¹⁰ Scheffler, Eben. "Poverty in the Book of Proverbs: looking from above?: Old Testament wisdom, human dignity and the poor." *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 111, no. 1 (2012): 480-496.

¹¹ Lantu, Adie Alfrets, Janes Sinaga, Naek Sijabat, Juita Sinambela, and Beni Chandra Purba. "Service to the Poor as a Form of Service to Jesus based on Matthew 25: 41-45: Synthesis of the ladder and homogeneous models." *RERUM: Journal of Biblical Practice* 2, no. 1 (2022): 45-62.

The Old Testament prophecies are filled with a voice proclaiming justice, too. Isaiah 1:17 He says "Learn to do right; seek justice' Defend the oppressed. Take the fatherless to your cause and stand up for the widow."¹² This command answers the biblical aphorism that faith requires works, which include fighting against the oppressors and standing up for the oppressed.

Stewardship and generosity: In this regard, stewardship is imperative in the theological perspective of poverty reduction. Luke 16:10-13 speaks of the stewardship of wealth and underlines the society's obligation, saying, "The one who is loyal in a little is also loyal in much." This passage demonstrates that God bestows stewardship on wealthy individuals to utilize their wealth for the betterment of others.¹³ In 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 As if to underscore this point, he said, 'he who soweth sparingly shall also reap lightly, and he who soweth bountifully shall also reap generously.' This teaching shows the effect giving has on the recipient and the giver and makes giving an act of worship.¹⁴ The scriptural mandates provide a religious and spiritual basis for the Church's responsibility to minimize poverty. It invites people and churches to embrace a warm, deep, and spiritual attitude of commitment to the poor as a form of worship, as a form of justice, and as a responsible response.

2.2. ThChurch's Mission in Economic Justice

The present Church's mission transcends spirituality and guidance to encompass economic justice. Based on principles such as love, compassion, and justice, the Church should be able to fight against injustice and call for a just distribution of resources.

Biblical models of economic justice: The first to be described underneath the venture of economic justice are expounded in the Mosaic Law highlighted in the Old Testament. Leviticus 25 presents the straightforward Jubilee laws, which mandate the cancellation of debts every fifty years and the restoration of land to its owners.¹⁵ These laws aimed to prevent generational poverty from becoming formative and lasting forever. We cannot perform jubilee practices with the same impact and meaning. Still, the concepts of justice, corresponding penalties, and restoring harmony for the benefit of

¹² Moberly, R. Walter L. "Whose justice? Which righteousness? The interpretation of Isaiah V 16." *Vetus Testamentum* (2001): 55-68.

¹³ Goodrich, John K. "Voluntary Debt Remission and the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16: 1—13)." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 3 (2012): 547-566.

¹⁴ Tvedtnes, John A. "The Quick and the Dead." *The FARMS Review* 19, no. 2 (2014): 215-237.

¹⁵ Gunjević, Lidija. "The Sabbath Day, the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee in the Laws of Pentateuch." In *Jubilee in the Bible*, pp. 11-81. Brill, 2017.

community welfare remain valid.¹⁶ Similarly, Deuteronomy 15:7-11 demands openhandedness, saying when you are among your fellow Israelites within the towns of the land that the Lord your God is to give you, they shouldn't be brief with loans.¹⁷ Therefore, it is crucial to understand that ensuring justice for the economically disadvantaged is a collective responsibility, and we encourage people to be faithful to God's entrusted blessings to meet their needs.

The Early Church as a Model : As a focus, the early Christian community is a convincing testament to the Church's concern with economic justice. Acts 4: The apostle, in chapters 32-35, elaborated on how the believers disposed of their possessions to satisfy the needs of others, lest any of them remain needy.¹⁸ It illustrates the Church as an organization that stands apart from most societies in promoting wealth accumulation and the concept of the 'haves' and 'have nots.' The Apostle Paul also paid much attention to economic fraternity within the Church. His letters frequently call for collections for the poor, emphasizing the Church's responsibility to its members and society.¹⁹ It applies spirituality and materiality in practice and affirms that economic justice is part of the gospel call.

Modern Implications: In these modern situations, the Church's witness to economic justice is now required to work with the poor and the structures of sin that bring about poverty. Churches have a unique role as pioneers of policy changes, collaborating with other organizations that fight for social justice and facilitating change through economic empowerment programs.²⁰ For instance, most church-based organizations have engaged in microfinancing, offering small loans to persons in poor neighborhoods to enable them to start businesses and become financially independent. These programs conform with the teachings of the Scripture of stewardship and reformation, which would help people to come out of the vice of poverty.²¹ Churches demonstrate their commitment to economic justice by offering

vocational training programs. By equipping individuals with practical skills, these programs address the root causes of poverty and provide opportunities for career development. The churches cannot occupy the prophetic position without thinking practically simultaneously. They also need to implement internal change and provide immediate relief to some affected parties. Scriptures prescribe a similar dual approach to address the causes of poverty.

Challenges in pursuing economic justice

However, the Church struggles to address the effectiveness of economic justice based on its theological models. Lack of internal human or financial capital sometimes limits the extent and intensity of church-driven activities. However, political influences in a system also challenge cultural norms and the gains from women's advocacy.²²

The second issue is the conflict of interest between a focus on the spiritual welfare of the people and a direction that considers the socio-economic needs of the population.²³ For example, lay critics often argue that the Church should focus solely on ecclesiastical and religious matters, leaving social welfare groups to handle social concerns.²⁴ But also, as mentioned earlier, the theological tenets reveal that they are in harmony with each other; to care for people experiencing poverty is both theological and a social justice imperative.

Opportunities for impact

Even in this situation, The Church has significant opportunities to promote economic justice. Evaluate the benefits of working for a church. Other churches, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies should join the Church's efforts to increase the efficacy of church-led endeavors. Because of this reality, churches should combine their efforts and resources to tackle poverty.²⁵ Innovation is another way the Church fulfills a critical mission. Success in poverty reduction

¹⁶ Padilla, C. René. "The Relevance Of The Jubilee In Today's World:(Leviticus 25)." *Mission Studies* 13, No. 1 (1996): 12-31.

¹⁷ Hugen, Beryl. "Poor You Will Have With You Always." *Pro Rege* 22, no. 4 (1994): 1-14.

¹⁸ Scheffler, Eben. "Caring for the Needy in the Acts of the Apostles." *Neotestamentica* 50, no. 3 (2016): 131-165.

¹⁹ Downs, David J. "'The Offering of the Gentiles' in Romans 15.16." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29, no. 2 (2006): 173-186.

²⁰ Gesowan, Tony M. "The Role of the Church in Kenyan Politics through Social Justice and Christ's Prophetic Office." *African Multidisciplinary Journal of Research* 9, no. 1 (2024): 134-146.

²¹ Hoda, Najmul, and Shankar Lal Gupta. "Faith-based organizations and microfinance: A literature review." *Asian Social Science* 11, no. 9 (2015): 245-254.

²² Mwaura, Pauline K., and Daniel M. Nzengya. "Examining the Role of the Church in Socio-Economic Development of the Rural Poor in the Sub-Saharan Region: Insights from Previous Research and Future Research Directions." *African Multidisciplinary Journal of Research* (2022): 147-158.

²³ Bożek, Agnieszka, Paweł F. Nowak, and Mateusz Blukacz. "The relationship between spirituality, health-related behavior, and psychological well-being." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020): 1997.

²⁴ Hunt, Anne. "Vatican II and the laity: Vision, challenges and opportunities." *The Australasian Catholic Record* 91, no. 1 (2014): 3-20.

²⁵ Mabwe, Linda, Caroline Dimingu, and Fairchild Siyawamwaya. "The church as a social enterprise: A strategy for economic development." *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management* 6, no. 3 (2018): 144-157.

also depends on the creative use of technology and data underpinning its causes and trends. For instance, digital technology can facilitate microfinance, while data can identify the communities that need the most assistance.²⁶ Lastly, the Church has to be relevant to offer support and achieve. Every community has problems, and we must approach poverty reduction using methods specific to that community. Thus, by following the instructions coming from the clients, churches will be able to create cultural and sustainable programs.

3. Church Historical Contributions

3.1. Charity and Social Support in Church History

For many decades, the Church has been interested in poverty issues, seeing them as grounded in biblical principles of compassion, almsgiving, and support for the needy in society. During the early stages of Christian development, the people demonstrated love and charity by providing communal care support, ensuring that no Christian went without a basic need.²⁷ Acts 2: Livy, in the years 44-45, documents that believers in him lived in communities, sold their property and distributed the proceeds to the needy.²⁸ This practice aligned with one of the fundamental principles of the Christian faith, which is to love your neighbor; it also demonstrated the efforts of later Christians to combat poverty through collaborative efforts.

In the Middle Ages, the Church broadened the range of functions associated with charity, particularly where the state could not or did not meet the needs of society. Monasteries tragically assumed the role of social relief units, offering food, shelter, and medical assistance to those in need. Such institutions were a source of support for communities during famines, wars, or diseases.²⁹ For instance, following the Rule of St. Benedict, the Benedictine monasteries incorporated the

principles of hospitality and care for people with low incomes, thereby reflecting the principle of faith through a pragmatic approach.³⁰ Also, traveling preachers, such as the Franciscans, were mainly concerned with serving the poor and the sick; they devoted their entire lives to feeding and clothe the poor.³¹

The Church also ensures that it provides long-term solutions to support needy institutions. Christian organizations established hospitals, orphanages, and almshouses to provide long-term treatment for these vulnerable populations.³² Established in the 7th century, the Hôtel-Dieu in Paris stands as one of the oldest healthcare institutions in Europe, and the Church's tradition of healthcare continues to this day.³³ These establishments fulfilled basic physiological needs and embodied the concept of 'theology of the body,' based on the pious act of assisting the poor.

The Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation introduced new parameters into the Church's relations with social support. While Protestant reformers spurned central authority and favored personal initiative in matters of poor relief, the result was the growth of systematic poor relief on a local basis supported through local tithes and voluntary subscriptions. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church pursued its charitable goals of aiding impoverished communities through the efforts of religious orders such as the Jesuits and Sisters of Charity, among others.³⁴ These groups offered education, health care, and social services, often lacking in the state, particularly in the European regions.

3.2. Advocacy and Education as Poverty Alleviation Tools

The abolitionist movements of the 18th and 19th centuries were among the most notable activities in the Church. Piety and abolition were common cultural and political themes: men such as William Wilberforce in Britain and Frederick Douglass in the United States

²⁶ Mutema, Maxwell, and Pamela Chiromo. "Inclusive Agribusiness Models for Africa: The Case of an Innovative Initiative by TechnoServe in Zimbabwe." *International Food and Agribusiness Management Review* 17 (2014): 167-173.

²⁷ Nye-Knutson, Alena. "Hidden bread and revealed word: Manna traditions in Targums Neophyti1 and Ps-Jonathan." In *Israel in the Wilderness*, pp. 201-225. Brill, 2008.

²⁸ Miller, Darrow L. "Agriculture and the Kingdom of God." *Biblical holism in agriculture* (2003): 141-172.

²⁹ Gorski, Philip S. "Historicizing the secularization debate: Church, state, and society in late medieval and early modern Europe, ca. 1300 to 1700." *American sociological review* 65, no. 1 (2000): 138-167.

³⁰ Benedict, Saint, and Justin McCann. "Rule." *Documents of the Christian Church*. Henry Bettenson, Ed. London: Oxford University Press (1963): 161-179.

³¹ Connell, Charles W. "The Franciscan Invention of the New World." (2017): 485-488.

³² Eagle, David E., Warren A. Kinghorn, Heather Parnell, Cyrilla Amany, Vanroth Vann, Senti Tzudir, Venkata Gopala Krishna Kaza, Chimdi Temesgen Safu, Kathryn Whetten, and Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell. "Religion and caregiving for orphans and vulnerable children: A qualitative study of caregivers across four religious traditions and five global contexts." *Journal of religion and health* 59 (2020): 1666-1686.

³³ Trent, B. "Hôtel-Dieu de Québec: the story of Canada's oldest hospital." *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 132, no. 1 (1985): 56.

³⁴ Bellomo, Rinaldo, Claudio Ronco, John A. Kellum, Ravindra L. Mehta, Paul Palevsky, and ADQI workgroup. "Acute renal failure—definition, outcome measures, animal models, fluid therapy and information technology needs: the Second International Consensus Conference of the Acute Dialysis Quality Initiative (ADQI) Group." *Critical care* 8 (2004): 1-9.

based arguments against slavery on women's moral and ethical codes.³⁵ When Prime Minister William Pitt asked Parliament in 1806 to outlaw the slave trade, Wilberforce's zeal and the work of his group, known as the Clapham Sect, made the British slave trade illegal in 1807 and all slavery in the British Empire illegal in 1833.³⁶ Like theologians, Douglass, an ex-slave now an activist, employed Christian values in his abolitionist appeal for equal rights for people of all colors by appealing to the notion that 'all humanity was created equal.

Aside from advocacy, the Church has come to appreciate education as one of the most effective ways of eradicating the lower classes. Few children from the poor population had access to a basic education, and missionary schools became important during colonialism to provide the poor with basic literacy and survival skills.³⁷ Instead of sheltering cultural bias, these schools enacted laws governing social transformation and empowerment. For instance, missionaries introduced education to previously undeveloped regions in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, creating opportunities for generations to improve their circumstances.³⁸

This shows that church-led education went well beyond primary and secondary levels of education. Christians established Oxford University, Cambridge University, and Harvard specifically to produce clergy. Over the years, these universities offered education in all fields and admitted students from across social classes.³⁹ They incorporated the idea that the Church possessed knowledge, which was redemptive, and that the process of acquiring it would ultimately contribute to the positive evolution of society.

In today's world, the Church views education as a means to escape poverty. Christian groups have supported establishing schools, vocational training facilities, and scholarships.⁴⁰ For instance, World Vision and Compassion International aim to provide education, health care, and nutritional needs to sponsored children in needy areas. It is a plus when these initiatives meet the actual requirements to support immediate needs and

build upon the capacity to help a person gain and sustain an employable job.

The intersection of charity, advocacy, and education

This paper demonstrates that the Church has played an early role in poverty reduction through charity, advocacy, and education. Charity addresses the situation's urgency, helping people needing food, clothing, or shelter. Advocacy addresses structural deficiencies that generate and perpetuate poverty and seeks to change policies and practices prohibiting equal opportunity.⁴¹ Education equips individuals to become productive citizens and become self-sufficient. This simultaneous strategy has enabled the Church to contribute to poverty eradication continually. The Church has shown an environmental understanding of human needs by addressing poverty in all classifications: seven spiritual, material, and systemic. For example, the abolition of slavery was not only the erasure of evil but also the step forward that built up millions of economically and socially free people.⁴² Likewise, opening schools and hospitals through churches has had the domino effect of transforming the quality of life for populations.

While the Church has achieved significant success, it has also faced controversy and criticism. Missionary activities accompany colonialism; for example, they are often associated with the colonialization process of cultural imperialism. However, we cannot deny the Church's role in initiating positive societal benefits, particularly in the holistic fight against poverty.

Implications for current endeavors

Studying the Church's experience and active role in past poverty-fighting projects. It is helpful. First, the power of the Church to mobilize resources and turn people to action will remain helpful in underlining the need to embrace community-focused solutions.⁴³

³⁵ Peabody, Sue. "France's Two Emancipations in Comparative Context." *Abolitions as a Global Experience* (2016): 25-49.

³⁶ Baker, William. "William Wilberforce on the idea of Negro inferiority." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31, no. 3 (1970): 433-440.

³⁷ Oranga, Josephine, Enock Obuba, and Eliud Nyakundi. "Education as an instrument of poverty eradication in Kenya: successes and challenges." *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 8, no. 09 (2020): 410.

³⁸ Meier zu Selhausen, Felix. "Missions, education and conversion in colonial Africa." *Globalization and the rise of mass education* (2019): 25-59.

³⁹ Duchesne, Ricardo. "Christianity is a Hellenistic Religion, and Western Civilization is Christian." *Historically Speaking* 7, no. 4 (2006): 15-18.

⁴⁰ Oladipo, Julius. "The role of the church in poverty alleviation in Africa." *Transformation* 17, no. 4 (2000): 146-152.

⁴¹ Chepkirui, Abigael, and Simon M. Thiong'o. "Does cross-cultural adjustment affect employee work commitment? Assessing the role of work factors within selected mission hospitals in Kenya." *F1000Research* 13 (2024): 1229.

⁴² Okolie, Ugochukwu Chinonso, Christian Ehiobuche, Paul Agu Igwe, Michael Austin Agha-Okoro, and Chukwuemeka Christian Onwe. "Women entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation: Understanding the economic and socio-cultural context of the Igbo Women's basket weaving enterprise in Nigeria." In *Entrepreneurship and the Informal Sector*, pp. 8-27. Routledge, 2022.

⁴³ Bormet, Mona, Jane Kishoyian, Yoram Siame, Ngalande Ngalande, Kathy Erb, Kathryn Parker, Douglas Huber, and Karen Hardee. "Faith-based advocacy for family

Moreover, the biblical states of early Christians and the initiatives of charitable monastic orders that represent contemporary society provide examples of collective activities that can lead to fulfilling transformations. Second, the Church's involvement in advocacy shows the importance of addressing the root causes of the problem. In instances such as advocating for the abolition of slavery or promoting economic justice, the Church has shown that addressing systemic issues is a crucial step toward eliminating poverty.⁴⁴ Current challenges such as income disparity, environmental degradation, and political instabilities, which deepen poverty, make this approach inevitable. Ultimately, education continues to serve as a powerful tool for empowerment, showing no signs of diminishing. Therefore, through education, the Church can create more employment opportunities for the poor, begin to eradicate poverty, and subsequently collaborate with society to combat vices.⁴⁵ A curriculum that integrates academic, vocational/technical, life, and character education can prepare people to live in a world that seems to be escalating in its complexities.

The Church exhibits dynamic characteristics in the modern era.

As the Church progresses, it must implement positive initiatives that build on past contributions to address current challenges. What is more important is that the development in the area of technology and communication provides fresh chances for expanding outreach. For instance, we can conduct virtual classrooms, give and receive funding, and spread and share awareness.⁴⁶ However, collaborating with governments, NGOs, and other private corporate entities can help the Church reach a vast population of impoverished individuals, surpassing the current measures.

Indeed, there are specific issues that the Church cannot boast about and that require it to respond to criticisms. Credibility hinges on cultural competence and relevance, diversity and participation, and assessability and sustainability. The Church can fulfill its mission to the poor and marginalized by comprehending the past, reflecting on it, and actively engaging in the present to create a more positive and open future.⁴⁷ Altogether,

historical involvements of the Church in the fight against poverty testify to a powerful, persistent passion for justice, mercy, and liberation. The purpose of the Church is charity, advocacy, and education. The Church has been a source of hope for many individuals and groups. Despite facing new challenges and opportunities, the Church's rich history can serve as a foundation for a sustainable system to combat poverty.

4. Contemporary Approaches to Poverty Alleviation

4.1. Economic Empowerment: Microfinance and Vocational Training

In poverty-targeting strategies spearheaded by churches, microfinance activities offering small credit to businessmen and women locked out from conventional financial institutions are on the uptrend. Churches typically finance these measures, collaborating with established MFIs to offer loans and financial education to individuals. Churches typically finance these measures, collaborating with existing MFIs to offer loans and financial education to individuals.⁴⁸ For instance, the Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) collaborates with churches to provide microfinance services to underserved sectors, enabling them to establish their businesses and manage the loans they receive.

These programs are particularly effective in areas where women's poverty rates are significantly high due to their exclusion from the mainstream economy. Self-finance schemes carried out by the Church often target women as champions of change at the family and community levels.⁴⁹ Thus, these schemes not only combat poverty and give women a financial voice through education but also undermine all forms of discrimination and discriminatory practices that disempower women in the economic marketplace.

Apart from microfinance, vocational training has become another critical strategy for providing skills on the market. Most churches typically organize training sessions to equip their congregation with highly valuable skills in civil service, carpentry and joinery, dressmaking, computer operations, and agriculture, among other critical areas. These set programs help address the gap

planning works: evidence From Kenya and Zambia." *Global Health: Science and Practice* 9, no. 2 (2021): 254-263.

⁴⁴ Kang-Hyun, Kim, and Jun Ki Chung. "Public Theology and Its Application: A Case Study of Goryeoin Ministry in South Korea." *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 15, no. 1 (2024): 57.

⁴⁵ Ayoo, Collins. "Poverty reduction strategies in developing countries." *Rural Development-Education, Sustainability, Multifunctionality* (2022): 17-57.

⁴⁶ Dunlow, Jacob. "Digital discipleship: A study of how churches in New York used technology for adult discipleship during the COVID-19 pandemic." *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 3 (2021): 458-472.

⁴⁷ Ondondo, Emily Ayieta. "Language and the Church in Kenya: Unity, Diversity or Unity in Diversity?." *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 8, no. 9 (2024): 3649-3656.

⁴⁸ Chikwira, Collin, Edson Vengesai, and Petronella Mandude. "The impact of microfinance institutions on poverty alleviation." *Journal of Risk and Financial Management* 15, no. 9 (2022): 393.

⁴⁹ O'Donnell, Megan, Mayra Buvinić, Shelby Bourgault, and Brian Webster. *The gendered dimensions of social protection in the COVID-19 context*. No. 576. Washington, DC, USA: Center for Global Development, 2021.

between learning and the labor market, training people for jobs that exist in the market. For instance, World Vision and Tearfund collaborate with local churches to develop and execute vocational training programs offering gainful employment to rural and urban impoverished individuals, thereby fostering economic sustainability.⁵⁰

In addition, vocational training activities tend to encompass comprehensive human resource development to acquire professional competence and character. We nurture soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, among others, to enhance the participant's marketability. Churches provide training opportunities and serve as a venue for trainees to meet potential employers or partners.⁵¹ This holistic development of vocational training covers skills for student practice and prepares them to handle the existing and evolving formal employment sector.

4.2. Community Development and Support Systems

Perhaps one of the most apparent ways churches promote human welfare is by setting up food banks, clinics, and housing. These efforts aim to provide necessities to individuals currently facing more urgent situations. For instance, many churches operate food banks, which assist in providing groceries to individuals with limited access to food.⁵² They primarily rely on the generosity of their congregation members and their partnerships with traders, demonstrating that solidarity is achievable and effectively combats poverty.

Church-owned clinics, also known as faith-based clinics, play a crucial role in providing health care to the underprivileged population. These clinics sometimes provide care at little or no cost by removing hurdles to health care that are most pervasive in impoverished populations. Occasionally, churches collaborate with international relief agencies to provide medical services to underprivileged areas, ensuring that everyone in need receives care.⁵³ Similarly, churches primarily undertake housing projects to provide

homeless people, particularly the destitute, with a place to live and a fresh start in life.

In addition to fulfilling people's basic needs, churches also strive to assist them in strengthening their support systems, enabling them to become independent. The primary means are counseling services that help emotionally and psychologically challenged individuals struggling with poverty. Small income usually results in stress, depression, and family breakdown, which forms a circle of hopelessness.⁵⁴ Most church-funded counseling services assist individuals and families with challenges they experience in everyday life by advising them and assisting them to change for the better.

Churches utilize mentorship programs as a crucial strategy for providing support mechanisms. In addition to food and shelter, churches provide mentors to help, encourage, and check on members. Mentorship can take various forms, from career coaching to spiritual discipleship, with the underlying goal of helping people become their true selves.⁵⁵ Youths particularly value these opportunities, as they can emulate senior individuals and experience a sense of acceptance in their societies. Churches are also enormously responsible for combatting social exclusion, which often results from poverty. Through embracing tolerance, churches help open facilities where people can meet and mingle and get support.⁵⁶ Through precarious activities provided by churches, support groups, and events, people engage in physical and emotional social interactions. These goals enhance dignity and worth, which dwarf the stigmatizing features of poverty.

Furthermore, in the present generation, the Church has embraced developmental partnerships with governments, international and local non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders in the private sector. These partnerships enable churches to expand their resource capacity and potentially achieve even more. For example, Habitat for Humanity is a Christian housing organization that collaborates with local churches to construct homes for resale at the lowest costs and engages future homeowners in construction.⁵⁷ It is for this reason that the modeled system addresses

⁵⁰ Admiraal, Wilfried, Wouter Schenke, Loes De Jong, Yolande Emmelot, and Henk Sligte. "Schools as professional learning communities: what can schools do to support professional development of their teachers?." *Professional development in education* 47, no. 4 (2021): 684-698.

⁵¹ Kostikova, Ilona, Liudmyla Holubnych, Zoya Girich, and Nataliia Movmyga. "Soft skills development with university students at English lessons." *Revista Romaneasca Pentru Educatie Multidimensionala* 13, no. 1 (2021): 398-416.

⁵² Schanbacher, William, and Heewon L. Gray. "Religion and food insecurity in the time of COVID-19: food sovereignty for a healthier future." *Ecology of Food and Nutrition* 60, no. 5 (2021): 612-631.

⁵³ Goodwin, Ellen. "A Faith-Inspired Way of Working: What the COVID-19 Pandemic Has Shown Us

about the Humanitarian Sphere's Approach to Local Faith Engagement." *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 5, no. 2 (2023): 30-39.

⁵⁴ Hollier, Joel, Shane Clifton, and Jennifer Smith-Merry. "Mechanisms of religious trauma amongst queer people in Australia's evangelical churches." *Clinical Social Work Journal* 50, no. 3 (2022): 275-285.

⁵⁵ Grocutt, Alyssa, Duygu Gulseren, Julie G. Weatherhead, and Nick Turner. "Can mentoring programmes develop leadership?." *Human Resource Development International* 25, no. 4 (2022): 404-414.

⁵⁶ Harvey, Claire. "Building neighbourhoods where friendships flourish." *Zadok Perspectives* 163 (2024): 10-13.

⁵⁷ Harris, Janeé R. Avent. "Community-based participatory research with Black churches." *Counseling and Values* 66, no. 1 (2021): 2-20.

housing adequacy and, at the same time, ensures that beneficiaries feel like they own something.

5. Challenges and Opportunities

5.1. Resource Limitations and Capacity Building

Lack of technical knowledge within the Church may hinder the effective implementation of poverty eradication programs that many churches organize. While churches may excel in praying for people and counseling those in distress, they may lack the necessary expertise to run micro-financial institutions effectively, offer vocational training, or manage large-scale community projects. This limitation could disrupt churches' growth and hinder their ability to address systematic poverty effectively.⁵⁸ Additionally, the church staff may possess limited skills in project planning and management, proposal and grant writing, and fundraising, all of which are crucial for establishing and maintaining development projects. Therefore, many interventions face challenges in assessing outcomes, evaluating performance, and securing resources for sustainability.

Overcoming these challenges has to do with improved capacity-building efforts. Therefore, to overcome the issue of limited resources, churches must focus on enhancing their internal resources. Enabling knowledge among the church leaders and staff to undertake courses in project management, financial management, and fundraising can assist the Church in making the most of limited resources and possibly generating more support.⁵⁹ That can also include building the capacities of the congregation itself to be able to contribute to the poverty reduction exercise effectively. Through offering professional development, churches present their leaders with opportunities that can strengthen the delivery of the Church's interventions; in this way, the Church acquires the capacity to manage social, financial, and administrative elements.⁶⁰

Furthermore, churches have the potential to enhance their resource endowment by diversifying their funding portfolio. However, traditional donations remain a significant support aspect, and churches may consider exploring new revenue-generating avenues such as social business or collaborating with businesses. For instance, churches should be able to promote the establishment of fair-trade cooperatives, which can generate income for society. Churches can also collaborate with local companies to create jobs for community members, fostering regional economic growth.⁶¹ This way, churches will have multiple avenues to tap into funding their poverty alleviation programs and widen their resource endowment.

5.2. Collaborations with Government and NGOs

Government agencies can be key players in poverty issues, especially social welfare and development agencies. When the government partners with churches, it can leverage their established social structures and public trust to provide services. For example, churches can partner with government ministries to deliver health care, education, and quality shelter to needy societies.⁶² Governments may occasionally provide funding or other resources to churches that work in poverty and demonstrate a willingness to serve even more needy individuals.⁶³ Moreover, ministries may assist churches with legal and political concerns affecting developmental activities so that the programs meet the legal requirements of the country in question.

There are also promising opportunities for cooperation with NGOs. Many NGOs today possess networks and experience in education, health, and microfinance, which can bolster the Church's ongoing efforts. Currently, churches can engage with NGOs to learn about successful poverty reduction.⁶⁴ Churches may lack the expertise to design and implement development programs; therefore, NGOs can support them by providing essential experience in project implementation. Also, NGOs can help churches get

⁵⁸ Oliver, Gordon. "Speaking Christian: a retrospective journey in practical theology." *Practical Theology* 14, no. 5 (2021): 454-466.

⁵⁹ Moreno, M., R. Ortiz, Daniel Cagigas-Muñiz, J. Becerra, J. M. Martin, A. J. Prieto, MdIA Garrido-Vizuete, Juan Manuel Macías-Bernal, M. J. Chávez, and P. Ortiz. "ART-RISK 3.0 a fuzzy—based platform that combine GIS and expert assessments for conservation strategies in cultural heritage." *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 55 (2022): 263-276.

⁶⁰ Frasca, Francesca, Elena Verticchio, Cristina Cornaro, and Anna Maria Siani. "Performance assessment of hygrothermal modelling for diagnostics and conservation in an Italian historical church." *Building and Environment* 193 (2021): 107672.

⁶¹ Nyamongo, Getui, Ichuloi Anthony, and Kandagor Rotich Daniel. "Factors impeding Financial Stability of the Church: A Study of Seventh Day Adventist, South East

Kenya Field, Kenya." *African Journal of Education, Science and Technology* 7, no. 4 (2024): 191-200.

⁶² Greenberg, Anna. "Doing whose work? Faith-based organizations and government partnerships." In *Who Will Provide? The Changing Role of Religion in American Social Welfare*, pp. 178-197. Routledge, 2021.

⁶³ Fu, Jiawei Sophia, Katherine R. Cooper, and Michelle Shumate. "Do US faith-based social service organizations resist collaboration? Examining the role of religiosity and operational capacity in interorganizational partnerships." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (2021): 241-261.

⁶⁴ Moshtari, Mohammad, and Evelyne Vanpoucke. "Building successful NGO-business relationships: A social capital perspective." *Journal of Supply Chain Management* 57, no. 3 (2021): 104-129.

funds for the projects through grants, enabling church-operated programs to have other resources besides those provided by the Church.

NGOs can also help augment churches' capacity to identify and assess their programs' effectiveness. This is because NGOs are typically proficient in monitoring and evaluation (M&E), making them highly valuable in gauging the impact of developmental interventions.⁶⁵ Through collaborations with NGOs, churches can enhance their M&E systems to determine if the programs have the intended impact on the participants' abilities. This approach also assists churches in demonstrating the effectiveness of their campaigns to potential funders, thereby enhancing their appeal as a project to potential future funding partners.

Churches also need to partner with other faith-based organizations besides governments and NGOs. These partnerships enable churches to pool resources, enhancing their collective impact and fostering mutual learning. They can also unite the churches to prevent service duplication, ensuring optimal utilization of resources.⁶⁶ For instance, several churches in a given society can collaborate to form a unified food pantry or joint medical center since one can provide the other needed equipment in society.

Furthermore, churches can assist in formulating robust policies aimed at reducing poverty among empowered manufacturers. Churches must work closely with governments and NGOs to provide concerted voices to mobilize system change. For instance, churches can organize with NGOs and social justice organizations to fight for increased coverage of basic needs, access to health care, and policies that encourage people's economic rights.⁶⁷ These partnerships reinforce the effectiveness of church-led activities and are also part of building an equitable and fair society.

Thus, there is a conclusion that resource constraints are still a crucial factor hindering communication in church organizations carrying out poverty relief activities. Still, the partnership can indeed be regarded as promising from this point of view. Churches can form strategic relationships with governments, NGOs, and other FBOs to supplement available resources, knowledge, and connections that will improve the future impacts and permanency of the programs. Such partnerships enable churches to increase outreach efficiency and achieve improved program enhancement while also being involved in fighting systemic issues. In this way, churches can maintain their essential vocation of working on poverty eradication, promoting hope, and creating sustainable communities.

6. Conclusion

Over the ages, the Church has been used as light armor and called upon in fighting poverty, as is true to every adversity, due to its spiritual worth and societal representation. China's Church has proved over familial and current generations that it is possible to offer a hand now while also helping to give a hand up into the future while equipping men and women with means to become capable in the future. Its foundation lies in justice, compassion, and stewardship, making it a diverse approach that concentrates on personal and communal transformation by providing individuals with spiritual and material support.

To intensify its fight against poverty, the Church must incorporate innovative technologies to enhance its reach and impact. This also involves establishing strategic partnerships and collaborations with governments, nonprofit organizations, and other institutions to broaden the scope of available capacity and knowledge, thereby enabling more integrated and sustainable solutions. Adding extra gears provides an extra layer of solution-focused and culturally appropriate strategies for change. Also, in place-making and sustaining development programs, funding the training and capacity-building of church leaders and members enables them to undertake those programs. Last, the Church should continue preaching and making donations, actively advocate for changes in various discrimination systems, and, most importantly, passionately address societal poverty issues. These changes can assist traditional religious institutions in reestablishing their activities, using their mission as the foundation to define their long-term impact on lives and societies.

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Cite this Article: Ndzi, L (2025). The Church as an Agent of Change: Alleviating Poverty Among its Members. *Greener Journal of Social Sciences*, 15(1): 25-37, <https://doi.org/10.15580/gjss.2025.1.012825015>.