



Understanding the Nature and Root Causes of Poverty in Nigeria: A Focus on Plateau State

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ABSTRACT

Due to many historical, economic, political, and environmental causes, poverty in Nigeria is still a complicated and widespread problem. This essay explores how poverty is now understood in Nigeria, emphasizing Plateau State. The study looks at three main ways that poverty manifests itself: environmental deterioration, social isolation, and economic deprivation. It illustrates how these elements impact people's lives locally and nationally, increasing vulnerability, limiting access to necessary services, and raising the likelihood of conflict via instances from Plateau State. Widespread unemployment and restricted access to capital are examples of economic deprivation, but minority groups' marginalization and the absence of educational possibilities are examples of social exclusion. Food insecurity is made worse by environmental deterioration, which also has a detrimental effect on agricultural output, which is a major source of income for many people in the area. To reduce poverty in Nigeria and accomplish the country's development objectives, the article ends by urging extensive legislative changes, sustainable development strategies, and community-driven solutions.

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Introduction: Overview of Poverty in Nigeria

Nigeria, a nation rich in natural riches but with glaring economic disparities, poverty is one of the most urgent problems. Even though Nigeria has the biggest economy in Africa, poverty still exists there, which highlights the underlying issues that have impeded the nation's progress. Around 80 million Nigerians, or more than 40% of the country's population, are estimated to be living below the poverty line, according to the latest World Bank figures (World Bank, 2022). The multifaceted nature of poverty in Nigeria, which is marked by food insecurity, unemployment, lack of access to education, and subpar healthcare facilities, is reflected in this startling number (Oni & Ajibola, 2021).

The issue is made worse by regional differences, as poverty rates differ greatly throughout Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. Due to reasons including insecurity, low agricultural output, and limited industrialization, the northern regions—which include states like Borno, Yobe, and Plateau—show some of the highest poverty indices (NBS, 2022). The southern states, especially Lagos, on the other hand, exhibit higher levels of wealth, mostly because of their more diverse economy and easier access to infrastructure. In addition to highlighting national disparity, these regional disparities also show that specific policies are required to address the causes of poverty in certain areas (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024a).

Nigeria is one of the nations with the highest rates of poverty in the world. Due in large part to its potential to spur economic growth in West Africa, the nation has emerged as a focal point in international talks on ending poverty. Eliminating poverty is a top objective according to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, and Nigeria's poverty statistics greatly contribute to the global poverty statistics (UNDP, 2022). Therefore, addressing poverty in Nigeria is not only a national issue but also a global one, as ignoring the problem might compromise global efforts to achieve SDG 1—ending poverty in all its manifestations worldwide (Adeola & Fayemi, 2020).

Scope of the Study

To comprehend the nature and underlying causes of poverty in Nigeria, this paper examines Plateau State as a case study. The North-Central state of Plateau is distinguished by a special fusion of historical significance, agricultural potential, and cultural variety. Notwithstanding these advantages, the state is among the poorest in Nigeria due to its high rates of poverty, with over 70% of the population living in poverty (NBS, 2022). Plateau State was chosen as the study's main point because it embodies the problems that many northern areas experience, including poverty brought on by violence, environmental degradation, and limited access to essential social amenities (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024b).

Because of its socio-political and historical characteristics, Plateau State may also be used as a

microcosm to study Nigeria's larger poverty problems. Due to community displacement and disruption of livelihoods, the state's history of ethno-religious conflicts has made poverty worse (Adedoyin et al., 2016). Furthermore, as farmers contend with erratic weather patterns and diminishing soil fertility, the state's reliance on agriculture—which is extremely vulnerable to climatic variability—further solidifies cycles of poverty (Onwumere & Anyanwu, 2021). The article seeks to offer a comprehensive picture of how poverty appears in Nigeria at both the local and national levels by examining these regional concerns.

Additionally, as noted in the works of Sele and Wanjiku (2024a, 2024b), who investigated the roles of religion and education in resolving economic inequality in Nigeria and Kenya, this study will draw on ideas from the body of literature already available on development and poverty reduction measures. Their comparative study offers a starting point for comprehending how structural problems—like inadequate governance and unequal access to education—fuel poverty. The article aims to offer long-term answers that are specific to the problems facing Plateau State and, consequently, Nigeria overall by expanding on these conversations.

The Nature of Poverty in Nigeria

We examined poverty in Nigeria from a theological and socioeconomic standpoint in the preceding section, highlighting its complex character. Building on that basis, this section on "The Nature of Poverty in Nigeria" explores the various facets of poverty in greater detail, including social exclusion, economic hardship, and environmental degradation. We may see how poverty is more than simply a lack of money but also a deprivation of the skills, opportunities, and resources required for human flourishing by connecting these aspects with the theological concept previously presented.

This link supports the claim that combating poverty in Nigeria necessitates an integrated strategy that incorporates social inclusion, legislative change, and environmental sustainability rather than just economic solutions. This is also consistent with the religious view that development should support holistic well-being, tackling the underlying causes of poverty including healthcare, education, and the empowerment of marginalised communities, in addition to material prosperity (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024b; Sen, 1999).

Multidimensional Poverty

In Nigeria, poverty is a multifaceted issue that extends beyond a lack of resources. The multifaceted character of poverty considers several factors, including social, economic, and environmental difficulties, all of which add to the condition of deprivation experienced by a person or group (Alkire & Santos, 2014). The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which considers

elements including housing conditions, education, and access to clean water, assesses poverty in three main areas: health, education, and standard of life (UNDP, 2022). Multidimensional poverty offers a more comprehensive framework to comprehend the lived realities of the poor than absolute poverty, which only considers income levels, and relative poverty, which contrasts economic patterns within a community (Sen, 1999).

According to a 2022 National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) study, 133 million Nigerians, or over 63% of the country's population, live in multidimensional poverty. This figure demonstrates the terrible conditions that many Nigerians endure, as they confront not only financial difficulties but also limited access to essential utilities, healthcare, and education (NBS, 2022). The situation is especially bad in rural regions, where the poverty cycle is further entrenched by poor infrastructure, restricted access to basic services, and environmental deterioration (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024a)

Manifestations of Poverty

1. **Economic Deprivation:** One of the main features of poverty in Nigeria is economic deprivation, since many people experience underemployment, unemployment, and restricted access to finance. With almost 53% of young people either jobless or underemployed, youth unemployment is a serious problem (World Bank, 2022). Many Nigerians are in a condition of economic precarity due to the lack of formal work possibilities and the pervasive informality of the labour market (Ajakaiye & Adeyeye, 2019).

Furthermore, many Nigerians are unable to participate in entrepreneurial endeavours that may help them escape poverty due to a lack of access to financial resources, such as credit or loans (Bankole & Olayemi, 2020). Due to suppressed innovation and underutilised productive labour, this economic deprivation not only restricts individual economic mobility but also impedes national prosperity. Economic disadvantage in Nigeria is associated with structural problems, such as unfair access to opportunities and bad governance, as Sele and Wanjiku (2024a) note.

Example: A lack of finance and sophisticated agricultural equipment inhibits the productivity of many farmers in Plateau State, where agriculture is the primary economic activity (Onwumere & Anyanwu, 2021). Because farmers are unable to invest in higher-yield crops or participate in value-added processing, the lack of financial inclusion makes rural poverty even worse.

Impact: Local livelihoods are impacted by economic deprivation because it prolongs cycles of poverty and limits opportunities for communal growth. Because large segments of the population are unable to

make substantial contributions to the economy, it hinders economic progress on a national scale and exacerbates socioeconomic disparities (Okafor & Edeh, 2017).

2. **Social Exclusion:** Another notable aspect of poverty in Nigeria is social isolation, which is especially prevalent among marginalised populations like women and ethnic minorities. Social exclusion happens when discriminatory behaviours or policies consistently deny some groups access to opportunities, resources, and services (Hickey & Du Toit, 2013). In Nigeria, females are less likely than boys to attend formal schooling, and this is frequently observed in rural areas with few educational resources (UNICEF, 2020).

Minority groups are marginalised, which makes poverty worse since these communities lack access to basic services like healthcare and education, especially in conflict-prone areas like the Middle Belt (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024b). Deeply ingrained cultural customs and a lack of social infrastructure contribute to gender inequality and prevent vulnerable groups from moving up the social ladder.

Example: Due to a shortage of healthcare and educational resources, many rural communities in Plateau State—especially those impacted by ethno-religious conflict—face social exclusion (Adedoyin et al., 2016). Since young people in these regions frequently lack access to higher education or vocational training, this has led to subpar educational achievements and restricted employment opportunities.

Impact: Because marginalised populations are often denied the opportunity to improve their socioeconomic condition, social exclusion causes poverty to become entrenched throughout generations. Over time, this strengthens social divisions and makes disparities more noticeable (Adetunji & Oyetunde, 2019).

3. **Environmental Degradation:** One of the main causes of poverty in Nigeria is environmental deterioration, especially in areas that depend significantly on agriculture. Rural lives are severely impacted by the loss of natural resources, such as soil erosion, deforestation, and desertification (Ayanlade & Ojebola, 2016). Environmental issues including land degradation and soil erosion have had a significant negative influence on agricultural output in Plateau State, lowering crop yields and pushing many farmers farther into poverty (Onwumere & Anyanwu, 2021).

Food security is impacted by environmental deterioration, which also jeopardizes initiatives to advance sustainable development. Poverty levels are exacerbated in rural areas because of decreased

agricultural productivity, which makes them more susceptible to food shortages and price instability (FAO, 2022). Furthermore, the loss of natural resources makes it harder for future generations to survive, which feeds the cycle of environmental degradation and poverty.

Example: Significant soil erosion has resulted from deforestation and overgrazing in Plateau State, lowering the amount of arable land available and endangering the lives of agricultural families (Yusuf et al., 2018). Many farmers have been forced to give up farming entirely because of the loss of healthy soil, which has made it harder for them to raise crops.

Impact: Rural communities' economic stability is directly threatened by environmental deterioration, which forces many to live in poverty as they lose their main source of income. At the national level, it poses a significant threat to Nigeria's food security and economic stability, as agriculture accounts for a large share of employment and GDP (Ajakaiye & Adeyeye, 2019).

Root Causes of Poverty in Nigeria

There are several underlying causes of poverty in Nigeria, and these factors combine to form a complicated web of deprivation that impacts millions of people. Examining the historical, political, economic, and social elements that contribute to poverty's persistence is necessary to comprehend these underlying reasons.

Historical Factors

Nigeria's poor situation is still greatly influenced by the legacy of colonialism. Economic policies and resource exploitation during the colonial era were created to favour the colonial powers, leaving behind shoddy institutions that now find it difficult to support their people (Adeleke, 2018; Iyoha & Oriakhi, 2009). Regional disparities have been sustained by the historical disdain for fair resource allocation, which has resulted in a concentration of wealth in certain places while ignoring others (Ighodaro & Okumadewa, 2019). As a result of this historical background, many communities are still struggling with underdevelopment and limited access to basic amenities, especially in rural areas like Plateau State.

Political Factors

Another major factor that has seriously impeded Nigeria's efforts to reduce poverty is corruption. Nigeria routinely ranks among the world's most corrupt countries, according to the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International, 2022). Poor infrastructure, insufficient healthcare, and inefficient social services are the results of mismanaging public resources (Obadan & Aghayere, 2019). The situation is made worse by political instability, which is typified by frequent changes in leadership and policy. This

undermines long-term development initiatives and prevents the implementation of sustainable programs aimed at reducing poverty (Adejumobi, 2019; Fagbadebo, 2007).

Economic Factors

Nigeria's over-reliance on oil has made its economy a monolith that is susceptible to changes in international markets. An unsustainable economic climate and a lack of jobs have resulted from the nation's previous economic policies that prioritised the oil industry above manufacturing and agriculture (Nwachukwu & Okolo, 2021; Oloyede, 2016). Opportunities for economic growth and job creation, which are essential for lowering poverty levels, are restricted by this lack of variety (Obeng-Odoom, 2017). Sele and Wanjiku (2024) point out that many Nigerians have been stuck in low-paying positions or unemployed due to the country's failure to industrialise, which has prolonged cycles of poverty.

Social Factors

Finally, societal problems are a major contributor to Nigeria's ongoing poverty. Particularly harmful are rapid population growth rates combined with poor access to healthcare and education, particularly in remote regions like Plateau State (Ogunleye, 2021). While inadequate healthcare services led to high mortality rates and a lower quality of life, restricted access to high-quality education impedes skill development and career prospects (Uddin et al., 2018). Sele and Wanjiku (2024) point out that social isolation of marginalised people exacerbates these issues by erecting obstacles to upward mobility and solidifying poverty.

Examples of Poverty's Manifestation and its Impact

The previous part examined the underlying causes of poverty in Nigeria, emphasising the historical, political, economic, and social elements that add to this widespread problem. These fundamental components lay the groundwork for comprehending how poverty manifests itself and how it affects society more broadly.

For example, the educational deficiencies observed in rural areas, especially in Plateau State, are directly related to the legacy of colonialism and its ongoing consequences on institutional integrity. Poor education is not a singular problem; rather, it is a symptom of more serious systemic issues stemming from poor resource management and inefficient government (Galtung, 2020; Okwudishu, 2019). As seen by the continuous environmental deterioration impacting agriculture, political instability brought on by corruption also makes economic hardship and food insecurity worse (International Crisis Group, 2020; FAO, 2022).

Furthermore, the economic stagnation linked to an excessive reliance on oil and a lack of industrialisation is the primary cause of the high rates of migration from

rural to urban areas. Urban overcrowding brought on by this movement exacerbates poverty rather than reducing it (World Bank, 2020; International Organisation for movement, 2019). As a result, the poverty symptoms covered in this part are inextricably tied to the previously mentioned root causes, revealing a complicated network of interconnected elements that still pose a threat to Nigeria's socioeconomic environment.

Local Level

- ✓ **Education in Rural Communities:** In rural Plateau State, access to high-quality education is still severely lacking, which exacerbates poverty and restricts children's chances. Poor educational outcomes result from the absence of qualified instructors, sufficient facilities, and necessary learning resources in many rural locations (UNESCO, 2021; Sele & Wanjiku, 2024). Children who get poor education frequently have fewer job opportunities and poorer earning capacity as adults, which prolongs poverty in their families and communities (World Bank, 2020; Okwudishu, 2019). This educational deprivation starts a cycle of poverty. As a result, the socioeconomic development of Plateau State and Nigeria overall is negatively impacted by the growing disparity between urban and rural educational attainment (Ogunyemi, 2020; Ijaiya et al., 2018).
- ✓ **Agriculture and Food Insecurity:** In the agricultural sector of Plateau State, environmental degradation severely reduces output and raises food insecurity. The already unstable state of food security in rural areas is made worse by factors including soil erosion, deforestation, and desertification, which hurt livestock and agricultural output (FAO, 2022; Sele & Wanjiku, 2024). These groups' dependence on subsistence farming leaves them extremely susceptible to changes in market pricing and climate change (Adewale & Afolabi, 2021; Mambo, 2019). Therefore, the heightened food shortage not only raises poverty levels but also causes malnutrition and associated health problems in the population, impairing cognitive and physical development (NBS, 2021; Eze, 2020).

National Level

- ✓ **Insecurity and Conflict:** At the national level, unemployment and poverty play a major role in the emergence of violent conflicts and insurgencies, such as Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria. As they attempt to flee their socioeconomic circumstances, young people are drawn to extreme ideas by the

despair brought on by high poverty levels (Galtung, 2020; Sele & Wanjiku, 2024). In addition to destabilising the economy, the ongoing cycle of violence takes vital funds away from programs aimed at reducing poverty and promoting development (International Crisis Group, 2020; Okwudishu, 2019). The nation's poverty is sustained because of this instability, which also deters foreign investment and sustainable economic progress (UNDP, 2019; Adebajo, 2021).

- ✓ **Migration:** The pattern of rural-urban migration, in which people from underdeveloped regions migrate to metropolitan areas in quest of better prospects, is another example of the effects of poverty. Cities become overcrowded because of this movement, which frequently leads to the growth of slums and subpar housing conditions (World Bank, 2020; Adewale & Afolabi, 2021). Poverty in both rural and urban regions is made worse by the flood of rural migrants, which places a tremendous strain on urban resources including healthcare, education, and job possibilities (NBS, 2021; Galtung, 2020). Therefore, although migration may offer some people short-term respite from poverty, it frequently creates new problems and ignores the underlying causes of poverty (International Organisation for Migration, 2019; Okwudishu, 2019).

Strategies for Alleviating Poverty

We examined the many effects of poverty in Nigeria, especially in Plateau State, in the section above, emphasising both the local and national expressions of this urgent problem. The effects of poverty, which range from increased migration and violence to insufficient education and food insecurity, highlight how urgently effective responses are needed. Comprehending these expressions establishes the foundation for pinpointing specific tactics that might reduce poverty on a local and national scale.

A comprehensive strategy that emphasises both localised remedies and systemic improvements is required to solve these issues. It is crucial to consider the connections between the many elements that contribute to poverty as we move on to talking about methods for reducing it. Fostering sustainable economic growth and social well-being requires policy changes, community-driven projects, and alignment with international frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (World Bank, 2021; UN Development Programme, 2022). Every tactic works to address the underlying causes of poverty as well as its manifestations, thereby promoting a more just and prosperous society.

We can better envision how to end the cycle of poverty and advance holistic development in Nigeria by

tying knowledge of the effects of poverty to practical solutions, especially in areas like Plateau State where the problems are most severe (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024; Houghton, 2022). The next section will examine certain tactics that may be used to successfully reduce poverty, covering both grassroots projects that include local populations in the development process and policy-level adjustments.

Policy Reform

Comprehensive policy changes are necessary to fight poverty in Nigeria. Eliminating corruption, which has long afflicted the nation's governing systems and embezzled funds intended for development, should be the top priority of these changes. According to research, corruption hinders economic growth and makes poverty worse by denying the most vulnerable groups access to resources and public services (Transparency International, 2021; Obasanjo, 2020).

Furthermore, diversifying the economy is essential to lowering Nigeria's excessive reliance on oil, which has made the country's economy susceptible to changes in the price of the commodity globally. Putting money into industries like manufacturing, technology, and agriculture may boost local economies and provide employment (UNDP, 2022; Sele & Wanjiku, 2024). More effective initiatives to reduce poverty will also be made possible by better governance, which is defined by accountability and openness and guarantees that funds are allocated where they are most needed (World Bank, 2021; Okunlola et al., 2020).

Community-Based Solutions

Local poverty issues have been successfully addressed by community-driven initiatives, especially in Plateau State. Through cutting-edge techniques like organic farming and cooperative models, programs centred on sustainable agriculture enable communities to increase their income levels and food security (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2022; Sele & Wanjiku, 2024). Additionally, by providing people with the necessary skills for economic participation, improving educational opportunities through neighbourhood projects like adult literacy programs and vocational training can end the cycle of poverty (World Food Programme, 2021; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2022). In line with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), these grassroots strategies not only promote community resilience but also active engagement in the development process (Houghton, 2022; Kankwenda et al., 2020).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

To combat poverty, Nigeria's dedication to accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offers a crucial framework. In addition to

guaranteeing fair access to high-quality healthcare, education, and employment opportunities, progress towards the SDGs can spur structural improvements that have a direct influence on poverty levels (Nigerian Economic Summit Group, 2021; UN Development Programme, 2022). Implementation issues still exist, though, and greater cooperation between governmental organisations, non-governmental groups, and community stakeholders is required to carry out poverty reduction plans in line with the SDGs (Adesina, 2021; Sele & Wanjiku, 2024). In addition to promoting national development, addressing the interconnected aspects of poverty holistically supports international initiatives to end poverty in all its manifestations by 2030.

Conclusion

The intricacy of poverty in Nigeria, especially in Plateau State, indicates a network of interconnected elements that call for a diversified strategy to successfully address. This article has examined the various aspects and underlying causes of poverty, emphasizing how social, political, economic, and historical factors all play a role in its continuation. We looked at how poverty manifests locally, including insufficient schooling, food insecurity, and the socioeconomic effects of migration and violence. These revelations demonstrate that poverty is a complex problem that calls for all-encompassing solutions rather than just being an economic one.

Policymakers, civil society organizations, and local communities must embrace integrated policies that include both structural changes and grassroots efforts to address the complex character of poverty. To foster an environment that supports sustainable development, policymakers must give top priority to measures that combat corruption, encourage economic diversification, and guarantee improved governance (NBS, 2022; Oxfam, 2023). Additionally, local communities ought to be involved in community-driven development projects that enable them to successfully handle their own difficulties. To break the cycle of poverty, this involvement can strengthen resilience and advance sustainable agriculture and education (Sele & Wanjiku, 2024; World Bank, 2021).

Additionally, adherence to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offers a strong foundation for comprehensive poverty reduction. Nigeria may strive for a more just and successful society by fusing global goals with local realities. To guarantee its efficacy and flexibility in response to shifting conditions, poverty reduction initiatives must also be continuously monitored and assessed (UNDP, 2022; FAO, 2023).

To sum up, fighting poverty in Nigeria—especially in Plateau State—requires teamwork and creative ideas that deal with its underlying causes and effects. All Nigerians can have a better future if we cultivate a culture of responsibility, diversity, and sustainable growth.

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About the Authors

1. John Sele Philip

John Sele Philip is a dynamic scholar and advocate whose work bridges theology, development studies, and social justice to confront the pressing challenges facing marginalized communities, particularly in his native Plateau State, Nigeria. A Berom from Gyel, Jos, Sele carries the weight of personal loss and the enduring trauma of the genocidal violence targeting indigenous Christians, which fuels his relentless pursuit of truth and restoration. Currently pursuing a Master's degree in Development Studies with a specialization in the Theology of Development at Africa International University (AIU) in Nairobi, Kenya, he holds a Bachelor's degree in Theology with a minor in Development Studies from the same institution. His academic journey is marked by a profound commitment to integrating theological principles with practical development strategies, as evidenced by his authorship of the influential blog, *Theology of Development* (<https://theologydev.com>), which explores faith-based solutions to societal challenges. As a lecturer in Development Studies at AIU (<https://aiu.ac.ke>), Sele inspires students to engage critically with issues of governance, social inclusion, and community empowerment. His leadership extends beyond

academia, having served as the International Students Representative at AIU, and was awarded the “**Best International Student President in East Africa 2025**” by **ASLA Awards** (<https://asla.africa>). Sele is also the Chief Executive Officer of Content Creators Hub (<https://ourcreatorshub.org>), a platform fostering creative solutions for social impact and was awarded by **Inua Awards** (<https://inuaawards.com>) as the “**Innovator of the Decade in East Africa, 2025**”. Sele's scholarly contributions, including peer-reviewed articles on peacebuilding and community-driven development (Sele et al., 2024; Sele & Mukundi, 2024), reflect his dedication to empowering marginalized groups, particularly in conflict-ridden Plateau State. His research interests—governance, social justice, Educational Reforms, and the theology of development—centre on practical applications within the African context, addressing systemic inequities and advocating for inclusive policies. Informed by years of grassroots engagement and a deep-rooted faith, Sele's work in this article is both a scholarly exposé and a personal crusade. As a survivor of the violence that has fractured his homeland, he channels his grief and vision into a clarion call for global accountability and local resilience. His ultimate aspiration is to serve Plateau State, restoring its cultural mosaic through justice, peacebuilding, and sustainable development, ensuring that the voices of survivors like those in Dogo Nahawa and Bokkos are amplified and honored.

2. Polycarp Kim Zongo

Polycarp Kim D. Zongo is a dynamic Christian leader, preacher, revivalist, teacher, counselor, orator, writer, musician, and scholar. A proud son of Jos, Nigeria, from the Berom tribe, he brings a unique cultural and theological depth to his work. He is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Development Studies at Africa International University, Nairobi, Kenya, with a specialization in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation.

With extensive experience in both church and societal leadership, Polycarp has authored numerous scientific research articles, devotionals, and delivered teachings, seminars, and messages across Nigeria and beyond. His work is marked by a deep passion for life transformation, social impact, and community restoration. He is joyfully married and a devoted father to three wonderful children.