

CHRISTIAN- MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES ON POVERTY AS CAUSE OF SUFFERING IN ABUJA, NIGERIA

Abel YakubuNanwa
ECWA Mabushi, Abuja FCT
abelnanwa@yahoo.com

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Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, PhD
Department of Religion and Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Jos, Jos
ikee_mario@yahoo.com

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Umar Habila Dadem Danfulani, PhD
Department of Religion and Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Jos, Jos
umardanfulani@gmail.com

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.30799.70560

Abstract

Suffering and poverty are inseparable and does not exclude anyone since both the righteous and the unrighteous suffer. Some people have the notion that if one suffers, it is because such a person is not religious enough or he/she has committed sin, on the contrary however, findings prove otherwise because whether one is a devout religious adherent of Christianity or Islam or any religion for that matter, suffering does not consider one's religiosity, hence, both Christians and Muslims suffer. The study revealed specific areas that Christians and Muslims in Abuja FCT, Nigeria undergo suffering. This is against the background that suffering is inevitable as long as human beings exist on this planet earth. Suffering however, is also unique due to different human circumstances, hence, the need to investigate how Christians and Muslims suffer as a result of poverty in Abuja FCT, which is believed to be where rich people live because it is the seat of political and economic power house of the country. The researchers used interviews and observation methods of data collection in which the adherents of Christianity and Islam in Abuja city were interviewed. The study found out that poverty is a cause of suffering because both the righteous and unrighteous experience poverty in addition to suffering from the demolition of properties due to the zeal to adhere to new Abuja Master Plan policy, the effect of covid-19 pandemic, poverty and unemployment (arbeit loss); among others.

Key words: Poverty, Perspectives, suffering, Christians and Muslims

Concept of Poverty

The concept of poverty can be viewed from two broad perspectives: relative poverty and absolute (Webster, 1993; World Bank, 2016 and Adawo, 2011) linked poverty with situations where people are experiencing outcomes that deviates from their expectations. They further opine that absolute poverty is a misery linked to an insufficient resource base, lack of income, narrow margin, high risk of failure, hunger, disease etc, (17).

In an attempt to give a concise definition of the term poverty, Watt opines that poverty is a state of being in which we are unable to meet our needs while Adeleke poverty refers to lack of basic resources, lack of political power, personal and physical deprivation and other socio-economic deprivations 5). Still on the meaning of poverty, the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) (1995), states that poverty is often described as a

state or condition of living in which people have little or no money, assets or means of support. On another scale Aku, Ibrahim and Bulus (1997) wrote that poverty is a plague affecting people all over the world, it is dehumanizing by its very nature, it is the condition that denies individuals the rights to exercise their full potentials (Aku, Ibrahim and Bulus 41)

But the most common definition of poverty is a condition where people are below a specific minimum level of income that is an imaginary international poverty line. It is determined by the ability to afford an adequate diet and other minimal necessities (World Bank Report 3). The poverty line knows no national boundary, it exists in Nigeria, Calcutta, Jakarta, Cairo, and even in New York. However, the World Bank (1995) has stated that in Nigeria poverty was found to be a rural phenomenon with 8.4 million of the 10 million extreme poor people being from rural areas. The World Bank further in (2003) revealed that 65% of the population in sub-Sahara Africa still lived under \$1.25 per a day while Weil (2009) notes that more than 1 billion people worldwide survive on the income of less than \$ 1 per day of which significant population are in Africa (World Bank Report 3-4). Again, Bowden contends that poverty is measured by comparing people's income. Peoples whose income is too low to meet basic needs such as food and shelter or health and education are said to be poor, this low level of income is called "poverty line" (Bowden 4).

Furthermore, Jeroh and Obi see poverty in its cause and manifestation as a multi-dimensional concept usually experienced by the poor and observed by the rich. According to them, this is why discourse and definitions of poverty are multifarious and highly extensive (Jeroh and Obi 113). For them, the concept of poverty is relative to the life situations of people and a state of mind and a perception of self in the complex web of social relation. As a result, therefore, they posit that poverty can be viewed from four dimensions: (a) lack of basic resources, (b) lack of power, (c) personal and physical deprivation, (d) socio-political deprivation. Accordingly, they argue that poverty as a concept hinge on three core issues empowerment, opportunity and security. This is because according to them, opportunity comes as a result of empowerment, thereby guaranteeing enhancement of security of lives and properties.

In conceptualizing poverty Alao defined poverty as simply "the condition or quality of being poor, unproductiveness, deficiency or inadequate supply of something. He argues that despite the multi-dimensional approach to the concept of poverty, one common theme is the lack of command of resources to meet essential needs (42). Equally, he argues that poverty perception varies from one clime to the other and according to culture, population and subgroups such as a religion of residence or sector of employment. Hence, he stated that the African perception of poverty for instance, vary from that of Europeans or North Americans. He submits that this notion has given rise to class system in different societies (Alao 142). After all said and done, there are three dominant conceptual views of poverty. The first view sees poverty as a severe deprivation of some basic human needs at the individual or household level. The second view defines poverty as the failure to achieve basic capabilities, such as being adequately nourished, living a healthy life, possessing skills to participate in economic and social life etc. while the third conceptualization of poverty came into lime light in the 1990s upwards. The core of this view of poverty is that poverty must be defined by the poor themselves or by the communities that poor people live in. This is otherwise known as the voices of the poor approach (chambers) (Alao 142).

Measurement of poverty

Poverty status is determined by comparing the monthly real per capita expenditure to official poverty line. If the per capita monthly real expenditure is less than the value of the official poverty line, then that individual is considered to be in poverty. The method used to calculate official poverty line is called Cost of Basic Need (CBN) method. This poverty line is considered as an absolute poverty line and does not vary geographically. The Copenhagen Declaration describes absolute poverty as “a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information” (2). The World Bank identifies 'extreme poverty' as being people who live on less than \$1 a day. According to World Bank report of 2001, 21% of the World's population was in extreme poverty, and more than half of the world's population was in poverty (World Bank Report 3). Extreme poverty is the result of permanent or long-lasting forms of precariousness that undermine the capacity of individuals, families, communities and population groups to assume fundamental rights enshrined in the International Bill of Human Rights. Extreme poverty cannot be overcome by material aid and capacity building alone, nor can poverty reduction initiatives be successful unless they are based on the recognition of the inherent dignity and on the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights preamble (World Bank Report 3-4).

Three levels of poverty have been identified; extreme poverty, moderate poverty and relative poverty. Extreme poverty occurs when families cannot get their basic needs for survival. They may be frequently hungry, lack safe drinking water, cannot afford education for their children, may lack shelter and have inadequate clothing. This level of poverty is most likely in developing countries. Moderate poverty occurs when families just meet their basic needs, while relative poverty refers to circumstances in developed countries when household income is below a given proportion of national income. Three dimensions of extreme poverty namely; income poverty, human development poverty and social exclusion have been central concepts in the development of social work over the past century. Income poverty if chronic and severe, can lead to homelessness, hunger, lack of health care and suspension of parental rights. Development poverty epitomizes the non-fulfilment of rights and needs in the vital area of health, education and training, access to information and employment, while social exclusion is not only a violation of human dignity but a phenomenon that leads to isolation, alienation and a hidden existence. In developed countries, extreme poverty affects only a small proportion of the entire populations (World Bank Report 4-5).

Poverty due to High Cost of Living in Abuja

Both Christians and Muslims in Abuja metropolis suffer from the high cost of living. There is high cost of accommodation (outrageous rent), electricity, high prices of food items in the market, transportation; among others. Owing to the high cost of accommodation within the FCT, many people prefer to look for accommodation far away (from environs) such as part of Nasarawa State and Niger State, hence, they have to leave home very early to catch up with their office times within the FCT. Omigbule Hamed Tunde and Markus Solomon, during interview, considered that suffering as high cost of accommodation within Federal Capital Territory is a thing to consider for low income workers and the jobless people within Abuja (Interview).

Talking about the high cost of living, Philip S. Clement and Simon E. Sunday lamented that their purchasing power is dwindling amidst rising inflation, and both the salary

earners and self-employed citizens are complaining that their earnings rarely meet up with family demands including feeding, health, education and housing (2). They further explained the situation of Ibrahim Abdulmuminu, a father of one and Kano businessman, who lamented how the cost of living has affected not only his marriage but his way of living. They quoted him thus:

Honestly, what we are experiencing now is a dilemma. When you talk about a hike in price, I am the one to tell you that because I am a businessman. This situation has negatively affected my business. If I had known, I wouldn't have even got married at this time, talk less of raising a child. It is difficult (Clement and Sunday 2).

In addition, in Abuja, Mohammed Ahmed told *Guardian Newspaper* that he is tired of life due to poverty or high cost of living because he and his extended family survive on just £1.50 a day, including what he sends to relatives in Maiduguri to help them buy food (4).

Poverty in Relation to Human suffering

Poverty is the state or condition in which a person or community lacks the financial resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living, which in most cases results to suffering. The income level from employment is so low that basic human needs can't be met. Poverty is a state of not having enough material possessions or income for a person's basic needs. Poverty may include social, economic, and political elements. Absolute poverty is the complete lack of the means necessary to meet basic personal needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter. Poverty also includes issues of access to services such as health care and education, marginalization and exclusion. Poverty refers to lacking enough resources to provide the necessities of life food, clean water, and transportation etc. every country has its own measure for poverty. "If poverty is related to lack of resources, it can also be understood in economic terms" (Spicker 232).

However, poverty has essential components, of which one of it is lack of hope. Poor people often lack hope for the future because they live in a lie. The lie of poverty, that is reinforced day-in and day-out is, "You don't matter. You're worthless. "Imagine not being able to provide enough food for your children or pay for a hospital visit when a child is sick or injured. Imagine the guilt, grief, and despair. The poor are helpless in the face of war and natural disasters. When natural disasters and conflict occur, the poor suffer the most. They are unprotected, uncared for, and unnoticed (World Bank Report 6).

Overcrowded urban areas where millions of the poor live in slum conditions increase the risk of disease and increase the death toll when conflict and war erupt or an environmental disaster hits. Poverty often causes the poor to put pressure on their environment, and in turn the environment contributes to the suffering the poor endure. Damage to the natural environment in which the poor live increases the impact floods and other natural disasters have. But "natural disasters" are as much a result of poor government, bad infrastructure, population density, rampant population growth and unequal living conditions as anything else. Extreme poverty helps create the disaster.

Limited access to sanitation and clean water lead to poor hygiene practices and more disease, which hinder the ability of the poor to work or attend school. That is why an organization known as Lifewater states "Water and poverty are inextricably linked. Lack of safe water and poverty are mutually reinforcing, access to consistent source of clean

water is crucial to poverty reduction.” (Lifewater 1). If girls do not attend school due to lack resources, and when someone more powerful takes advantage of them, from withholding wages or payments to trafficking a child, the poor are unable to pursue justice, for they lack the money and connections to do so. Although girls are more likely to be victims of sexual abuse and sex trafficking, exploitation does not discriminate based on gender. All of the world's poor are targets. Despite this harsh reality, it's the feeling that you don't matter, like your life will never get better, that is the most crushing and demoralizing aspect of poverty. It's also why poverty reduction efforts and programs to lower the poverty rate must be holistic, reaching into every aspect of the human experience.

Causes of Poverty in Sub-Sahara Africa

Talking about overcoming human poverty, United Nations Development Programme states that, the root causes of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa are not different from the causes of poverty anywhere else; poverty has been growing in sub-Saharan Africa due to long term impacts of external factors like war, genocide, famine, and land availability (United Nations Development...8) and unless these factors are addressed, the cycle of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa will continue to grow as each component of poverty reinforces the others. In sub-Saharan Africa, almost 220 million people, half the population, live in poverty.

External factors include lack of shelter, limited access to clean water resources, food insecurity, lack of access to health care, corruption, poor infrastructure and limited or dwindling natural resources. The internal elements that contribute to poverty are intangible and can include deficiencies in knowledge, aspiration, diligence, values, self-confidence and self-esteem; among others. When you have never seen someone escape a life of poverty, you have no reason to believe that escape is possible. Poverty becomes your lot in life and part of your identity. You cannot imagine a better future because you have never seen one, or if you have, it is a future for other people; not a future for someone like you. This lack of hope keeps people in poverty even when an opportunity that could change their lives presents itself (United Nations Development... 6).

Poverty in Africa

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with over 190.9 million people (Jaiyeola and Bayat, 15) and World Bank, 2017. It is the largest producer of crude oil in Africa, sixth in the world and it has the second largest gas reserves in the world (Khan and Cheri, 63). Nigeria is blessed with huge mineral resources among which are coal, iron ore, barite, zinc, limestone, columbite, tin, kaolin, lead and gypsum. Most of these resources are found in the northern part of Nigeria. The northern zones of Nigeria are also blessed with fertile land and rich in Agricultural produce such as vegetables, fruits, cattle, fish, dairy products, groundnut, beans, cotton, yam, cassava, cereal and many more (Asoegwu, 18).

Despite its numerous mineral resources and human capital, poverty rate in Nigeria is alarming such that Nigeria is referred to as the poverty capital of the world with nearly 100 million of its people living in abject poverty (Jaiyeola and Bayat, 5-7). It is quite disturbing how a country with abundant natural resources, booming oil industry with thriving agricultural produce, a large percentage of the population live in penury (Simon-Oke, 169).

Poverty in Africa, like elsewhere, is typically measured in economic terms. The standard measure is the World Bank's definition of living on less than \$1.90 per day. But as we have mentioned, economics cannot be the sole measure and determinant of poverty. The World Bank recognizes that poverty is hunger, lack of shelter, being sick and not being able to see a doctor, not having access to school, not knowing how to read, not having a job, fearing for the future, losing a child to a curable illness, and living one day at a time. All these constitute suffering to an extent. Again, poverty is also understood as powerlessness and lack of representation and freedom.

The condition of poverty in Nigeria has become an absurdity in which, in the face of economic growth, two-thirds of the Nigerian population live in abject poverty (Faloyo and Bakare, 565). The social indicators in Nigeria are among the worst in the whole world. In every five children, one dies at the age of five. Over 12 million children are out of school and there are about two million AIDS orphans. Different strategies have been implemented by previous and current governments to reduce poverty in Nigeria. Yet poverty continues to increase at an alarming rate (Raimi 125). The level of poverty in Nigeria is unexpected given the enormous resources.

Since suffering and poverty is a universal problem most especially in Africa and it happens to all human beings, people of Nigeria cannot be an exception regardless of their religious affiliations or Spiritual standing with God. Both the wicked and the righteous from all the religious in the country suffer. Suffering does not distinguish whether one is a Christian, Muslim or Traditionalist, when it comes to misfortune, calamities and many others, every one experiences in life. Today in Abuja and other parts of the country and the world at large, one may see a seemingly righteous person (Christian or Muslim) passing through difficult times; and the possibility of another person thinking that such a one should be living a life of ease, but instead he/she is caught in a web either of sudden grief, or of continuous aggravation over a long period of time. This shows that people have different understanding of suffering, although suffering is universal, yet it is a highly individualized phenomenon.

Regardless of people's spiritual standing in addition to their strife to living a better life, they still suffer at one point or the other. Both Christians and Muslims are involved in the struggle for alleviating suffering, but suffering still remains a major obstacle in people's life today in Abuja and other parts of the country and the world at large. The fundamental lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic is a challenge on the global level, the ENDSARS protests and its aftermath result in Nigeria in 2020 also attests to the reality of human suffering. People suffer from accident, economic, stress, fire incident, loss of job, and death of loved one etc. when any of these happen to the citizenry, their understanding of suffering varies, likewise their responses also varies. The problem of suffering is not a scientific problem that can be solved through continuous observations and test in the laboratory but a logical problem of clarifying a number of beliefs and reconciling a number of thought systems. The existence of suffering in this world is a complex problem that might cause many Christians and Muslims alike to question the love of God. If suffering is an unpleasant situation, why did God allow humans experience an unpleasant situation? Donald Abel argued that suffering is bound to be in the world and it is necessary to have the opposite of things in existence. Hence suffering is necessary to be an opposite of comfort, and good. He raised an illustration from musical work to support this claim. According to him, in a musical work, for example, there may occur discords which somehow add to the beauty of the work as a whole (71).

Different parts of the world, philosophies and religions gave different explanations on what they call “Suffering”. While poverty is named suffering in places like sub-Saharan Africa, what is called suffering in the west or East differs from that of Africa. What we call suffering, to some person, it is the kind of life they have chosen to live for religious reason. This implies that suffering is relative and the term is best explained by experience.

Most of the explanation we have on suffering are theological ones. Most philosophies rest on Scriptural references in discussing the reason for suffering especially as it relates with the idea of God's existence. Although there are lot of explanations of suffering from the theological and philosophies perspective, but it also true that human suffering is an academic issue which needs to be addressed from the academic point of view in anthropological nature. Since Christianity and Islam are two different religions, consequently the perspectives of poverty as a cause of suffering. Likewise, it is also good to know the indices of poverty in the nation, the extent to which poverty contributes to human suffering, and how can one cope with the reality of pain and suffering in one's life

The Unemployment in Nigeria

The unemployment crisis in Nigeria has led to a situation where many Nigerians turn to crime in order to make ends meet. That is often seen in cases of theft and robbery and in more sophisticated crimes such as advanced fraud and other types of frauds and embezzlement. Unemployment can lead to crime as a way to vent frustration and anger. Many unemployed individuals feel they have been dealt a raw deal in life and may lash out at society by engaging in criminal activity. It can also lead to crime as a way to gain status and respect. Many young people, in particular, feel they have nothing to lose by engaging in crime and treat it as a way to earn respect from their peers (Aganga 15).

The effects of unemployment on the individual and household include; wide-spread poverty and inequality with its attendance consequences. Arbiel loss also results in increase susceptibility to malnutrition, illness and mental stress, subsequent loss of self-esteem leading to depression; it can lead to escapists and/or other self-destructive behaviour used as coping mechanism, for example, excessive alcoholism, drug abuse, and suicidal tendencies. This can lead to dysfunctional social and emotional relationships; loss of self-confidence; feeling of shame, un-fulfilment and inadequacy. It may further jeopardises access to health care, loss of social and economic security, limitations of educational opportunity for the children and other members of the family, limiting the family access to good housing, increases vulnerability of family members especially women, children and elderly, and it can create tension and conflict, for example, domestic violence (Aganga 15)

The huge unemployment problem has led Nigerian society to experience high levels of poverty. Unemployment causes poverty because when people are unemployed, they do not have any tangible source of income. This means they cannot afford to buy food, pay rent, or even transportation. As a result, they find themselves living in poverty. Unemployment can also lead to mental and physical health problems, worsening poverty. The most appropriate way to discontinue the cycle of poverty is to create jobs and reduce dependence on foreign or imported goods (Obadan and Odusola 5-6).

One of the most damaging effects of unemployment is political instability. When there is a large number of people who are out of work, social unrest and, in extreme cases, revolution may occur. Nigeria is a prime example of how unemployment can lead to political

instability. Coups and uprisings have plagued the country for decades, most of which can be traced back to high unemployment rates. It only takes a slight provocation to escalate political instability in a country like Nigeria, where the young population is unemployed and frustrated (Aganga 16).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although, it seems impossible to completely eradicate poverty in human society, however, conscious effort can be made to reduce it. For example, one of the areas of the causes of poverty as discussed is unemployment; this can be solved when government focuses on the following:

1. **Encourage entrepreneurship:** The government should create an enabling environment for Small and Medium scale Enterprises (SMEs) to survive and grow. The government and private individuals should provide start-up capital in the form of loans or grants to those who want to go into business and become self-reliant or self-employed and consequently employ others. The government can reduce taxes and regulations on businesses, provide entrepreneurs training and support, and improve financing access. Government should raise the budget of education to reach at least 20% as recommended by UNICEF. Provision should be made on technical education. To this end, university education should be deemphasized, while practical polytechnic and entrepreneurial education should be initiated with a focus on technical and ICT education.
2. **Investing in education:** The educational system should be made functional. To achieve this, emphasis should be laid on entrepreneurship education so that students should have acquired the basic skills needed for self-reliant before graduation. This will help improve the workforce and make them more competitive in the global economy.
3. **Improve infrastructure:** This is yet another dismal factor that has rendered millions of Nigerians unemployed. If the infrastructure is improved and empowerment policies are put in place, people will have opportunities to employment and use their talent in sectors like textile and Agro based industries which are capable of absorbing both skilled and semi-skilled workers. The government can achieve this by prioritizing public transportation, telecommunications, and investing heavily on various types of energy sources (thermal, hydro, oil and gas, solar, steam-hydrogen, and palm oil).
4. **Promote economic growth:** There is need to allow the private sector to go into the economy to help in developing the nation's economy. Government should set standards and ensure that these standards are followed in order to regulate exploitative tendencies of the bourgeoisies and also provide an environment conducive for them to operate. The government can do this by deregulation, tax reform, and improving the business environment.
5. **The introduction of one year maternity for women, child allowance, and**

student's loans are long overdue in Nigeria. Welfare benefits, retirement benefits and other welfare benefits should be initiated and made to operate for workers and retired personnel.

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