

Ibibio Socio–Ethical Approach to the Reality of Evil: A Panacea for Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

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Abstract

For decades, successive governments in Nigeria have initiated policies and programmes targeted at poverty reduction or eradication in the country. The current state of things in the country is a testimony to the fact that these policies and programmes have not adequately achieved the purpose for which they were formulated. While scholars continue to explore how poverty can be alleviated in Nigeria, it seems much has not been done concerning how Afro–traditional ethical approaches may assist in ensuring poverty alleviation. It is this gap that this paper sets out to address. The paper tenders how Ibibio approach to the problem of evil can serve as a tool for poverty reduction in Nigeria. Examined through a combination of the analytical, speculative and pragmatic philosophical methods, the paper aims to elucidate the Ibibio idea of the root cause of poverty, the reason for the failure of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria and the importance of Ibibio ethical values and her response to the reality of evil in ensuring poverty reduction in Nigeria. It was discovered that Ibibio's belief in the Supreme God (Akwa Abasi Ibom); her principle of moral obligation to one another (Owo ediinyene); principle of good reputation (Eti Enyinofofonakan imo); and the principle of hard work and dignity of labor (Owo isiinohoifuudia), if properly channeled, can serve as effective tools in reducing poverty in Nigeria. The paper concludes that reviving and re-establishing cultural value and traditional ethical values can serve as guiding principles for effective poverty alleviation. It is therefore recommended among others, that government at all levels should revive fundamental traditional ethical ideals for the grooming of substantial moral behavior necessary for the growth of Nigeria.

Keywords: Ibibio, Ethical Value, Evil, Poverty Alleviation

Introduction

In philosophical and religious discourses, the experience of poverty as in other vices cannot be sufficiently analyzed without recourse to the foundational fact of the existence of evil in the world. For even when some socio–economic philosophers like Karl Marx aliens the cause of poverty to the material condition of the society where there is a structural class difference; the rich employers (bourgeoisies) and the labourers (proletariats). Still, the escalation of poverty lies in the capitalist ideology, where the few rich capitalists covet their statues even to the detriment of masses particularly the labourers: The cost of labour unnaturally lower than the sacrifice of labour, thus the rich remain richer, and poor subjected and conditioned to be perpetually poor (Hu, 2023:230). Poverty in this sense could be classified as moral evil because it stems from human action, and its existence necessarily gives birth to socio-economic ills like; stealing, extortion, human trafficking, prostitution, bribery, sickness, illiteracy, hunger, increase in mortality rate, communal crisis, war among others. Nonetheless, there is a natural dimension to poverty. The deficiency of a community of natural resources necessary for its growth, or community been prone to some natural disaster such as flood, tsunami, drought, or earthquake that could affect living condition of the people could account for natural cause of poverty. There are also instances where poverty could result from a combination of both moral and natural evil. Echendu (2023:243) in his research on the cause of flood in Nigeria identifies a combination of natural and moral factors (poor management of drainage and water ways, gas flaring and bush burning that causes climate change, and the natural overflow of water above river bangs) as major causes of flood. Poverty has been identified as one factor that engenders religious conflicts in Nigeria (Oko, 2015:293). In Oko (2022:204), poverty manifests itself in many ways. Corruption is most often identified as the prime cause and the propelling factor for poverty growth in every country (Uyanga 2018: 167). Another factor could be one’s indolence to the realities around him.

These factors are deeply rooted in the incline or complete aberration of the imperative socio-ethical responsibilities we owe ourselves and to another, imbedded in African ethics. The foregoing is not far from the Ibibio idea of the relationship between evil and poverty in the world. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to examine how the socio–ethical approach of the Ibibio to the reality of evil can serve as a tool for poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The paper aims to resuscitate the fundamental identity of the Ibibio (African) socio-ethical definition of causes, effects, and the ideal response to reality of evil in the world. This aim is motivated by the conviction that the application, in both private and cooperate lives, an ideal ethical ideology and attitude which resonates with a strong sense of responsibility to one’s self and one another will be resurrected in all; thus, creating the natural environment for socio-economic growth and poverty alleviation in our

country. The Ibibio people dominate Akwa Ibom State, in the south Nigeria (Essien, 2020^a). Akwa Ibom state is bordered on the east by Cross River State and on the West by Rivers and Abia States, and on the South by the Atlantic Ocean. The position of this paper is that there is a link between the attainment of the UN SDGs no.1 (poverty alleviation) and adherence to African ethical values mostly amongst Africans. The philosophical methods employed in this paper include analytical, speculative, and pragmatic methods.

The Reality of Evil in the World

The Ibibio word for evil is “idiok” which connotes which causes harm and that which is morally unacceptable. This definition of evil in Ibibio language agrees with it meaning in Greek language which is *πονηρός* (*poneros*), which means; a being or a state of affairs which is morally and socially worthless. For a person or a state of affairs to be considered evil or wicked means to cause discomfort, hurt, repulsion, or harm to others. According to Collins (2019: 90), “The word ‘evil’ can be used in many ways. An old-fashioned way uses it to refer to wickedness ‘evil’, strictly so called and suffering and pain and anything else bad that happens.” Umoh (2012: 57) stresses the fatal effect of evil in human life when he describes it as “a defect affecting the integrity of a being.” This use of the word is historic. Observably, discussions of the philosophical problem of evil throughout history use the word “evil” in this way. In what follows; this usage presupposes an undeserved, intense suffering and pain as well as horrific wickedness and the worst possible term of opprobrium imaginable. It equally affirms it as an existential reality.

In the words of Trueblood (1957: 232), “Thousands are daily dying of cancer and other thousands are so crippled that they must be carried everywhere they go. Although not all have suffered equally, the reality of evil and suffering is an enigma.” This is undoubtedly beautiful and pragmatic introduction of evil as a fact in life. Similarly, Pigou (1929: vii) argues, “The misery and squalor that surround us, the injurious luxury of some wealthy families, the terrible uncertainty overshadowing many families of the poor-these are evils too plain to be ignored. Indeed, as Hume argues, evil constitutes the core of human existence. In his word: “People are indeed sufficiently convinced of this great and melancholy truth. The miseries of life, the unhappiness of men, the general corruption of our nature, the unsatisfactory enjoyment of pleasure, riches, honour; these phases have become almost proverbial in all language” (1779: 525). Some common cases of evil that stick close to our existence include; poverty, hunger, pain, sickness, injustice, persecution, maltreatment, disappointment, failed expectation, killing, flood, drought, earthquake, tsunami, tornado, etc. These and others cause hurt, discomfort and harm to us.

Poverty as a Form of Evil

According to Umoh (2012: 57), philosophy distinguishes three major types of evil, namely natural, metaphysical, and moral. Natural evils are caused by natural phenomena or non-human agents, example flood, earthquake, volcano eruption, tsunami, outbreak of diseases and so on, causing misery and death to man. This evil is said to be meted out to man by nature, in which case God. More than other types of evil, God or gods are usually directly blamed for such evil. Etim (2006: 67) describes metaphysical evil as the absence of perfection in a being on account of his created and finitude nature. In essence, it is the nature of man to die, to fall sick, and to be limited in space and time, to be hungry or even to fall asleep. There is nothing that could be done about it since it is part of his ontology. Moral evil is any morally negative event caused by the intentional action or inaction of an agent, such as a person. “It comes as a result of man’s inhumanity to man, resulting from the misuse of human freedom” (Umoh, 2012: 57–58). The endless waves of violence and insidious wickedness perpetrated by man against his fellow man in form of killing, kidnapping, armed-robbery, stealing, betrayal, disappointment, breaking the bond of love and unity and so on are examples of moral evil. This is also the sphere in which the experience of poverty is equally considered in philosophical circle as evil.

Umoh’s treatment of the types of evil above shows that poverty is a moral evil. A concise and universally accepted definition of poverty is elusive largely because it affects many aspects of the human conditions, including physical, moral and psychological. Different criteria have, therefore, been used to conceptualize poverty. However, as Ajakaiye & Adeyeye (2001: 5) observed, most analyses follow the conventional view of poverty as a result of insufficient income for securing basic goods and services. Others view poverty, in part, as a function of education, health, life expectancy, child mortality etc. Synthesizing these two views, Dauda & Oyeleke (2021: 1) identify poverty as “a situation whereby an individual or household finds it difficult to fulfill basic needs, lacks opportunities provided by an enabling environment to sustainably improve its wellbeing or is vulnerable to losing its current standard of living.” The inability to achieve the basic needs of life is quite fundamental in poverty index discourse. The notion of “basic needs” are clarified by Musa *et al.* (2022: 49), to include: purchasing power, economic security, proper nutrition, higher life expectancy, good health care services and so on. The lack of which characterizes a state of poverty. Poverty is characterized by the following conditions – not having enough to eat, poor drinking water, poor nutrition, unfit housing, low educational opportunities, inadequate health care, lack of economic infrastructure, helplessness and so on (Okoro, 2020:108, Udom, Olusakin & Essien, 2025).

Like many other definitions, Dauda & Oyeleke's definition is suggesting the fact that poverty could result from man (perhaps the privileged ones) not creating the necessary opportunities as well as the suitable condition for another (the less privileged) to attain a meaningful living. Leadership has been seen as one of the most essential necessities of human life (Oko, 2018:33). Put it simple, one taking a decision or action which adversely turns to affect the overall wellbeing of another (Udoiwang & Akpan 2023: 345). This is the context in which leadership failure and corruption is often identified as some of the causes of poverty (Udofia & Edem, 2024). In this regard, an average person is quick to condemn corrupt and incompetent leaders and bring their actions to public opprobrium. Sadly, little or no attention is often paid to the moral deficiency of such leaders. In some cases, too, common citizens perhaps, out of helplessness and desperation for survival or because of ignorance have been complacent with corruption and corrupt public office holders. They do so without recourse to the damaging implications of their complacency as a catalyst for corruption gradually becoming a norm and a common identity of public office holders. At the instance of corruption and stealing of public funds, the question we should ask is; what makes it convenient for someone to siphon monies meant for the people, and which when appropriated properly would have changed their living condition for the better, yet being comfortable seeing the same people suffering, struggling and grasping for life without any sense of guilt or obligation? Why would anyone feel comfortable seeing the people whose fortune he holds suffering without feeling obligated to changing their ugly condition? And on the other hand, why is it common for the poor to happily accept and celebrate corrupt leaders amongst them? And why are these behaviors swiftly becoming a norm in our time against the backdrop of the ancient African societies; where it was an abomination to even take side with someone responsible for the hurt, harm or dead of another? The answer we sort for is not unconnected with sad reality of the backlash of the pitiful denigration of our defining socio–ethical value as a people. This development is an outcry for the resuscitation of our fundamental socio–ethical value.

The Effects of Poverty in Nigeria

Poverty is real in Nigeria. Over decade or so, the standard of living of the average person in Nigeria has progressively nose-dived. The empirical evidence on the streets of Nigeria and economic statistics show obviously how precarious life has become for the average person through suffocating levels of poverty. In the observation of Nwokoji (2025: 4), after a critical analysis of a report from *Pricewaterhouse Coopers International Limited*, “13 million more Nigerians are at risk of living below poverty line in the 2025.” The indices for this economic prediction are the evidence of rising inflation in the country, escalating interest rates, and the depreciating value of the Naira. The national poverty line,

as defined by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), represents the annual income threshold below which an individual is considered poor. Alli(2025: 2) observes that, “The World Bank classifies anyone living on less than \$2.15 a day as living in extreme poverty, a condition that is now prevalent in the country. The report of Nwokoji (2025: 4) further indicates that Nigeria’s economic environment, characterized by surging inflation and the rising cost of living, is exacerbating poverty levels, with far-reaching implications for the country’s population. In 2024 the World Bank's report on *Poverty and Equity Brief: Africa Western & Central, Nigeria* had indicated that an approximately 129 million Nigerians live below the poverty line, with another 13 million added making an approximately 142 million Nigerian (above 60 percent of its total population). The poverty situation in Nigeria is evidently fatal and more pathetic for its citizen when compared with other developing countries in Africa and other less endowed countries in the world (World Bank, 2024: 2).

No doubt, this report about the poverty situation in the country may be challenged by the government’s economic team as untrue or as an exaggeration of the actual reality. It is most likely also that, on the other hand, the general outcry of the masses may rather prove that the same report is a misrepresentation of the precariousness of the poverty reality in the country. In this regard we accept the above report not on account of accuracy but as a fair representation of the poverty situation in the country. The description of Nigeria as a paradox by the World Bank in 1996 according to Abdulrahman (2023: 74), has continued to be confirmed by events and official statistics in the country. The paradox is that the poverty level in Nigeria contradicts the country’s immense wealth. Among other things, the country is enormously endowed with human, agricultural, petroleum, gas, and large untapped solid mineral resources. As it is, the poverty situation in the country is multidimensional, which among other explanations means it is felt on every facet of our lives. In what follows, we highlight the effects of poverty on: health and mortality rate, unemployment and illiteracy level in the country.

Health and Mortality Rate: With respect to the effects of poverty on health and mortality rate in Nigeria, reports from economists give meaningful insights. Abdulrahman (2023: 74) asserts that “In Nigeria, the prevalence of illnesses and fatalities has increased in tandem with the country's rising poverty rate... putting an average life expectancy in Nigeria at 51 years.” His report is consistent with an earlier report by Sindiga (2015: 35). Both Abdulrahman and Sindiga agree that because of the high poverty level, the death rate in the country has grown significantly, particularly with small children that are below five years of age (Abdulrahman, 2023). Furthermore, Sindiga (2015: 36) opines that “14.5 million children die each year in underdeveloped nations, with 10 % of all births resulting in mortality by the time they turn one and 20 % as they become five years of age.” The

significance of parasitic infectious illnesses is underlined as the cause of Nigeria's comparatively high death rate. This poor health situation and high mortality rate in the country results significantly from reality of low income earning and the failure of government to provide basic healthcare amenities and services which combat endemic diseases that reduce production, including trypanosomiasis, schistosomiasis, and malaria.

Unemployment: The Nigerian Economic Summit Group, (2024: 4) reports that the unemployment rate in Nigeria as at November 2024 stood at 9.2% marking a slight decline from 10.6 of the first quarter of the year. Nonetheless, it also indicates that Nigeria's misery index still rose to 38.3% within the period irrespective of the decline in poverty rate. This implies that many Nigerians are still experiencing a cost-of-living crisis, more than half of the population living in poverty. The clearest explanation for unemployment is the underutilization of the numerous human resources which is necessary for the growth of the country (Akpan, 2021: 7). In effect, where such resources are not gainfully harnessed for the good of the nation, a misappropriation of same into violence and criminalities such as; cyber and internet fraud, kidnapping, and stealing are inevitable (Oko, 2020:190). Indeed, at the root of most problems in Nigeria is the evil of poverty.

Out of school Children: On the occasion of the distribution of 2,760 solar-powered radio sets to the Katsina State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) rued the growing out-of-school children population in Nigeria (Egobiambu, 2024). Reporting that one in three children is out of school in Nigeria, representing 10.2 million at the primary school level and 8.1 million children at the junior secondary level, UNICEF Field Office for Kano State, Rahama Farah, attributed the ugly development to the increasing rate of poverty in Nigeria (Egobiambu, 2024). Nwoke *et al.*, (2024: 3) agree with UNICEF that poverty is the biggest barrier to school access, exacerbated by school fees and other costs of education. At least 43% of children are forced into child labour (Panday-Soobrayan, 2022). The apparent implication of this development is the increase rate of criminality and insecurity in the country which in turn, are caused by several factors (cf. Olusakin & Sibani, 2023, Oko, 2020:190). Therefore, ignoring the reality of poverty or treating it with levity will continue to put Nigeria at risk to perpetual increase in other form of vices and ills such as kidnapping, terrorism, armed robbery, and so on. A reduction in poverty will certainly have a substantial implication on the reduction of such vices in the country.

Government Efforts on Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

In the light of the government's concern for poverty reduction, numerous policies and programmes have been designed at one time or another to meet the special needs of the

poor (at least on paper). The following programmes are worthy of note as provided in Amakoromo et al. (2024:111–112):

1. National Accelerated Food Production Program, 1972.
2. Operation Feed the Nation, 1976
3. Green Revolution Program, 1980
4. The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), 1986.
5. Family Support Program, 1993
6. Poverty Alleviation Program Development Committee (PAPDC), 1994.
7. Community Action Program for Poverty Alleviation (CAPPA), 1996.
8. Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP), 2000.
9. National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP), 2001.
10. Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA), 2011.
11. The Subsidy Reinvestment Empowerment Program (SURE-P), 2012.
12. National Social Investment Program (Nsip), 2015.
13. N-Power for Youth Employment, 2015.
14. Nigerian Youth Investment Fund (NYIF), 2020
15. Market Moni 2.0, 2023
16. Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), 2023.

Common to these programmes is a target on improving the living condition of Nigerians. Amakoromo *et al.* (2024: 110) observe that “the majority of both the past and current government expenditures are devoted to these initiatives aimed at raising the average citizen’s standard of living. Nonetheless, the continuous deterioration of the living condition of Nigerians is evident of the colossal failure of those programmes. For instance, Yusuf (2020: 1), notes that the Nigerian Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs was given N258.4 billion between January and September 2020; of that amount, N96.3 billion was expended during that time.” Many economists and political scientists such as Abadan (2001: 183), attributes the consecutive failure of these programmes to poor planning and execution, corruption, inequality and unequal distribution of national resources, failure to crystallized and consolidate each programme within the nation’s overall development objectives, over-dependency crude oil, insecurity and so on. Such conclusion on the reason for the failure of these policies and programme focuses superficially on the cause of poverty from the deficiency of strong political will or a workably economic strategy. Whereas, the major cause of poverty is the aberration of an ideal socio–ethical attitude toward one another which resonates with Ibibio notion and approach to evil.

Ibibio Understanding and Approach to Evil

What is evil for the Ibibio? Answering this question does not only give us a decent understanding to what the Ibibio see as evil, but justifies both their attitude toward evil doers, as well as the various measure put in place to combat evil in the society. Obviously, this question bounds within the context of morality. Morals and values are what define the culture and identity of Ibibio people in addition to their ontological identity. This collaborates fittingly with Nana & Udom's (2024: 146) assertion that as a way of firmly establishing their moral and value system, the Ibibio are known for their stern prohibition concerning issues like stealing, deception and corruption among other vices. They also note that such vices attract societal disapproval and punishment, serving as a deterrent to would-be offender and thus engendering positive values through abstention. The Ibibio also believe that evil such as killing, infidelity in marriage, madness, non-productivity in business and wasteful spending resulting in poverty, academic failure and so on could be inflicted on people through the use of some supernatural powers such as witchcraft and sorcery spirits. This is equally the case in most African societies especially among the Yoruba of South Western Nigeria, as Vincent Olusakin (2013: 72–73, 2014:144 & 2022: 120) notes. According to Udok & Udofia (2022: 24), witches are usually stigmatized and hated. This could be a way of abhorring their activities as evil by the society.

In global African context, evil according to Wiredu (1983: 11), for Africans, refers to “vices like killing, stealing, adultery, and disrespect for elders, telling lies, incest and cruelty or doing harm in any way to other people. Similarly, Majawa (2020: 6) maintains, “To Africans evil means anything which distorts the natural, limiting, besetting and immoral against the ancestors, the Creator and destroying life.” He further elucidates the impacts of evil to include the generation of disharmony between the living, the unborn, the living dead, the creator and the worldview. There is disruption in societal structures and moral fibers worldwide due to occurrence of evil at various levels of human existence. To this extent, morality is essentially interpersonal and social in contest, anchoring on the well-being of human beings.

Characteristically, the Ibibio understanding of evil is not significantly different from common understanding of evil in Africa. However, two fundamental ideologies shape their approach to reality or evil; be it natural, moral, or metaphysical. These ideologies are: First, the belief in the immortality of the soul (to us the terminology of ancient Greek philosopher, Plato) or what Nagasawa (2025: 200) terms the problem of impermanence. In which the world and life is considered to be transient, fragile and impermanent; people and their dwellings are akin to floating bubbles in the water in the river because their existence is temporary, transient and fragile. While in Nagasawa theory of impermanence, life is analogous to a ceaseless flow of a river, the Ibibio believe that there is a place of

existence in a supernatural world after physical death (Etuk, 2002: 67). The quality of life in the supernatural world, among other factors is said to be determined primarily by one morality and benevolence in this world. Therefore, morality and virtuous has an immortality value in Ibibio metaphysics.

Second, there is a pragmatic dimension of Ibibio approach to the reality of evil which is akin to William James' notion of "Meliorism". Meliorism according to Andrew Fiala(2019: 4), "is an optimistic conviction that human being are vested with potentials for ameliorating poor human condition and to make world a livable place." Although, this world is neither considered the best possible place, nor should it be considered the worst, hence, in it there is room for progress and positive changes through conscious human effort. In this light, the promotion of moral values such as love towards one another, and the principle of hard work in Ibibio tradition is rooted in the conviction that human beings have significant roles to play in mitigating the effect of evil in the world, and that the world could be a better place should virtuous values be upheld. Traditionally, the Ibibio like other Africans are obligated to being their brothers' keepers and are concerned about the well-being of others. Some of the social engineering factors for the cultivation of morality and the attitude necessary for combating evil in the society are the following. These social engineering factors grow from their religious and social worldviews, and not as necessarily divine instructions. However, some supernatural coloration is sometimes attached to them for divine validation.

1. Belief in the Supreme God (Akwa Abasi Ibom)
2. Principle of Moral Obligation to one another (Owo ediinyene)
3. Principle of good Reputation (Eti Enyinofonakan imo)
4. Principle of Hard work and Dignity of labor (Owo isiinofoifudua)

A resuscitation of these virtues through acceptance of, and respect for indigenous culture is expedient. The development of academic curriculum, social re-orientation programmes that promote and instill these virtues in the lives of both young and old, leaders and the led, will generate a substantial effect on the war against poverty and other vices in our society and nation as a whole. Rooted in the Ibibio socio-ethical approach to poverty as evil, these virtues is characterized by reverence to a Supreme Being, obligation and love for one another, repudiate the fundamental cause of poverty, and offer paradigm shift from poverty toward a sustainable economic life.

Ibibio Socio-ethical Approach to evil and poverty alleviation in Nigeria

Belief in the Supreme God (Akwa Abasi Ibom)

The Ibibio understanding of evil is ontologically inherent in her metaphysical worldview. As it may be the case in most African culture, the Ibibio adopt a metaphysical or

supernatural outlook as a guiding principle in understanding and approaching physical realities. This metaphysical outlook centers on the belief in the existence of a Supreme Being known as *Abasi Ibom* (God the Creator), other supernatural being, and a world. Abasi Ibom is reputed and revered for his power in summoning the universe into existence including mankind and everything in it. Apart from the names by which the Supreme Being is known, the people also go by names which delineate their beliefs and the roles they attribute to the Supreme Being via Great God *Utibe Abasi*, Gift of God *Enobong*, Peace of God *Ime Abasi* (Oko, 2019:69). He can also cause the non-existence of anyone through death, which is most often considered as punishment for evil. For sake of meaningful living, Abasi (God) sets the standard of life in the world. This means that God is foundational to Ibibio morality; hence everyone is expectedly accountable to him. This reveals that the Ibibio people attached great importance to the worship of the Supreme Being (Essien, 2020^b), viewing Him not merely as a distant deity (*Deus remotus*), but as the moral compass and sovereign force shaping human destiny and communal life. This point is equally stressed by Kanu (2016: 58), in his general overview of the foundation of morality in Africa, “The social order is founded on the ontological order. To renounce the ontological order is to renounce African ethics and law. Corroborating this point is the assertion of Mbiti (2016:36) who explains, “One should view morality as an authoritative code of conduct directly sanctioned by god. The moral code is therefore not autonomous, but its autonomy is derived from the creator god. Any breach of the moral code would accordingly be an offence against god and his instruction.” Also in (Mbiti (2015: 36), God gave the moral order to people so that they might live happily and in harmony with one another.

Consequently, Chief Sunday Udofia, (Personal communication, March 2, 2025) argues that when one commits an offence or evil such as murder and other hurtful acts, the Ibibio consider such acts not only as an act against the one directly affected or the family or community, but also most importantly as a sacrilege against God; an evil reprehensible in the sight of God who is the giver and preserver of life. Because of God’s love and commitment to taking care of his creature, he can act vengefully with evil against individuals, families, or communities who cause hurt or harm to others especially the vulnerable in the community. Similarly, Obong Asikpo Francis, (Personal communication, March 2, 2025), explains that sacrifice in Ibibio tradition grows out of the belief that an offense against one another is an offense against God, hence the need to appease him. He explains further that when one commits hurtful acts against another without remorse, he is by implication calling on the wrath of God against himself, his household and possibly the community; depending on the gravity of the offense. On the

contrary, Obong Asikpo maintains also that an act of kindness to one another is pleasing to God and attracts blessings.

From the above it is evident that the war against poverty in Nigeria could be won if this strong sense of accountability to God enshrined in the Ibibio social–ethical culture is cultivated by every Nigerian. Meaning that every person in position of leadership or followership is obliged to appraise his or her moral behavior not merely in the light of the Constitution but relevantly too, in the light of divine moral principle. You can call this an Ibibio version of the global ‘divine command theory’. Also, this charges humanity to understand that spiritual implication of immoralities and villainy which cause others to be impoverished is not merely a moral offense but a grave sacrilege before God. The cumulative effect of such widespread immorality is economic instability, as evidenced by the ongoing recession in Nigeria (Ekanem, Essien & Okon, 2022,). In which case, even if one is not criminalized by the civil or societal authority, he would not escape a divine punishment from God who knows everything, and tolerate no evil. This type of punishment which is received on earth is called ancestral judgment among the Yoruba (Olusakin, 2018:214).

This is not an advocacy to undermine the status of Nigeria as a secular state, neither is it a campaign for the religionization of Nigeria. Rather, it is a called for the revival of our socio–ethical value as a people. Corruption which is commonly identified as one of the major causes of poverty spread wildly in Nigeria because there is no conscious sense of accountability to God. Poverty in Nigeria will be substantially alleviated when leaders are committed to the reality of the God to whom they are ultimately accountable.

Principle of Moral Obligation to One another (Owo ediinyene)

Most African communities are known for their communal life. Although, such has been grossly infracted and undermined by civilization and urbanization, nonetheless, this historic identity of African communal life has not yet been completely eroded. Ogbujah (2007: 15) alludes to the fact that African communalism is the existential life of the traditional African, which is founded on the belief that all human beings are members of one family of mankind. It is the traditional concern for persons and their wellbeing. It presupposes that while the family is the closest unit of an African community, everyone in that community is his brothers or sisters’ keeper. Ibibio socio–ethical approach to evil is equally shaped by their acceptance of communalism as an ideal socio–cultural philosophy because of its ontological origin. This means that the Ibibio believe that being–in communion is the natural way of being human. One cannot think of human beings in the world without thinking of them in communion\community with one another. Udoh et al. (2024: 121) capture this fact beautifully thus: Socially, communalism is manifested in the spirit of oneness exhibited by the members of the community, such that they all share the

failure and success of one another as if these were success or failure of the community. Achievements of individuals are attributed to the community and this creates a spirit in which even the poor widow contributes her mite in order to afford scholarship for a bright youth with the underlying understanding that his success is for the good of all members of the clan.

This point gives meaning to the adage; “*eyenokpon ono ubon, ubonokponkeeyen*” which means, a child is the heritage of the family/community and the family/community’s prestige and pride is in the quality of their children. This notion of communalism unravels the profound essence of human existence. This implies that to the Ibibio the value of life is not measured by one’s length of days or by one’s personal achievements, but by how much one has impacted on others within his community. As (Chief Udofia, personal communication, March 2, 2025) argues, “It is ethically disapproving for anyone to be rich, yet ignoring the poor living condition of his kinsmen.” He notes also that it is at the instance of one helping his brother that the adage, “*owoediinyene*” (The most valuable possession of a man is his fellow man) usually find its meaning. The socio–ethical value of communalism in Ibibio society is the fact that everyone is morally obligated to be his brothers’ keeper. It implies that failure to help one’s brother in need is judged as an offense before God and man, except in a situation is known for causing evil to others including his own relatives. This is the premise from which Gyekye (1997: 36), explains communalism as “the doctrine that the communality (or group) is the focus of activities of the individual member of the society.” We need not stress that poverty in Nigeria could be alleviated if everyone would imbibe the virtue of building human lives rather than building ephemeral empires for themselves. While the government deserves the caution to avoid corruption, and self–oriented policies and programmes, well placed members of all communities in Nigeria should also avoid weaponization of poverty for social relevance and dominance. Given the effectiveness of a dual dimensional approach to the reality of poverty, from both government and individuals there will be rare of hope for Nigerians, and the fight against poverty is winnable.

Principle of good Reputation (Eti Enyino fonakan imo)

In a broad sense, the Ibibio people in their traditional ethics place a strong level of emphasis on goodness of character as a valid virtue. This is evident in their various proverbs such as; *etienyino fonakan imo*, which means that a good reputation is worth more than riches. Another is, “*owoayayambukakan idem*”, meaning that true beauty is in one reputation and not in his or her physical outlook. Goodness of character consist of virtues such as kindness, generosity, hospitality, justice, humility, obedient to legitimate authorities, respect for elders, while elders ensure the protection and promotion of truth, justice, harmonious living, the rites and traditions of the people. Okpo (2019: 78), argues

that the Ibibio consider such virtues as imperative for the sustenance and maintenance of peace and harmony in the society. At the heart of goodness in Ibibio tradition is the act of love and generosity to others. The mere avoidance of bad behavior is a negative virtue, or at best, a neutral one. To be regarded as positively virtuous one is expected to be helpful and useful to one's neighbours. A virtuous act benefits not just the individual, but the society; it engenders the spirit of oneness, solidarity, and peaceful communal coexistence (Okpiliya & Akpan 2021:12).

Relating the points above to the reality and evil of poverty in Nigeria, it cannot be disassociated with the fact that Nigerian political class is deficient of positive virtues; both the leaders of government as well as their political appointees. On the failure of leadership Okpo (2019: 80) categorically asserts, "Unethical leadership describes major Nigerian schemes, plans, and institutions and it is the chief reason for the continuous underdevelopment of the nation." This assertion is in sync with Chinua Achebe's analysis of the condition of the Nigerian state. According to Achebe, (1998: 1): The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. Leaders are not ready to give account of their stewardship but busy asking for impunity clause in order to perpetuate evil (Oko, 2017:84). Nigerian culture of followership seems to be conditioned by the weaponization of poverty which has often aided vote buying and other social ills. The other is the ill absolutism which appears to define leaders in the character of monarchs rather than democrats. Most leaders abhor contrary opinion. Followers who become leaders when groomed under such condition of mentor are mostly likely to become the worst version of their mentor. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to responsibility, to the challenge of personal examples which are the hallmarks of true leadership. Indeed, Nigeria has been blessed with both human and natural resources, but it has been unfortunate with leaders who, rather than steering the wheel of the country towards development, have exploited it for their selfish gains (Udofia & Edem, 2024).

Apart from the failure of leaders of government in curbing poverty in the country, the contribution of political appointees to poverty and the impoverishment of live in Nigeria is grievous, yet constantly ignored or undermined. Evidently, most political appointees in Nigeria claim as the prime virtue the concept of "loyalty". Their understanding of this virtue is sadly shabby. It is merely limited to shameful sycophantism around their principal or pay master (Udoette and Akpan, 2023:72). The evil associated with their sycophancy could be tolerated if it were merely limited to the promotion their selfish interest for wealth, firm and favor. But they use same to shield the leadership of government from the knowledge of the true reality of things in the country. While the

masses are complaining of the hardship in the country, political appointees of government are persistent in their blabbing about increase or growth in the Nation's economy, without discrete caution. The fight against poverty in Nigeria could be successful if it is taken from mere policy promulgation to the fight against selfishness of leaders at all levels. Indeed, should every political office holder be sincere to appropriate the government resources in their procession for the well-being of even some members of their immediate communities, Nigeria would not need such a long list of failed poverty alleviation programs and policies. Poverty will be gradually extinguished, especially when such effort of government is supported by everyone in the community at their distinct levels of help and assistance. There is no better approach to poverty alleviation than when everyone is committed to affecting the lives of his kinsmen positively. Loyalty in governance should not merely be to the head of government but most importantly to the people; to the extent that the people could have the right to recall any political appointee who does not serve the overall interest of the masses. Politicians are expected to build a good name for themselves by evident of virtuous living exemplified by love for one another. The masses should not be quick to throw ovation at politicians just for the gain of favor. Traditional chieftaincy titles should not be given to people merely because of the office they occupy but because of the performance in governance.

Principle of Hard-work and Dignity of labor (Owo Isi InohoIfu Udia)

Hard-work is another important virtue amongst the Ibibio. Being hard working shows the natural strength and resilience of a typical Ibibio person, and prevents one from getting involved in some social vices such as stealing, gossip and busy-body, violence and other forms of criminalities. More so, the Ibibio believes that hard-work has a practical effect on one's socio-economic life. In line with this worldview, Essien and Edem (2024:201) observe that instances of poverty may, in certain cases, be attributable to slothfulness or lack of diligence, thereby supporting the traditional belief that hard work is integral to both moral conduct and material success. Consequently, the Ibibio asserts; "*ubokanamutomisikpahaakang*" meaning that a hard-working person can never experience famine or die of hunger. The underlying belief here is that, the Supreme Being (God) who cherishes the virtue of hard-work, and is equally committed to the well-being of his creature will always compliment and appreciate every hard-work with success and fruitfulness. To further encourage the incubation of the virtue of hard-work the Ibibio people assert; "*owoisiinohoifuudia*" meaning that a lazy person does not deserve a scrumptious delicacy. Udoh et al. (2024: 121) add "In Ibibio, a hard-working person is qualified to have the qualification of *an eti-owo* (a good person)." By qualifying an Ibibio hard working person as a good person is to extol the dignity of labour. Obviously, Labour in the traditional African society was highly valued and Ibibio is not an exception. Over-

dependence on government for survival and a failed sense of responsibility to oneself and others have aggravated the subversion of dignity of labour. Labour included all forms and means of livelihood like farming, fishing, trading, blacksmithing, craft etc. When the principle of hard–work as extolled in the Ibibio culture is upheld, over–dependency on government and others will reduce and poverty is conquered. At such instance, one shall have fulfilled his or her divine mission; care for himself and others, and be useful to his or her community.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Evident from our discussion so far is the fact that the evil of poverty in Nigeria which seems to be endemically insurmountable can be alleviated if the right people with the right ethically attitude are put in the right position. In this respect there is an urgent need to revive our cultural values, traditional ethical principles and institutions. There is the need to re-establish them as the guiding principles of our daily life and living. There is an urgent need to revive and revitalize the dropping spirit and basic institutions of our culture. Also, we add the fact that a conscious return to and observance of traditional ethical principles especially those of the Ibibio remains the only viable and valid option if social order, harmony and stability in Nigeria. To this end we recommend:

1. A conscious effort by government at all level to revive our fundamental traditional ethical ideals for the grooming of substantial moral behavior necessary for the growth of Nigeria.
2. Primary and Secondary schools' curriculum should be revised to reflect the promotion of our fundamental ethical ideals for a proper integration of the right ethical value in the life of our young ones for a better and greater Nigeria's tomorrow.
3. Both leaders and follower should act, think and behave in line with the Ibibio understanding and approach of poverty as evil.
4. A political system that enhances the recall and replacement of political appointees who are helpful to their communities should be established in Nigeria.
5. Traditional oath system such as *Mbiam* (oath should be introduced as part of oath of allegiance and oath of office for all political leader and public official in Nigeria (Edem & Udom, 2024).
6. The principle of Hard–work should be coveted by all Nigerians.

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