

## Social Poverty in Nigeria: The Role of the Church in the Structures of Inequality

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### Abstract

Poverty in Nigeria has become a deliberate mechanism of control, with deprivation converted into political currency for manipulation and domination. The church stands as a paradox in this landscape both a sanctuary of empowerment and, at times, a silent accomplice in sustaining inequality. Faith communities intervene through education, welfare, and microcredit, yet risk reinforcing dependency through selective charity, prosperity doctrines, and disengagement from structural reform. Anchored in Liberation Theology and Critical Social Theory, this study employs qualitative, interpretive analysis thematically reviewing ecclesial interventions and critically evaluating religious discourse. This lens exposes the church as a contested site where complicity and resistance converge, shaping Nigeria's socio-political reality. The argument is direct, genuine transformation demands moving beyond palliative charity toward prophetic, justice-oriented praxis that confronts inequality at its roots. Only by embracing structural change can the church subvert poverty's weaponization and reclaim its vocation as a liberating force within Nigeria's socio-political order.

**Keywords:** Church, Poverty Alleviation, Christian Social Responsibility, Faith-Based Organizations, Nigeria

### 1. Introduction

Poverty in Nigeria has become something far more insidious than mere economic hardship. It's been turned into a tool of control a way for political elites to keep people dependent, quiet, and divided. This isn't a theory; it's visible in how things actually work. Come election season, bags of rice and cash handouts appear. The rest of the year brings crumbling hospitals, schools without teachers, and roads that swallow vehicles whole. Analysts like Odunowo [1] and Okorafor [2] have pointed out what many Nigerians already feel in their bones, this poverty isn't accidental. It's maintained deliberately, through patronage networks and strategic neglect that transforms human suffering into votes and loyalty. Into this bleak picture steps the church and here's where it gets complicated. The church is doing real, tangible good. Catholic women's groups send money to widows displaced by violence [3]. Pentecostal pastors run entrepreneurship programs for jobless youth [4]. Justice,

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Development and Peace Commissions (JDPCs) dig boreholes, build classrooms, and run microfinance schemes that actually help people start small businesses [5][6]. In a country where the state has largely checked out, these interventions matter. They keep people alive.

But there's another side to this. Some churches hand out charity selectively, reinforcing the very dependency structures they claim to fight. Others preach prosperity gospel so aggressively that poverty becomes a moral failing if you're poor, you must lack faith [7]. And when political leaders loot the treasury or security forces massacre peaceful protesters, too many pulpits stay eerily silent [8]. The church becomes, intentionally or not, part of the machinery it should be resisting. This study digs into that tension. Does the church's work actually challenge Nigeria's weaponized poverty, or does it accidentally prop the system up? My argument is straightforward: charity isn't enough. Handouts without justice just polish the chains. What Nigeria needs from the church is something messier and more confrontational prophetic advocacy that names corruption by name, systemic engagement that understands power, and a justice-oriented practice that treats poverty as something to abolish, not manage. Methodologically, this study works historically and interpretively. No surveys are administered, no focus groups observed. Instead, the approach traces how things arrived at this point reading church statements, denominational policies, JDPC reports, media coverage, and scholarly work across theology, sociology, and political science. Historical research, done right, isn't just collecting old documents. It's reconstructing how human relationships and power structures evolved, so we can understand the present more clearly and imagine something better for the future. Poverty isn't a neutral fact you can measure with a single metric. It's constructed through language, political choices, and institutional habits. That means interpreting it requires engaging with narratives and power, not just counting income brackets. The sources I'm drawing from are varied: official JDPC communications, Pentecostal public statements, academic critiques, and journalistic investigations. Together, they show how the church frames poverty, how state actors exploit it, and whether religious narratives end up reinforcing inequality or challenging it. Scholars like Okorafor [9] and Udo [10] provide the analytical backbone, but the story itself belongs to the communities living it

**Weaponization of Social Poverty:** This phrase denotes something far more deliberate than ordinary hardship. It captures how poverty gets manipulated as an instrument of political, economic, and social control. Poverty here isn't some natural accident born from scarcity or poor management. It becomes instrumentalized weaponized, really to keep people dependent, to silence dissent, and to secure loyalty. Odunowo [11] drives this home: poverty in Nigeria functions as a systemic mechanism of domination, something elites strategically maintain to strip people of agency and keep them under control. So weaponized poverty transforms human deprivation into a governance resource. Citizens get pacified through selective welfare, patronage networks, or religious consolations that conveniently mask structural injustice. In Nigeria, this isn't theoretical. It's concrete and material. Poverty ties directly into unemployment, broken healthcare, failing schools, and pervasive insecurity all of which feed into cycles of disempowerment. Okorafor (2024) argues that elites intentionally perpetuate these conditions because desperation consolidates their political power. Poverty becomes both an outcome and an instrument, produced by weak governance yet actively wielded to dominate.

**The Church:** The study approaches the church in two ways, here as an institution and as a functional actor. Institutionally, we're talking about organized Christian bodies: denominations, congregations, and ecclesiastical structures operating across Nigerian society. The church building itself, the edifice for public worship, and the broader body of

believers professing the same creed Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Catholic, and others. Functionally, though, the church operates as a socio-religious actor mediating spiritual, cultural, and political life. In contexts of poverty, the church often steps in as a mediator providing welfare, education, psychosocial support. But Nwachukwu [12] warns that this mediation risks becoming complicity when charity stays palliative and never confronts systemic inequalities. The Nigerian church, particularly in Pentecostal circles, frequently preaches prosperity theology that frames poverty as a faith problem or spiritual deficiency. These messages might inspire hope, but they can also obscure structural dynamics, shifting blame away from the state and onto individuals [13]. On the flip side, Catholic social teaching and mainline Protestant traditions through Justice, Development, and Peace Commissions (JDPCs) tend to emphasize structural justice and advocacy. So the church's role isn't uniform. It's contested, ranging from prophetic resistance to ideological complicity.

**Inequality:** For this study, inequality covers economic, social, and political disparities defining Nigeria's stratified society. Inequality is not accidental. It's structurally engineered and institutionally sustained. Udo [14] frames Nigerian inequality as the deliberate exclusion of marginalized populations from power, resources, and representation. This isn't a byproduct of underdevelopment. It's a deliberate architecture of governance. Against this backdrop, resistance means both organized and spontaneous actions challenging structures that weaponize poverty. Resistance takes many forms grassroots mobilization, prophetic preaching, advocacy by faith-based organizations, even subtle community non-compliance. In Nigeria, the church becomes a central resistance site when it aligns with the marginalized, exposes systemic injustice, and amplifies demands for transformation. But resistance stays fragile, especially when churches depend on political patronage or prioritize institutional survival over prophetic witness. To summarize what the study has mapped out so far, weaponized poverty is not some unfortunate accident of governance it's the intentional manipulation of deprivation, a calculated strategy where scarcity gets weaponized to keep populations subdued and politically manageable. The church, for its part, occupies a far more complicated position than simple hero or villain. It's a dual actor one that may genuinely resist this weaponization through prophetic advocacy and grassroots empowerment, yet may also reinforce it through silence, prosperity preaching, or charity that never questions the system producing the poverty in the first place. Inequality, meanwhile, isn't incidental or a byproduct of underdevelopment that will naturally resolve with time. It's systemic deliberately engineered through policy choices, institutional design, and political calculation that exclude marginalized populations from power, resources, and meaningful representation. And resistance, as we've conceived it, operates on two registers simultaneously: it's theological in that it draws from sacred texts, spiritual conviction, and moral imagination, but it's also socio-political in that it demands concrete action against structures, accountability from elites, and the redistribution of power and resources. These aren't just abstract definitions we've settled on. They form the conceptual boundaries that frame everything that follows the lens through which we will read the church's interventions, judge its complicities, and assess whether its praxis ultimately subverts or sustains the weaponization of poverty in Nigeria

### **Poverty as a Weapon of Control**

Ogunwole [15] makes a stark case that deprivation has been weaponized into survival politics, with the state deliberately engineering scarcity to force compliance from a hungry population. Okorafor (2024) echoes this, pointing to the theater of election-season food handouts and conditional palliatives as mechanisms of social control rather than genuine relief. Taken together, these scholars leave no room for accident theory. Nigerian poverty is

not some economic miscalculation or unfortunate byproduct of underdevelopment. It is a deliberate political instrument, wielded with precision. Poverty and ignorance function as calculated tools in the hands of political elites, keeping large swathes of the population dependent, pliable, and politically docile. These perspectives push beyond the familiar narrative of developmental failure. What emerges instead is a calibrated governance system where deprivation serves as the operating software of domination.

While the state steadily withdraws from its social obligations, the church has historically stepped into the vacuum as a surrogate welfare and empowerment provider. Catholic institutions, working through their Justice, Development and Peace Commissions, deliver micro-credit, legal aid, and community development programs that target vulnerable groups with structured, intentional empowerment. On the Pentecostal side, large denominational bodies such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God have elevated Christian Social Responsibility into a mainstream operational framework, treating poverty alleviation as an explicit organizational mandate rather than peripheral charity. Personal observation and lived experience within Nigerian church spaces reveal a wide spectrum of interventions: widow empowerment schemes providing capital for small trade, youth skill workshops teaching carpentry and digital literacy, food banks operating in urban slums. These efforts demonstrate the church acting as a buffer against social dislocation, pouring concrete resources into gaps left gaping by a neglectful state. Yet the scholarly warning is clear and persistent. Sele and Wanjiku observe that while churches excel at immediate relief through charity, they frequently stop short of confronting structural injustice, inadvertently sustaining cycles of dependency rather than breaking them. Ighele and Aboyeji raise a sharper concern about prosperity-centered preaching, which risks forging a distorted wealth ethic where poverty becomes spiritualized, framed as personal failure or insufficient faith, and responsibility migrates away from the state and unjust systems onto individual shoulders. Vanguard carries reports from church leaders themselves, voices from within the institution lamenting the proliferation of commercialized churches and fragmented responses that erode collective credibility. The picture that forms is layered. The church operates as a vital safety net, catching people who would otherwise fall through completely. Simultaneously, it stands vulnerable to complicity in the very politics of poverty it claims to oppose.

Against these narratives of complicity, however, certain ecclesial movements have chosen a different path: prophetic resistance. Nigerian Catholic Bishops have issued public calls for moving beyond temporary palliatives toward sustainable empowerment, directly urging government accountability and systemic reform. Justice-oriented arms of the church, such as Caritas agencies, have championed structural justice by integrating theological reflection with grounded development praxis. Pentecostal voices have also joined this chorus, urging faith communities to drive entrepreneurship, industrialization, and innovation as concrete pathways out of entrenched poverty. These initiatives resonate with liberationist theology's deeper vision, repositioning the church not as a mere dispenser of charity but as a prophetic force actively resisting structural injustice.

## **2. Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative, interpretive, and historically informed research design to examine the role of the Nigerian church in either reinforcing or resisting the structural weaponization of poverty. The inquiry relied entirely on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, theological texts, denominational statements, church policy documents, reports from Justice, Development and Peace Commissions, publications of faith-

based organizations, and relevant media reports on poverty alleviation, political patronage, prosperity theology, and ecclesial advocacy in Nigeria. Sources were purposively selected according to their relevance to the study's central concepts of social poverty, inequality, religious complicity, empowerment, and prophetic resistance. The collected materials were analyzed through thematic content analysis, which involved identifying, comparing, and interpreting recurring patterns concerning church-led welfare programmes, microcredit initiatives, educational support, humanitarian relief, prosperity preaching, political silence, public advocacy, and structural reform. Liberation Theology and Critical Social Theory provided the principal analytical frameworks. Liberation Theology was used to assess whether church practices reflected a preferential option for the poor and promoted emancipatory action, while Critical Social Theory facilitated the examination of ideological narratives, power relations, institutional interests, and mechanisms through which poverty and inequality are normalized. Historical interpretation was also employed to trace the evolution of church-state relations and ecclesiastical responses to Nigeria's changing socio-political conditions. To strengthen analytical credibility, evidence from scholarly, ecclesial, and journalistic sources was compared through source triangulation. The study did not involve surveys, interviews, experiments, or human participants; rather, it developed a critical synthesis of existing evidence to determine whether church interventions merely alleviate deprivation or meaningfully confront the political and economic structures that reproduce poverty.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

Liberation theology took shape in late 1960s and early 1970s Latin America, born from an urgent need to respond to systemic oppression, crushing poverty, and authoritarian rule. Gustavo Gutiérrez, widely regarded as its principal architect, published his seminal work *A Theology of Liberation* in 1971 with a radical proposition: theology must begin from the lived experiences of the poor and oppressed, and Christian faith must prioritize active engagement in social transformation. At the heart of Gutiérrez's framework sits the "preferential option for the poor" the conviction that God holds special concern for those pushed to the margins, and that the church's mission must embody this concern in both its theology and its daily practice. This concept fundamentally reshaped theology into praxis, insisting that salvation cannot be reduced to the spiritual alone. It is simultaneously political, economic, and social. Two other thinkers deepened this vision considerably. Leonardo Boff argued that the church must stand in concrete solidarity with the oppressed, dismantling oppressive structures and championing human dignity at every turn. Jon Sobrino, drawing from the life of Jesus, emphasized Christ as a liberator model one who stood with the disenfranchised against imperial powers rather than accommodating them. Their contributions reinforced liberation theology as a framework where faith and justice intersect, positioning the church as a counter-hegemonic institution that refuses to bless the status quo. When this theological current reached Africa, it found fertile ground. Theologians like Allan Boesak in South Africa and Jean-Marc Éla in Cameroon took up its insights and applied them to apartheid, colonial legacies, and the inequalities of postcolonial states. African liberation theology emphasized challenging structures of exploitation, ethnic domination, and political corruption all of which functioned as tools of oppression across the continent. In this way, liberation theology evolved into a global paradigm, adaptable to different contexts of systemic inequality while retaining its core commitment to the marginalized.

In Nigeria, liberation theology carries profound relevance. Scholars such as Nwachukwu and Eze argue that churches must move beyond charity and prosperity-driven ministry

models, which frequently spiritualize wealth while ignoring the structural inequality that produces poverty. The Nigerian church's heavy investment in welfare programs food distribution, microloans, emergency relief while genuinely helpful, may inadvertently perpetuate dependency rather than confronting systemic poverty at its roots. Liberation theology demands a shift from these palliative measures toward prophetic praxis: publicly denouncing corruption, advocating for economic justice, and mobilizing communities to resist exploitation. This framework situates poverty not as fate or divine punishment but as a form of oppression to be actively resisted. Critically, liberation theology also confronts Nigeria's dominance of prosperity gospel. By promising wealth as a sign of divine favor, prosperity theology often deflects attention from poverty's systemic causes, attributing economic struggles to a lack of faith or spiritual failure. This paper critiques that position as theologically shallow and politically complicit, since it systematically discourages structural critique and collective resistance. Instead, liberation theology calls the Nigerian church to recover its voice for justice, confronting both political elites and internal ecclesial practices that reinforce inequality. Thus, liberation theology frames the church's engagement with poverty not as optional charity but as an essential component of its identity. It insists that true Christian witness requires dismantling the systemic weaponization of poverty in Nigeria, empowering the oppressed, and reimagining society in ways that honor human dignity and justice.

Critical social theory, rooted in the Frankfurt School tradition, emerged in early 20th-century Germany as a direct response to the failures of classical Marxism and the terrifying ascent of authoritarian regimes. Thinkers such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, and later Jürgen Habermas set out to critique far more than economic structures alone. Their target encompassed the cultural, ideological, and institutional systems that keep domination alive and well. Horkheimer drew a sharp line between critical theory and traditional theory, insisting that the former carries an emancipatory aim. It does not settle for understanding society as it is; it seeks to transform society by exposing the hidden mechanisms of power and oppression that operate beneath the surface. Adorno and Horkheimer, in their collaborative work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, delivered a devastating critique of how modern rationality and the culture industry could themselves become instruments of domination, lulling individuals into passive compliance. Marcuse, in *One-Dimensional Man*, pushed further, arguing that advanced industrial societies manufacture false needs that keep exploitation systems running smoothly. These insights travel well beyond their European origins. They remain acutely relevant for contexts like Nigeria, where political elites routinely deploy cultural and religious tools to maintain inequality and tighten control. Habermas, representing the second generation of Frankfurt School thought, extended critical theory into the realm of communication. He argued that distorted communication sustains domination, and that genuine emancipation requires creating spaces for free, rational dialogue. His concepts of communicative rationality and the public sphere prove particularly useful when analyzing how Nigerian churches function as discourse platforms. They can operate either as spaces of critical resistance or as mechanisms that reproduce state ideology, depending on how they are used.

Applied to Nigeria, critical social theory illuminates poverty as socially engineered rather than naturally inevitable. Udo demonstrates how ruling elites actively exploit poverty to perpetuate dependency, ensuring citizens remain politically docile and manageable. Okeke contends that religious rhetoric sometimes reinforces this domination, framing poverty as divine will rather than the outcome of systemic exploitation.

In practical terms, critical theory exposes the church's dual role within Nigeria. On one hand, it can serve as an ideological apparatus legitimizing inequality, especially when prosperity teachings individualize poverty and blame the poor for their own condition. On the other hand, it holds genuine potential as a counter-hegemonic space where discourses of justice, resistance, and empowerment are nurtured. This ambiguity makes critical theory essential for interrogating whether the church ultimately resists or reinforces the weaponization of poverty. Moreover, critical theory critiques the commodification of religion itself, where churches may become businesses that accumulate immense wealth while leaving structural poverty completely unaddressed. This commodification echoes Adorno's critique of the culture industry, where even faith gets packaged and sold in ways that pacify rather than liberate. Such critiques resonate powerfully in Nigeria, where immensely wealthy churches sometimes coexist alongside congregations living in destitution. Thus this theory provides analytical tools for deconstructing not only the political economy of poverty but also the cultural and religious mechanisms that normalize it. In the Nigerian context, it equips this study to interrogate whether the church functions as a site of resistance or as an accomplice in domination.

### **The Church and Structural Poverty**

A deeply troubling finding surfaces from this analysis. Numerous Nigerian churches, through their routine discourse and theological positioning, end up legitimizing the very structures that sustain poverty instead of tearing them down. Step into congregations across the nation and sermons abound on suffering, divine timing, and personal faith messages that carry authentic spiritual resonance on their own terms. Yet these same sermons deliberately sidestep direct engagement with systemic injustice. They counsel patience through hardship without ever naming the politician who emptied the healthcare budget. They exhort faith over fear without acknowledging the security forces that gun down peaceful protesters. They praise God's provision without probing why provision became necessary why the state collapsed so thoroughly that churches were forced to fill the void. This theological framing coincides, however unintentionally, with political strategies that wield poverty as an instrument of social control. By normalizing deprivation by instructing congregants that their suffering serves a divine purpose rather than tracing back to political cause elites find it far simpler to manage and pacify marginalized populations without touching root causes. The faithful absorb the lesson of waiting on God rather than demanding accountability from those in power. They internalize the habit of praying through hardship rather than mobilizing against it. Critical Social Theory throws harsh light on this alignment, proposing that institutions churches prominently among them can function as ideological instruments propping up domination systems (Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas). Active conspiracy with power is unnecessary; preaching a theology that never challenges power accomplishes the same outcome.

Within Nigeria, when churches cast poverty as "God's will" or a personal spiritual trial, they shift responsibility away from political structures and cement the status quo with crushing effectiveness. The woman who attributes her poverty to weak faith will never storm the government house. The widow who accepts his deprivation as divinely ordained discipline will never demand answers about vanished pension funds. Okeke aptly observes that religious rhetoric can conceal injustice, redirecting attention from systemic exploitation toward individual spiritual inadequacy. The church's muteness on poverty's structural engines its refusal to identify corruption, nepotism, resource plunder, and policy violence as the genuine drivers of deprivation amounts to complicity by omission. It reduces the church to a mirror that reflects society's inequities rather than a hammer that shatters them. This critique, however, must

coexist with another truth a great many Nigerian churches deliver genuinely indispensable humanitarian services. Food distributions prevent families from starving. Scholarships place children in school who would otherwise abandon education. Healthcare clinics treat diseases in communities where public hospitals have ceased functioning. Vocational training outfits young people with marketable capabilities. Microcredit schemes extend capital to entrepreneurs barred from formal banking. Olusola-Ilori and Afolaranmi record churches in Ilorin assembling welfare committees, running vocational training, subsidizing education, and operating job-placement programs that tangibly improve existence. Onukwuba spotlights Catholic microcredit schemes that have become practical channels for poor households to address pressing needs and launch entrepreneurial ventures. These are not gestures of performative charity. They embody actual labor, actual resources, and actual compassion in a setting where the state has largely forfeited its obligations. Still, these interventions compassionate as they are remain fundamentally palliative. They ease surface symptoms without destabilizing the systemic inequities that generate those symptoms. A food program fills empty stomachs but never contests the agricultural policy failures that created the hunger. A scholarship rescues one child but never confronts the funding collapse that ruined public education for millions. A microcredit loan liberates one entrepreneur but never tackles the banking exclusion that keeps whole communities trapped in informal destitution. Liberation theology judges such efforts inadequate when they stop short of challenging the political and economic architectures that manufacture widespread poverty. The criticism is not that charity is inherently wrong it is that charity stripped of justice devolves into a technique for managing inequality rather than escaping it.

Church-led welfare is indispensable in Nigeria; remove it and entire communities would crumble. Yet it carries the risk of deepening dependence on ecclesiastical generosity while veiling the urgent need for systemic advocacy against corruption that hemorrhages public resources, against economic exclusion that hoards wealth among elites, against misgovernance that reduces citizens to subjects. The church that feeds the impoverished without ever interrogating why they are poor effectively becomes an accomplice in their ongoing immiseration. It dispenses relief that preserves the system rather than relief that dismantles it. The imperative, therefore, is not to discard welfare but to radicalize it to attach political education to every food distribution, policy advocacy to every scholarship, demands for banking reform to every microcredit initiative. Only through this integration does the church graduate from managing poverty to genuinely confronting it.

### **Prosperity Gospel and the Commodification of Hope**

One of the most dominant currents running through Nigerian Christianity today is prosperity theology, a doctrine that elevates material wealth as the primary signifier of divine favor. Looked at through both sociological and theological lenses, this narrative raises serious concerns. Iheanacho and Akindele have leveled sharp critiques against the overemphasis on material wealth as evidence of salvation, going so far as to label it "heretical" whenever it assumes dominance within church teaching. Apyewen et al. alongside Iheanacho have documented how Nigerian prosperity preachers frequently distort the gospel itself, stripping spirituality down to pure monetization, extracting resources from congregants, and corroding both moral integrity and communal well-being in the process. What makes this theology particularly damaging is how it privatizes poverty. Economic hardship gets recast as personal spiritual failure rather than the product of structural injustice. This reframing effectively silences any legitimate call to confront political corruption or socio-economic inequality. The unemployed young man is told he lacks sufficient faith, not that the economy has been rigged

against him. The farmer whose crops fail is advised to sow a bigger seed offering, not that agricultural policy has been neglected for decades. In this way, prosperity theology commodifies hope itself packaging it as something you purchase through tithes and offerings rather than something collectively pursued through social transformation. Those without wealth get branded as spiritually deficient, and hope devolves into an economic transaction rather than a vision for systemic reform. Operating through what Critical Social Theory identifies as ideological hegemony, the prosperity gospel sustains the acceptability of inequality by making it appear natural, even divinely ordained. It functions as a powerful tranquilizer for the masses, teaching them to look upward for miracle breakthroughs rather than outward at the structures crushing them. And perhaps most insidiously, it lifts the burden of guilt from those in power the politicians who loot, the elites who hoard, the systems that exclude. After all, if poverty is simply a spiritual problem, then those who amass wealth need never question whether their accumulation comes at others' expense. The prosperity gospel thus serves as both opiate and alibi, keeping the poor docile and the powerful comfortable, all under the banner of divine blessing.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The study concludes that the Nigerian church occupies a paradoxical position in relation to social poverty, functioning both as an essential provider of welfare and empowerment and, in some instances, as an institution that unintentionally reinforces structural inequality. The findings show that church-led interventions such as food assistance, scholarships, healthcare services, vocational training, microcredit, and community development provide immediate relief to vulnerable populations; however, these measures remain largely palliative when they are not accompanied by sustained advocacy against corruption, economic exclusion, political patronage, and weak public institutions. The analysis also indicates that prosperity-oriented preaching may individualize poverty, commodify hope, and divert attention from the political and economic structures responsible for deprivation. These findings imply that the church must move beyond charitable relief toward a prophetic and justice-centred model that integrates social welfare with civic education, policy engagement, government accountability, and the defence of marginalized communities. Theological institutions and church leaders should therefore promote teachings grounded in solidarity, human dignity, equitable resource distribution, and the preferential option for the poor. Further research should employ interviews, surveys, case studies, and comparative denominational analysis to evaluate the measurable impact of church interventions, examine congregants' perceptions of poverty-related teachings, and determine which faith-based strategies most effectively produce sustainable socioeconomic transformation in Nigeria.

#### **Recommendations**

study recommends that Nigerian churches should reposition poverty alleviation from predominantly charitable intervention toward an integrated, justice-oriented framework that addresses both immediate needs and the structural causes of deprivation. Welfare initiatives such as food distribution, scholarships, healthcare support, vocational training, and microcredit should be combined with civic education, policy advocacy, anti-corruption campaigns, and sustained demands for accountable governance. Church leaders should use their moral authority and extensive social networks to challenge political patronage, economic exclusion, unemployment, unequal resource distribution, and institutional failures that perpetuate poverty. Denominations should also establish independent social-justice and policy units responsible for monitoring public policies, conducting evidence-based advocacy, and

coordinating collective responses to national socioeconomic problems. Theological institutions and seminaries should revise ministerial training to emphasize Liberation Theology, social ethics, human dignity, responsible citizenship, and the preferential option for the poor. Prosperity teachings that associate material wealth with divine favour or portray poverty as evidence of spiritual failure should be critically reassessed and replaced with theologies emphasizing solidarity, equitable development, productive work, and communal well-being. Churches should further strengthen partnerships with civil society organizations, development agencies, educational institutions, and responsible private-sector actors to expand sustainable livelihood programmes and community-based enterprises. Transparency and accountability should guide the management of church welfare funds and poverty-reduction projects to preserve public trust and ensure that resources reach intended beneficiaries. Finally, church interventions should be periodically evaluated using measurable indicators such as employment creation, income improvement, educational access, financial independence, and community participation so that faith-based responses move beyond temporary relief and contribute meaningfully to sustainable socioeconomic transformation in Nigeria.

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