



**A Journal of the Faculty of Arts**  
Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria

**THE**  
**INTERNATIONAL**  
**JOURNAL**

**OF CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH  
IN HUMANITIES (INJOCORH)**

**ISSN 3026-9067**

Volume 2 Number 1 2024

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## **The Relevance of the Nigerian Church through its Responsibility to the Society and Community Development**

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### **Abstract**

The relevance of the Church to society and community cannot be underestimated if the Church wants to fulfil Christ's mandate of great commission and be obedience to the instruction of Christ as stated in Matthew 5:16. More so, society and community where church located may sometimes face with diverse challenges and hardship such as poor social amenities, poverty, social and moral deviant, several health challenges that will require the church to show good work. The Nigerian church plays a vital role in promoting development through its various responsibilities: This development including spiritual growth and empowerment, support for community infrastructure (e.g., healthcare, education), community engagement and outreach, investment in community development projects, participation in community development initiatives, engagement with local authorities and stakeholders among others. Therefore, this paper aimed to look at the relevance of the church, as a faith-based organisation to the development of society where the church is located and operates in Nigeria. Also, this paper examined how the church can be relevant in the society and ensure there is development in such society where the church is located. The paper adopted a systematic literature review and a historical analysis. The paper reveals that Nigeria churches has make significant contribution to social responsibility, there is room for improvement, particularly in address systematic issues and promoting sustainable development within the Nigeria society. The paper concluded that the church adopting and embarking in social responsibility will be of great advantage in fulfilling the great commission. This paper, therefore, recommended that the church should make conscious effort to be actively involved more in social responsibility which can have direct impact to the immediate society in which the church operate and this will result to expected growth of the church and expansion of the kingdom of God.

**Keywords: Church, Community, Social Responsibility, Society, Society & Community Development**

### **Introduction**

The relevance of Nigeria church to society and community cannot be underestimated if the church wants to fulfil Christ's mandate of great commission and be obedience to the instruction of Christ as stated in Matthew 5:16, Moreso, society and community where church located may sometimes face with diverse challenges and hardship such as poor social amenities, poverty, social and moral deviant, several health challenges that will require the church to show good work. The word church means assembly. The Greek word '*Ekklesia*' refers to any assembly, local bodies of believers or the universal bodies of all believers (William, Merrill and William, 1996). Jesus Christ was the first person to use the word in the New Testament, and He applied it to the company that gathered about Him (Berkhof, 2005). New Testament church founded by Jesus Christ; that is, an assembly of believers joined to Christ's spiritual body by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians. 12:13) at the moment of regeneration (Titus 3:3-6), when they individually place their faith in the Lord Jesus as their Savior (Acts 16:31). If still on earth, they should be part of a local body of believers meeting regularly (Hebrew. 10:25) for edification (Ephesians. 4:12), worship (John 4:24), and participation in the ordinances (Geisler, 2011).



The purpose of the church is three-fold. The church comes together (assembles) for the purpose of bringing each member into spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:13). The church reaches out (scatters) to spread the love of Christ and the gospel message to unbelievers in the world (Matthew 28:18-20). This is the Great Commission, to go out into the world and make disciples. So, the purpose of the church is to minister to believers and unbelievers (Mary, 2020, August 28). Externally, the purpose of the church is to fulfill the Great Commission as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:18-20. There is no nobler purpose for the church than to introduce others to Christ. We do this in part by making sure we faithfully represent Him and become who He has called us to be. Philippians 2:15 exhorts us to be "blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation." Whether we witness to people in our neighborhoods or send others to foreign lands, the church is called to manifest the Holy Spirit in us by embodying Jesus' character and telling others about Him (What was God's purpose in establishing the church, n.d). Social responsibility is a moral obligation on a company, organisation or an individual to take decisions or actions that is in favour and useful to society (What is Social Responsibility? n.d.) The church has vital roles to play in making the society better and the purpose of the church which development is part of its roles must be felt in our society, this can be achieved through the visibility and engagement of the church through social responsibility.

This paper seeks to introduce the church social responsibility, the paper will offer an overview of the church and its social responsibility, there are need to be met as a result failure of church involvement in the development of the society as a role of church as commended by Jesus Christ when given great commission. This development cannot be achieved without the church involvement in social responsibility. Many areas of human life require church attention to address. This paper also shows the practices of social responsibility both in the Old and New Testaments. The church needs to be up and doing in-order to be relevant in its assignment and responsibility. The methodology adopted were systematic literature review from existing literatures, books, journal articles and internet sources. The researchers also adopted the historical approach while writing this paper.

### **Biblical Basic of Social Responsibility**

At creation, conversations about the environment loom ever larger in the public arena. God does not say, "Let there be plants." Rather Earth itself brings forth plants and then living creatures (Genesis 1:11,12,20,24). Plants have seeds so that creation has a self-sustaining momentum. Humans are given an executive function as administrators of earth and its plants and animals (vv. 26, 28). Genesis 2 and 3 refocus the picture onto the human scale but continue to show God's concern for the earth. God forms Man to meet earth's need in this regard (Genesis 1:15) (Richard, 2009, April 1). God Himself is the formulation of social responsibility which has clearly manifested at the beginning of the world.

In Genesis 26:32-33, Isaac had a sense of duty towards those that were around his vicinity despite his status as stated in Genesis 26:22 "He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, 'Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land'" (NIV). In the preceding verses of Genesis 26, Isaac had made several attempts to dig a well which was taken away from him, but this time around he succeeded in getting it done. The well did not only serve him and his household but by extension it also served the host communities. According to Isaiah 58 6,7, everyone who desires to please the Lord has a personal responsibility to serve the poor and the needy in the society or community. The passage applies to both the church and individual follower of Jesus Christ. According to Meduoye (2024), the expression of this is different for every single and every single local church. But as body of Christ, together we can make a dent.

The writer of the book of Deuteronomy, however, uses humanitarian arguments to motivate obedience to socially enlightened laws. Deuteronomy's law is not merely a shield to protect the rich and powerful (although there are places where their rights are considered), but protects dispossessed widows, orphans, immigrants, slaves, and daily wage labourers. Here are some verses in the book to support this:

- a) You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge (for a loan). Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. (Deuteronomy 24:17-18)



- b) You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:19)
- c) Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns.... the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill. (Deuteronomy 14:28-29)
- d) When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. (Deuteronomy 24:19)

The above verses show how the church which the assembly of God's people should relate with people living in their immediate society in which the church operates.

In Amos 5:21-24, Amos was speaking to his audience which had confused assurance with complacency. The prophet pronounces God's distaste and disgust at the worship offered by His people. Their burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, God will reject them all. The meaning of burnt offerings is total consecration to God but their consecration was not actually total as they ignored the social ills of their day. The meaning of peace offerings is fellowship with God and with others with special reference to the lowly but they neglected justice for the poor. As is true today, in those days, the poor were disproportionately vulnerable to injustice. They were easier targets of robbery because they had no money or social status to defend themselves. Justice in verse 24 as "reparation for the defrauded, fairness for the less fortunate, and dignity and compassion for the needy" and righteousness as "attitudes of mercy and generosity, and honest dealings that imitate the character of God" The word justice as more to do with social ethic (outward) and righteousness has more to do with moral principles. (inward) (Soo Bin Lee, 2020, May 29). God's reaction shown and clear that the offerings of ancient Israel were not devoted to God or to their fellow man.

The story of Jesus feeding the five thousand as found in the four gospels (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:1-15) shows Christ concerned about the social welfare of the people and this is achieved through the social responsibility of providing food for them.

- a) The compassion of Jesus is a strong theme in this story. Jesus cared for the multitudes who were "like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus was tired and his disciples were too. But his compassion for their needs was greater than his exhaustion. Jesus is the true Good Shepherd of God (Jack, 2023, April 5)
- b) Jesus recognizing the people's need for food, set about teaching his disciples an important lesson. In the household of faith, God is a constant and abundant provider of all our needs. Only he can satisfy our true hunger (Jack, 2023, April 5).

In the Gospel according to John 2:1-11, the beginning of Jesus miracles was seen in a marriage ceremony in Cana of Galilee where Jesus changed water to wine. He contributed in no small measure to the success of that particular marriage ceremony. He intervened at the critical period when there was a serious need in His immediate environment, even to the extent that the leader of the setting was amazed and he recognizes the good work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The examples of Jesus miracles clearly indicate that the church is existing in different localities though with the primary aim of preaching the salvation through Christ but the level of the social responsibility in that community of society would definitely make the church to be relevance in such area. Conversely, the church must not relent in its efforts to improve on the level of social responsibility, which may be another better mechanism for winning souls for Christ.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theoretical framework for this paper are Four-Part Model of Social Responsibility and Stakeholder Theory. Four-Part Model of Social Responsibility, according to Carroll Archie in 1979 proposed the four-part model of social responsibility, which implies that organisation have four responsibilities to fulfil to society: namely legal, ethical, economics and discretionary – which was later referred to as philanthropic (The Institute of Chartered Accountant of Nigeria Study Pack, 2010). The social responsibility refers to the



framework and obligation that an organisation has toward the society and environment in which it operates.

There are four types of social responsibility, which are as follows:

- i Legal responsibilities
- ii Ethical responsibility
- iii Environmental responsibility
- iv Philanthropic Responsibility

Stakeholder theory was first described by R. Edward Freeman, a professor at the University of Virginia, in his landmark book, "Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach." It suggests that shareholders are merely one of many stakeholders in a company. The stakeholder ecosystem, this theory says, involves anyone invested and involved in, or affected by, the company: employees, environmentalists near the company's plants, vendors, governmental agencies, and more. Freeman's theory suggests that a company's real success lies in satisfying all its stakeholders, not just those who might profit from its stock (Simon, 2013, August 4). It emphasises that organisations have responsibilities to multiple groups beyond just shareholders, including Customers, Employees, Suppliers, Communities and Environment.

Key principles of stakeholder theory are identified stakeholders, understand their interests, manage relationships, balance interests and create value for all stakeholders. By adopting stakeholder theory, organisations can foster a more collaborative and responsible approach to business, leading to greater success and positive impact.

### **Approaches of Social Responsibility the Church Can Embark**

Deliberately studying Nigeria society and community there are different methods and means for church to carry out social responsibility. Only the needs that are well identified and can be properly addressed. Asking questions or making inquiries such as: Who were the first settlers? What brought them there? What challenges did they face? Who were the prominent people that had lived there? What spiritual forces have been in charge? What cultural practices do they hold on to as a form? and so on would help kick start this duty of social responsibility.

Other means and methods of church social responsibility could include the following areas:

- i *Health Education*: organising beneficial seminars like care of the teeth, stress management, HIV/AIDS awareness, sexual health counselling etc.
- ii *Transportation safety*: This could include safety education for *okada* riders and drivers. This will depend on the area of challenge that the people face in the community. Enlightenment can be given on the use of crash helmets, side mirror, danger of over-speeding, road signs etc
- iii *Free medical services*: Free eye care and glasses, building maternity centres etc.
- iv *Vocational Training*: Activities like sewing, hat making, soap making, chalk making computer training etc can be organised to empower the community.
- v *Physical Infrastructures*: Road repairs, traffic control at busy road junctions, erecting of road signs like "school children crossing, bumps ahead, no parking", provision of potable water etc.
- vi *Education Services*: Provision of tutorial classes during the holiday for school children, provision of day care centres etc.
- vii *Environmental Sanitation*: mobilisation for sanitation of common area with the community, cleaning of drainage to allow free flow of water in order avert flood in the community.

### **Case Studies Highlighting Catalogues of Social Responsibilities by Some Churches in Nigeria in Recent Time**

The below highlighted case study of the social responsibility embarked by churches show that churches are going a lot in giving back to the community and also aware the important and the extend of what social responsibility can do in fulfilling the Christ's mandate.

- i Deeper Life Bible Church Builds Bridge in Lagos, "while also commending the church for its infrastructural intervention, some of the residents said that doing business in the area would be



easier as a result of the improved traffic situation. They also said the bridge would make life easier for the residents. They expressed the optimism that it was also going to impact positively on the economy of the area” (Ekah, 2018).

- ii Winners Chapel Rehabilitates Roads, The Baale of Iludun, Atan, Chief Lateef Salami lauded the church for the gesture, stressing that it is timely. He noted that they still need to construct good drainage system on the road, so that the water coming onto the road can be properly channelled because whenever it rains, the water would flow to the houses beside the road. “The Church is doing a good job and we are praying for them, they should help us in that area so that we won’t face the challenge of flooding” (Akinfenwa, 2015).
- iii Daystar donates school materials to 20,000 children; the church gave out school materials to various pupils and students across the state in preparation for the new academic session. “We as a church believe and practice the teaching of Christ on being responsible to the society where we live” (Jemilat Nasiru, 2017).
- iv Church provides healthcare services to Lagos community, Redeemed Christian Church of God, RCCG, Calvary Parish Province 27, Lagos, offered free healthcare services and other relief materials to residents of Mafoluku, Oshodi and its environs (Afamefune, 2028).
- v Christ Embassy fed 30,000 underprivileged children in Delta. No fewer than 30, 000 underprivileged children drawn from three communities in Warri, Delta State will this year benefit from the Inner-City Mission Children Food Bank, which is being sponsored by the Warri zone of the Christ Embassy (Youdeowei, 2016).
- vi Foursquare Church repairs Sango roads. Worried by the sorry state of link roads in the Sango area of Ogun State, Foursquare Gospel Church, Sango-Ota District, has rehabilitated roads in the four areas constituting Ifelodun/Olunloye Community Development Association (CDA). The initiative is part of palliative measures, which the church adopts annually (Akinfenwa, 2017).
- vii Church offers free medical screening, drugs to 500 Ogun residents. No fewer than 500 residents of Abeokuta, the Ogun State capital have benefitted from free medical outreach carried out in the area by the Glorious Liberty Church. The residents were screened for malaria, typhoid, high blood pressure, blood sugar, and other ailments. The medical outreach organised by the church in collaboration with Beth -help the foundation, and also gave food items and clothing to over 1,500 aged in the state capital (Ojuroungbe, 2024)
- viii The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) provides free medical services, palliatives to indigent FCT Community. RCCG, City of David, Abuja has conducted medical outreach, as well as provided food palliatives to over 2,000 households including widows, children and the elderly (Emejo, 2024).
- ix Afolaranmi (2020) referred to the Nigerian Baptist Convention that has a department of social ministries who is specifically responding to changing the lives of displaced persons from conflict-affected areas. This is apart from other social responsibilities that department does in coordinating the general social ministry of the Convention. This was earlier reiterated in a study (Kristilere, 2014).
- x During the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria, churches were forefront of philanthropic gestures as per of their social responsibility to the individual, group of people and government. According the Vanguard Newspaper 2020, COVID-19: Winners’ Chapel donates Ambulance, other materials to Ogun Govt (James Ogunnaike, 2020), as part of their contribution towards the fight against the spread of coronavirus in the state. The InnerCity Mission for Children, a non-governmental organisation under the auspices of the Chris Oyakhilome Foundation International, has donated food items to the Lagos state government to help soften the effects of the compulsory lockdown in the state which has affected many who survive through their daily means of sustenance (Editor Sunrise, 2020). Oguntola (2020) reported that Foursquare Gospel Church has donated food items to Lagos State Government to cushion effects of the lockdown on vulnerable residents.



### **Element of Social Responsibility**

According to Meduoye (2014), there are projects from which churches do undertake as part of social responsibility

- i *Feeding*: Provision of food items for the poor people in the community from time to time
- ii *Medicare*: Provision of medical services such as free eye test and medication and free diagnosis and provision of free drugs
- iii *Clothing*: Provision of clothes to assist the poor who cannot afford
- iv *Education*: Provision of financial subsidies to assist indigent student as well as granting scholarship to bright but financially disadvantages students
- v *Environmental sanitation*: communities are kept clean by engaging church members, according to James 2:18,26 - But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also
- vi *Water supply*: Churches do sink boreholes in communities where is scarcity of water
- vii *Road construction/rehabilitation*: Rehabilitation or construction of roads serving the community

### **Benefit of Social Responsibility**

- i It is a means of giving back to the community, thereby erasing the counterproductive public perception of the church as an institution which is set up to drain the purses of the people
- ii It makes the church community-friendly. People love to identify with churches which provide social services
- iii It promotes goodwill for the church. The people in the community generally appreciate the church and would support the church when any need arises. They also tolerate some disturbances from the church e.g. parking of cars
- iv It makes the church a true representation of Jesus Christ who ministered to all needs without caring whether such people had been saved first or whether they were His followers
- v It promotes evangelism as the community is not antagonistic to members of the church during evangelistic outreaches
- vi It as a strategy to penetrate into unbelieving neighbourhoods with the gospel our Lord Jesus Christ
- vii It promotes peaceful coexistence between the church and the community
- viii It gives the church a voice in the community

### **Conclusion**

The Nigerian church has a critical role to play in promoting development through its various responsibilities. By focusing on spiritual, social, economic, cultural, governance, and community development, the church can contribute significantly to Nigeria's growth and prosperity. The effective and efficient use of social responsibility will go a long way to achieve the desired growth of churches, hence Christ's mandate would be fulfilled

The effective and efficient use of social responsibility will go a long way to achieve the desired growth of churches, hence Christ's mandate would be fulfilled. Social responsibility can be engaged by churches but should not be seen as evangelism on its own, it should rather be followed up with outreaches, evangelism and other soul-winning driven programme to grow the church's membership. It is never a crime to be involved in what would benefit the populace living in the area of church's influence.

### **Recommendations**

To ensure that the role of the church in carrying out social responsibility in the society and community is sustained, this paper recommends the following:

- i The church should always make it a point of duty to be more relevant their host community and society



- ii There should be deliberate efforts on the part of the church to identify the particular needs in their community/society
- iii The church should devote a certain percentage of the income to social responsibility initiatives
- iv The headquarters of churches should come down to local assemblies to collaborate with them in carrying out worthwhile projects in particular communities.
- v Church should develop more free training programme that will benefit targeted group with the community/society e.g. holiday coaching for school children during the holiday period

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