

Need-Based Evangelism as a Tool for Economic Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation in Nigerian Pentecostal Churches

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/bjmas.2022.04178>

Published September 19, 2024

Citation: Oye-oluwafemi F.A. (2024) Need-Based Evangelism as a Tool for Economic Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation in Nigerian Pentecostal Churches, *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies*, 5 (5),24-43

ABSTRACT: *Pentecostal churches in Nigeria face the dual challenge of addressing both spiritual and socio-economic needs. This study explores the role of need-based evangelism as a tool for economic empowerment and poverty alleviation, focusing on how Pentecostal churches can integrate spiritual and practical support for wholistic community development. Using descriptive, qualitative, and quantitative research methodologies, data was collected from diverse age groups within Pentecostal congregations and their financial supporters. Findings reveal significant needs for education, vocational training, and employment opportunities, particularly among young adults. Middle-aged and older adults provide critical financial support, expertise, mentorship, and advisory roles, while younger members contribute through volunteerism and innovative ideas. The study recommends comprehensive vocational training, enhanced financial support, community engagement, and continuous evaluation to ensure sustainable impact. These measures aim to empower both younger and older demographics and strengthen the role of need-based evangelism in economic empowerment and poverty alleviation within Nigerian Pentecostal churches.*

Keywords: need-based evangelism, economic empowerment, poverty alleviation, Pentecostal churches, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The economic destitution faced by many in Nigeria presents both a dire need and a unique opportunity for intervention. The Pentecostal churches in Nigeria are confronted with the opportunity to engage in evangelistic efforts that not only cater to the spiritual needs of the people but also address their economic challenges. While the general term "evangelism" refers to the sharing of the gospel message about Jesus Christ and inviting others to accept him as their personal Lord and Saviour; Need-based evangelism is an approach that integrates spiritual outreach with practical support to meet the specific needs of a people. Need-based evangelism is a form of social evangelism that focuses on wholistic ministry. It focuses on meeting tangible needs such as food, shelter, healthcare, education, and emotional support while sharing

the message of faith and hope (Jackson, Caluori, Gray, and Gelfand, 2021). It has been practiced in various settings around the world -Christianity, Judaism and Islam amongst others.

Christianity particularly emphasizes the importance of love, compassion, and service to others as core values. The concept of "loving your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:39) is often referred to as a guiding principle for engaging in need-based evangelism. This approach reflects the wholistic nature of Jesus' ministry and aligns with the biblical call to love God and love one's neighbours as oneself. Jesus embodies the concept of need-based evangelism through His ministry of compassion, healing, and proclamation of the Gospel. His interactions with individuals and communities demonstrate a wholistic approach to meeting physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

Throughout the church history, various Christian movements, organizations, and individuals have exemplified need-based evangelism in action. This includes missions work, charitable organizations, social justice advocacy, community outreach programmes, and wholistic ministry initiatives that address both physical and spiritual needs. Instead of fostering dependency, effective need-based evangelism seeks to empower individuals to become agents of change in their own lives and communities. This empowerment includes providing education, skills training, and opportunities for self-sustainability. It is believed that by demonstrating Christ-like love and compassion through service and outreach, churches can effectively share their faith and contribute positively to the well-being of those they serve. The early church understood this principle and applied it with tangible results; the early church grew in leaps and bounds with the power of God mightily at work in them and through them.

Furthermore, Need-based evangelism historically focuses not only on immediate relief but also on long-term transformation. This involves addressing root causes of poverty, injustice, and spiritual emptiness while equipping individuals and communities for sustainable change. Historical examples include community development initiatives, discipleship programmes, and mentorship opportunities. Need-based evangelism also demonstrates cultural sensitivity and contextualization. This means adapting ministry approaches to the cultural, social, and economic contexts of the people being served. Historically, missionaries and evangelists often learned local languages, respected cultural norms, and worked collaboratively with indigenous leaders to ensure relevance and impact.

In the context of the Nigerian Pentecostal Churches, this approach involves understanding the unique challenges faced by the people and developing targeted interventions to address these challenges. This study therefore investigates how need-based evangelism can serve as a strategy for economic empowerment and poverty alleviation within the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria. The study posits that need-based evangelism has the potential to fulfill the spiritual mission of the church while also providing practical solutions to economic hardships. This dual approach promotes wholistic development, addressing both the spiritual and economic needs of the community. The research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on the intersection of faith and socio-economic development, highlighting the importance of tailored, community-specific interventions in achieving sustainable development goals and offering a replicable model for other religious organizations seeking to empower their communities.

Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations of Need-Based Evangelism

Evangelism, as defined by Stott, involves sharing the gospel message, proclaiming the good news about Jesus Christ, and inviting others to accept Him as their Lord and Saviour (Abraham, 1994; Stott, 2008). This process includes communicating the teachings of Jesus Christ through various forms such as public preaching, teaching, writing, media outreach, and interpersonal conversations, with the goal of transforming lives and fostering moral growth and personal development (Tucker, 2021; Coetzee et al., 2023). Effective evangelism addresses the practical, emotional, and spiritual needs of individuals, offering support and guidance in areas such as relationships, healing, and personal struggles (Davies-Kildea et al., 2017).

Need-based evangelism is a form of social evangelism that addresses practical needs while sharing the message of faith and hope. It involves providing food, shelter, healthcare, education, and emotional support to individuals and communities (Dike, 2022). The primary motivation is the belief that meeting tangible needs opens doors for spiritual conversations and fosters a deeper understanding of faith. By assisting struggling individuals or communities, trust is built, relationships are fostered, and opportunities to share Christian beliefs authentically are created. This approach emphasizes wholistic ministry, addressing not only spiritual needs but also physical, emotional, and social needs (Hong, 2007). For example, a church might provide food aid to a struggling community while offering counseling services or support groups for those facing mental health challenges. This integrated approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of different aspects of human well-being and seeks to provide comprehensive support.

Need-based evangelism is a specific approach that integrates the proclamation of the gospel with efforts to address these tangible needs, recognizing that spiritual transformation is often accompanied by improvements in quality of life. This method combines various types of evangelism, such as personal, missionary, media, prayer, and social evangelism, to meet the diverse needs of different communities (Ogunewu, 2014). It seeks to demonstrate the love and compassion of Christ not only through words but also through deeds that meet immediate and tangible needs. This approach can be contrasted with traditional evangelism, which primarily focuses on the spiritual message without necessarily addressing temporal needs.

The conceptual framework for need-based evangelism is built on several interrelated components: theological foundations, socio-economic context, wholistic ministry, community engagement, and measurable outcomes. The theological underpinning of need-based evangelism is rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, who emphasized love, compassion, and service to others. Jesus' ministry combined preaching the Kingdom of God with healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and caring for the marginalized (Matthew 25:35-40).

This wholistic approach to ministry is echoed throughout the New Testament, where believers are encouraged to demonstrate their faith through acts of love and service (James 2:14-17). According to Bosch, wholistic mission encompasses evangelism, social action, and contextualization, arguing that the

church must address both spiritual and physical needs as part of its witness (Bosch, 1991). Similarly, Stott emphasizes that evangelism and social responsibility are inseparable, forming a twofold commitment that reflects the comprehensive nature of the gospel (Stott, 2008).

Understanding the socio-economic context of the target community is essential for effective need-based evangelism. This involves identifying the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities within the community. For instance, in a community facing high unemployment rates, the church might focus on job training and economic empowerment programmes. In areas with limited access to healthcare, medical missions and health education might be prioritized. Research by Bryant Myers highlights the importance of understanding the local context to tailor interventions that are both culturally appropriate and effective (Myers, 2011). This contextual awareness ensures that the church's efforts are relevant and impactful.

Wholistic ministry is at the heart of need-based evangelism. It involves addressing the whole person—body, mind, and spirit. This comprehensive approach ensures that evangelistic efforts are not limited to spiritual salvation but also include initiatives that promote physical health, emotional well-being, and socio-economic stability. The Lausanne Covenant articulates this vision by stating that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both integral parts of the Christian mission (Lausanne, 1974). This document underscores the need for a balanced ministry that reflects the fullness of God's redemptive work.

Moreover, engaging the community is critical for the success of need-based evangelism. This involves building relationships, fostering trust, and encouraging active participation from community members. Collaboration with local leaders, organizations, and stakeholders can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the church's initiatives. According to Samuel and Sugden, effective community engagement requires listening to and partnering with the community, rather than imposing external solutions (Samuel and Sugden, 1999). This participatory approach empowers the community and ensures that the interventions are genuinely beneficial and sustainable.

Furthermore, to assess the impact of need-based evangelism, it is important to establish measurable outcomes. These can include both spiritual and socio-economic indicators such as the number of conversions, improvements in health and education, employment rates, and overall quality of life. Regular monitoring and evaluation help to refine strategies and demonstrate accountability. The World Bank's guidelines on monitoring and evaluation in development projects emphasize the importance of clear indicators and systematic data collection to track progress and inform decision-making (World Bank, 2004).

Needs-based evangelism is highly relevant in the Nigerian contemporary society, where crises such as poverty, inequality, mental health issues, and environmental challenges are prevalent. Addressing these pressing needs showcases the compassion and relevance of religious communities, reflecting their commitment to social justice and care for the marginalized and vulnerable (Halm, 2020). This form of evangelism fosters long-lasting and meaningful impact by providing tangible help and genuine care, making individuals more receptive to exploring spiritual matters and engaging in faith discussions. It

prioritizes relationships and ongoing engagement over quick conversions, recognizing that genuine transformation requires time, support, and guidance (Ambroise, 2000).

In summary, need-based evangelism is a holistic approach that integrates the proclamation of the gospel with practical efforts to address the physical, emotional, and socio-economic needs of individuals and communities. It is grounded in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, who modeled a ministry of both word and deed. By understanding the socio-economic context, engaging the community, and measuring outcomes, the church can effectively demonstrate the love of Christ and contribute to the holistic transformation of individuals and communities.

The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Community Development

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) have long played a significant role in community development, leveraging their resources, influence, and moral authority to address various social issues. Their involvement spans multiple sectors, including education, healthcare, economic development, and social services. The impact of FBOs on community development is profound and multifaceted, encompassing spiritual, social, and economic dimensions. Faith-based organizations have a historical foundation in community development that dates back to ancient times. Many of the world's major religions emphasize social justice, charity, and the upliftment of the poor and marginalized. For instance, Christianity's focus on service is deeply rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ, who emphasized caring for the needy (Matthew 25:35-40). Similarly, Islam's pillars of faith include Zakat (charitable giving) which mandates the support of the less fortunate (Esposito, 2011).

One of the primary roles of FBOs in community development is the provision of social services. These organizations often operate shelters, food banks, and counseling services. They provide immediate relief to those in crisis and work towards long-term solutions for issues such as homelessness, addiction, and domestic violence. For example, the Salvation Army, a Christian denomination, operates in numerous countries offering a wide array of social services, from emergency disaster relief to rehabilitation programmes (Watson, 2013).

FBOs also make significant contributions in the fields of education and healthcare. Many religious groups have established schools, colleges, and universities that offer affordable education to underserved communities. In addition, faith-based health institutions provide crucial medical services, particularly in regions where government healthcare systems are inadequate. Catholic Relief Services (CRS), for instance, runs numerous health and education programs globally, focusing on maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, and education for vulnerable populations (Hehir, 2010).

Economic empowerment is another critical area where FBOs contribute to community development. They often facilitate vocational training, microfinance, and entrepreneurial programmes to help individuals become self-reliant. The Grameen Bank, though not strictly a faith-based organization, operates with principles resonant with many religious values, providing microloans to impoverished communities in Bangladesh. Its success has inspired numerous faith-based initiatives aimed at economic development (Yunus, 1999).

Faith-based organizations frequently engage in advocacy and social justice work, striving to influence public policy and societal norms. They advocate for the rights of marginalized groups, environmental stewardship, and ethical governance. The Quaker movement, for example, has been involved in various social justice causes, including anti-slavery campaigns, peacebuilding, and prison reform (Dandelion, 2008). FBOs also play a pivotal role in fostering community cohesion and solidarity. They bring people together across different socio-economic backgrounds, creating a sense of belonging and mutual support. This social capital is invaluable for community development as it strengthens the fabric of society, making it more resilient to social upheavals (Putnam, 2000).

Despite their positive contributions, FBOs face several challenges and criticisms. There are concerns about proselytism, where the provision of aid is perceived as being contingent on conversion. Additionally, some argue that faith-based initiatives may lack inclusivity, catering primarily to members of their own religious community (Ferris, 2005). Moreover, the effectiveness and sustainability of FBOs can be hindered by dependence on donor funding and limited professional capacity.

Faith-based organizations are integral to community development, offering unique resources and perspectives that complement secular efforts. Their commitment to social justice, charity, and community building provides a wholistic approach to addressing societal issues. While challenges remain, the potential for FBOs to contribute positively to the well-being of communities worldwide is undeniable. By continuing to adapt and collaborate with other stakeholders, FBOs can enhance their impact and promote sustainable development.

Integration of Spiritual and Practical Support Initiatives

Integrating spiritual and practical support initiatives is a wholistic approach that faith-based organizations (FBOs) often adopt to address the multifaceted needs of individuals and communities. This integration recognizes that human well-being encompasses not only physical and material needs but also emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. By combining spiritual guidance with tangible assistance, FBOs aim to promote comprehensive development and transformation. Wholistic ministry is rooted in the belief that addressing only one aspect of a person's life is insufficient for true well-being. This approach aligns with the biblical mandate to care for the whole person, as seen in Jesus' ministry, which involved teaching, healing, and feeding the hungry (Matthew 4:23; Mark 6:34-44). Wholistic ministry seeks to meet physical needs while simultaneously addressing spiritual growth and emotional healing (Myers, 2011).

One practical example of this integration is the work of World Vision, an evangelical Christian humanitarian aid, development, and advocacy organization. World Vision provides emergency relief, education, healthcare, and economic development while incorporating Christian teachings and values into its programmes. By addressing immediate needs and promoting long-term development, World Vision exemplifies the integration of spiritual and practical support (Stearns, 2010). Another example is the Salvation Army, which combines social services such as shelters, food distribution, and addiction recovery programs with spiritual counseling and worship services. This dual focus helps individuals not only

recover physically but also find spiritual and emotional support, leading to more sustainable rehabilitation (Watson, 2013).

The integration of spiritual and practical support initiatives offers several benefits. First, it fosters a deeper level of trust and engagement within communities. When people see that their immediate needs are being met, they are more likely to be receptive to spiritual messages and pastoral care. This approach can also create a sense of belonging and community, as individuals experience the tangible love and support of a faith community (Thompson, 2015). Moreover, this integration helps to address the root causes of problems rather than just the symptoms. For instance, providing financial literacy programs alongside spiritual mentoring can empower individuals to make better financial decisions while also developing a sense of purpose and moral integrity. This holistic approach can lead to more sustainable and transformative outcomes (Corbett and Fikkert, 2010).

Despite its advantages, integrating spiritual and practical support initiatives is not without challenges. One major concern is the potential for proselytism, where aid is conditional upon participation in religious activities. This practice can undermine the credibility of FBOs and alienate those who do not share the same faith. It is essential for FBOs to ensure that their services are offered unconditionally and that recipients feel respected and valued regardless of their religious beliefs (Ferris, 2005). Another challenge is maintaining a balance between spiritual and practical support. There is a risk that one aspect may overshadow the other, leading to either a purely secular approach or one that neglects practical needs in favor of spiritual activities. FBOs must strive for a balanced approach that genuinely integrates both elements (Sider, Olson, and Unruh, 2002).

Conclusively, the integration of spiritual and practical support initiatives is a powerful approach to community development that addresses the comprehensive needs of individuals. By combining tangible assistance with spiritual guidance, FBOs can foster holistic transformation and sustainable development. While challenges exist, careful implementation and a commitment to unconditional support can ensure that this integration effectively contributes to the well-being of communities.

Previous Studies on Economic Empowerment and Faith-Based Interventions

Faith-based organizations have long played a significant role in community development, providing both spiritual guidance and practical support. Several case studies highlight the role of religious institutions in economic empowerment. For example, the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in Nigeria has implemented various community development projects, including free health clinics, educational scholarships, and vocational training programmes. These initiatives have significantly improved the quality of life for many participants, particularly in underserved areas (Adogame, 2013). Another notable example is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), which runs the Self-Reliance Services programme. This programme offers classes on personal finance, job searching, and entrepreneurship, helping members develop skills to achieve economic independence (Heaton, 2014).

These case studies demonstrate that faith-based organizations can effectively address socio-economic challenges by leveraging their resources and community networks.

Additionally, skill acquisition programmes are a critical component of economic empowerment initiatives. Studies have shown that these programmes can lead to significant improvements in employment prospects and income levels. For instance, the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) implemented the Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) programme, which included skill training for participants. This initiative not only improved financial stability for individuals but also fostered community solidarity and mutual support (Karl, Lawrence and Ammerman, 2014). Additionally, the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) has also launched several vocational training programs in various countries, targeting marginalized communities. These programmes have been successful in providing participants with marketable skills, leading to increased employment rates and higher incomes (Siddiqui, 2011). Such evidence underscores the effectiveness of skill acquisition programmes in enhancing economic opportunities and promoting self-sufficiency.

Furthermore, financial literacy is another crucial aspect of economic empowerment. Faith-based organizations often incorporate financial education into their programmes to help individuals manage their resources effectively. The World Vision International, for example, has implemented financial literacy training as part of its economic development initiatives in several African countries. Participants have reported better financial management practices, reduced debt levels, and increased savings (Rothlin and Griffiths, 2018). Similarly, small business development initiatives also play a vital role in economic empowerment. The Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) has been instrumental in supporting micro-entrepreneurs through training, access to finance, and market linkages. Their programs have led to the creation of numerous small businesses, contributing to local economic growth and job creation (Brouwers, 2017).

In summary, previous studies highlight the significant impact of faith-based interventions in economic empowerment. Case studies from various religious settings, along with evidence on the effectiveness of skill acquisition programmes and financial literacy initiatives, demonstrate the potential of these approaches to improve socio-economic outcomes for individuals and communities.

An Overview of the Socio-economic Challenges in Nigeria

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has one of the largest economies on the continent, primarily driven by oil exports, agriculture, and services. However, despite its vast resources and strategic economic position, Nigeria faces numerous socio-economic challenges that have impeded its development and left large portions of the population in poverty. These challenges include widespread poverty, unemployment, poor healthcare, inadequate education, corruption, and infrastructure deficits. This section discusses these socio-economic issues and their implications for the country's development.

One of the most pressing socio-economic challenges in Nigeria is poverty. Despite Nigeria's status as an oil-rich nation, the country struggles with high poverty rates. According to the National Bureau of

Statistics (NBS), as of 2020, over 40% of Nigeria's population—about 83 million people—lived below the poverty line (World Bank, 2021). The country's poverty is largely driven by unequal distribution of resources, economic mismanagement, and a heavy dependence on oil revenues, which fluctuates with global market conditions. The disparity between the rich and poor has widened over the years, exacerbated by income inequality that has led to a small percentage of the population controlling most of the wealth. Income inequality is more pronounced between rural and urban areas. Rural communities, which rely predominantly on subsistence agriculture, have fewer opportunities for upward mobility compared to their urban counterparts. Many rural Nigerians live without access to basic infrastructure, healthcare, or quality education, deepening the cycle of poverty (Oxfam, 2017). Urban areas, though more economically active, are also riddled with slums and underemployment, revealing the extent of poverty even in economically thriving regions.

Unemployment is another major socio-economic challenge facing Nigeria. The country's unemployment rate has surged dramatically in recent years, with the NBS reporting a 33.3% unemployment rate in the fourth quarter of 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Youth unemployment, in particular, poses a significant threat to social stability, with nearly one-third of Nigerians aged 15-34 out of work. The lack of employment opportunities for young people contributes to frustration, hopelessness, and, in some cases, social unrest, including participation in criminal activities or violent groups such as Boko Haram or ethnic militias. Underemployment is also widespread, particularly in the informal sector, where many Nigerians work in low-paying, insecure jobs without social protection or benefits. The informal sector accounts for about 65% of Nigeria's workforce (World Bank, 2019), and workers in this sector often lack the skills or capital to improve their livelihoods. The persistence of both unemployment and underemployment has stymied economic growth and deepened the country's poverty crisis.

Furthermore, Nigeria's healthcare system faces significant challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and a shortage of healthcare professionals. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that Nigeria has one of the highest maternal and infant mortality rates globally, with 512 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births as of 2019 (WHO, 2020). Preventable diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS continue to afflict millions of Nigerians, particularly in rural areas where access to healthcare services is limited. Public health expenditure in Nigeria remains below the recommended benchmark by the WHO, with healthcare funding at less than 5% of the national budget, far from the 15% agreed upon by African Union countries in the 2001 Abuja Declaration (Nigerian Ministry of Health, 2021). This underfunding has resulted in poorly equipped hospitals, inadequate medical supplies, and poor working conditions for healthcare workers. These conditions have led to a mass exodus of Nigerian doctors to other countries, exacerbating the healthcare crisis.

Education is a cornerstone for development, yet Nigeria's educational system is plagued by numerous issues, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and a high dropout rate. According to UNESCO (2020), Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world, with approximately 10.5 million children aged 5-14 not attending school. Factors contributing to this include poverty, cultural practices, and insecurity, particularly in the northern regions of the country where the

Boko Haram insurgency has targeted schools. The quality of education is also poor, with many public schools lacking basic amenities like classrooms, teaching materials, and qualified teachers. These deficiencies have resulted in low literacy rates, especially among girls and children from impoverished backgrounds. Nigeria's education system is in dire need of reform to equip the workforce with the skills required for the modern economy, but efforts to revitalize the sector have been slow and insufficiently funded.

Moreover, corruption remains one of the most pervasive socio-economic challenges in Nigeria. It is a major impediment to development and the equitable distribution of resources. Transparency International ranked Nigeria 150th out of 180 countries in its 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International, 2020). Corruption permeates nearly all sectors of Nigerian society, from politics and law enforcement to business and public services. In Nigeria, public resources are often diverted by politicians and government officials for personal gain, depriving citizens of essential services and infrastructure. Large-scale corruption has severely undermined public trust in government institutions, hindered foreign investment, and stunted economic growth. Efforts to combat corruption, such as the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), have been met with limited success, as corrupt practices remain deeply entrenched in the political and economic system.

Similarly, Nigeria's infrastructure is grossly inadequate to meet the needs of its growing population and economy. The country suffers from poor road networks, unreliable electricity supply, and insufficient water and sanitation facilities. The power sector is particularly problematic, with Nigeria experiencing regular blackouts and electricity shortages that have crippled industries and increased the cost of doing business. According to the World Bank, over 85 million Nigerians lack access to grid electricity, making it one of the largest energy deficits globally (World Bank, 2020).

The transportation sector is also underdeveloped, with dilapidated roads and railways making it difficult to move goods and people efficiently across the country. Poor infrastructure not only hampers economic growth but also exacerbates regional disparities, with rural areas often left without basic services.

Nigeria's socio-economic challenges are multifaceted, interrelated, and deeply rooted. Poverty, unemployment, inadequate healthcare, poor education, corruption, and infrastructure deficits all contribute to a complex web of issues that hinder the country's development. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach that includes policy reforms, increased investment in key sectors, anti-corruption measures, and economic diversification beyond oil. In addition to these governmental efforts, need-based evangelism can play a significant role in mitigating some of these socio-economic challenges. By integrating spiritual outreach with practical support, need-based evangelism empowers communities through education, vocational training, and social support systems. This holistic approach, exemplifying compassion and service, addresses both spiritual and material needs, helping to alleviate poverty and promote self-sustainability. When aligned with broader development efforts, need-based evangelism offers a complementary, community-centered strategy to uplift disadvantaged populations and contribute to Nigeria's journey toward sustainable development.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comprehensive methodology to examine the role of need-based evangelism in economic empowerment and poverty alleviation within Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. First, it adopts a descriptive approach for the literature review, providing a theoretical foundation and context on socio-economic challenges, faith-based economic empowerment, and need-based evangelism. This helps to identify gaps in existing studies and establishes a framework for analyzing the challenges and opportunities faced by Pentecostal congregations in Nigeria.

The research combines both qualitative and quantitative designs to gather data. Qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus group discussions, are used to collect context-rich information on the unique challenges and successes of need-based evangelism initiatives across different Pentecostal churches. These insights provide a deeper understanding of how churches are addressing poverty and economic challenges within their communities.

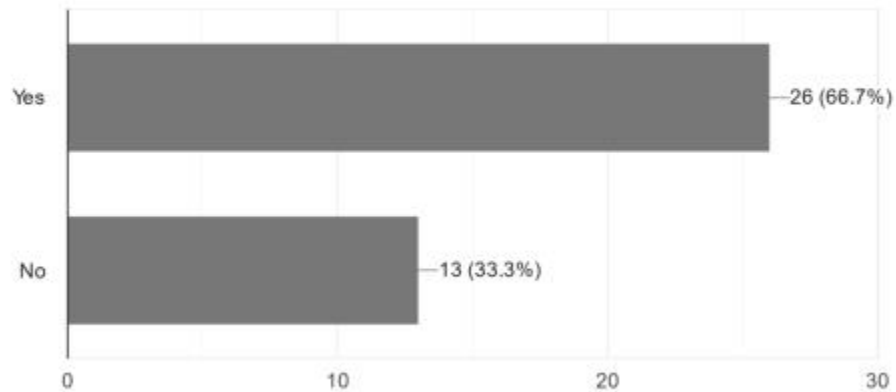
To complement the qualitative data, surveys are employed to collect quantitative data from a broader sample of Pentecostal congregants. These surveys gather demographic information, economic conditions, and participation in church programs, allowing for an analysis of the reach and impact of need-based evangelism efforts. By using a mixed-method approach, the study provides a well-rounded analysis of how need-based evangelism serves as a strategy for economic empowerment across diverse church communities in Nigeria, combining qualitative depth with quantitative breadth to derive comprehensive findings.

Socio-Economic Challenges in Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria

Pentecostal churches in Nigeria operate within a challenging socio-economic environment, reflecting national issues such as unemployment, underemployment, and illiteracy. These challenges affect both individual church members and the church's ability to meet their needs holistically. For instance, many congregants in Pentecostal churches across Nigeria experience unemployment or underemployment. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), Nigeria's unemployment rate stood at 33.3%, disproportionately affecting young adults. Among church members, the majority of job holders work in low-wage, unstable jobs such as security services and cleaning. This highlights the urgent need for vocational training and job creation within the church to bridge the gap between available skills and the labour market. Youths, who form a large part of church congregations, face particular challenges in securing meaningful employment despite their educational achievements (Adewumi, 2021). The graphs below attest to these assertions:

Do you have a job?

39 responses

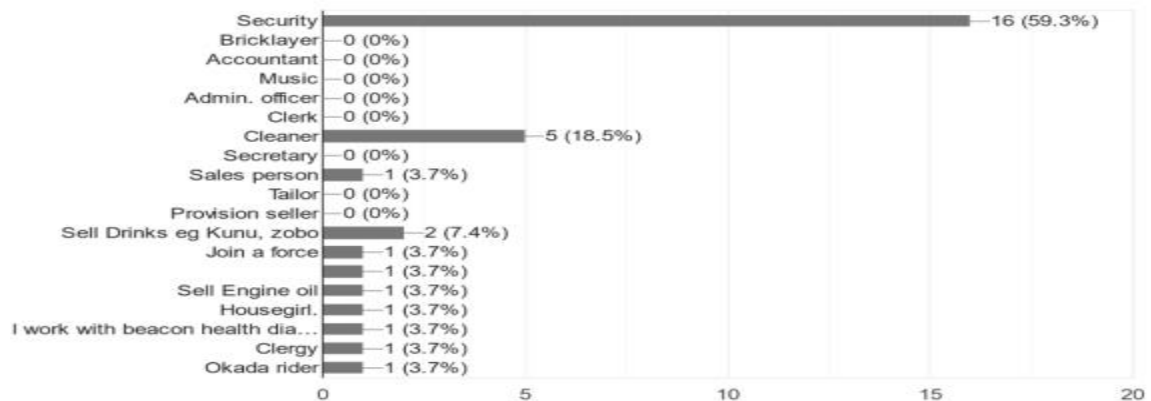


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data indicates that 66.7% of respondents have a job, while 33.3% do not. This shows that a significant portion of the respondents are employed, yet there is a notable percentage who are unemployed. This suggests a need for job support programmes, such as employment counseling, job search assistance, and skills training, to help the unemployed respondents find work. For those who are employed, programmes could focus on career development and advancement opportunities to further support their professional growth.

If Yes, What type of work do you do?

27 responses



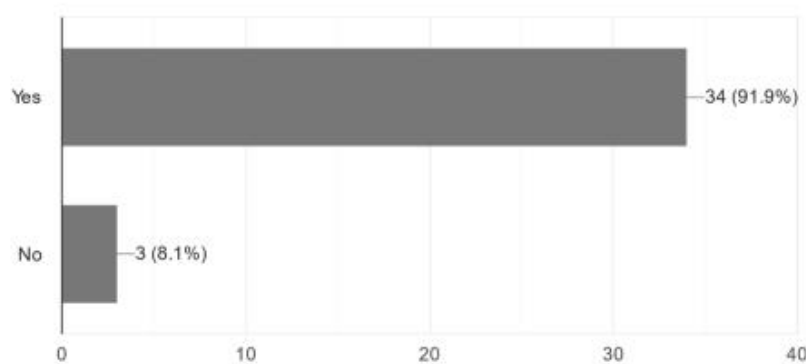
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data shows that 59.3% of respondents work in security, making it the most common occupation. Cleaners

make up 18.5% of the respondents. Other types of work include selling drinks (7.4%), and various jobs like sales, joining a force, selling engine oil, housegirl, healthcare, clergy, and Okada riding (3.7% each). This indicates a significant concentration in low-skilled, labor-intensive jobs, highlighting the need for vocational training and skills development programmes to diversify employment opportunities and improve job prospects for the respondents.

Are you willing to attend a training or workshop to improve on yourself?

37 responses

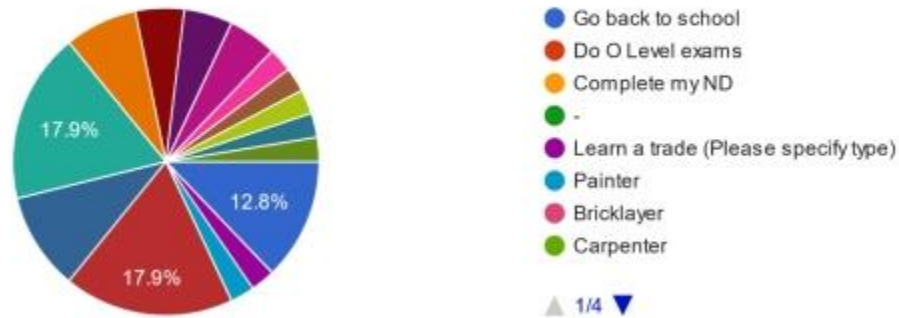


The data indicates that a significant majority (91.9%) of respondents are willing to attend training or workshops to improve themselves, while only 8.1% are not interested. This strong interest in self-improvement suggests that there is a substantial demand for educational and skill development programmes. Offering a variety of training sessions and workshops can help meet this demand, potentially leading to better job opportunities and personal growth for the participants. The church and related organizations can leverage this enthusiasm to implement effective training programmes that cater to the community's needs.

In addition, it is observed that access to quality education is a significant issue within Pentecostal churches, particularly for youth and low-income members. The inability to afford further education or vocational training, due to financial constraints, limits upward mobility. According to UNESCO (2022), nearly 20% of Nigerian youths are out of school or have insufficient educational opportunities, affecting their job prospects. Pentecostal churches can play a role in addressing this challenge by providing scholarships, offering vocational courses, and establishing partnerships with educational institutions (Ogundipe, 2022).

How would you like to be helped?

39 responses



The

data indicates a diverse range of ways respondents would like to be helped. The most common responses are to "Go back to school" and "Learn a trade" each preferred by 17.9% of respondents. Completing O Level exams is desired by 12.8%, while 17.9% aim to complete their ND. Specific trades mentioned include painter, bricklayer, and carpenter. This variety suggests that support initiatives should be multifaceted, offering educational opportunities, vocational training, and specific trade skills to meet the diverse needs of the community.

Furthermore, financial instability is a pressing challenge among Pentecostal church members, many of whom operate in the informal sector. The informal economy, while providing flexible employment, is characterized by instability and low income (Olusegun, 2021). Financial insecurity is further aggravated by inflation and the rising cost of living. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria (2021), inflation rose to 16.47% by the end of 2020, further squeezing the finances of low-income families. Pentecostal churches can address this challenge by establishing microfinance initiatives and small business support schemes, which help members become more financially stable (Adesanya, 2022).

What is your major problem? (You can choose multiple options)

39 responses



The primary issues faced by respondents include the need for a job, highlighted by 41% of the participants, making it the most significant concern. Accommodation and school-related problems are each noted by 12.8% of respondents. Food insecurity is an issue for 15.4%, while learning a trade, learning how to drive, and seeking connections with decision-makers each account for smaller percentages. This data suggests that job creation and employment support are critical needs, alongside assistance with housing, education, and vocational training. Addressing these concerns comprehensively can enhance the overall well-being and stability of the community.

Finally, Pentecostal churches have traditionally filled the gap left by insufficient government services, particularly in areas like social welfare. Churches frequently provide food, healthcare, and educational resources to their congregants. However, over-reliance on church welfare programmes can strain the church's resources and limit the sustainability of long-term interventions (Oladipo, 2020). To mitigate this, churches must balance between providing immediate relief and promoting economic self-sufficiency through sustainable empowerment programmes, including vocational training and financial management workshops.

On the other hand, Pentecostal churches in Nigeria are known for their dynamic structures, strong community involvement, and emphasis on faith-based initiatives, often supported by diverse groups of church members, from the financially stable to those offering time and labour. Thus, the support and financier group from the study reflects a typical pattern found in Nigerian Pentecostal churches. This group generally consists of middle-aged to older adults, many of whom have stable incomes and are well-established in their careers. Their willingness to contribute financially aligns with the culture of giving in Nigerian Pentecostal settings, where tithes, offerings, and special contributions form the backbone of church-based projects, including community outreach and evangelism.

Consequently, the analysis of support areas for the need-based evangelism programme reveals diverse interests among respondents. Financial support is the most prominent area, indicating a willingness to contribute monetarily. Education and mentorship are also significant, showing a strong interest in providing knowledge and guidance. Emotional and mental health support, along with job training and employment, reflects a concern for the well-being and future prospects of individuals. Health and wellness services, while less popular, still garner some interest. The few responses for prayers, capacity building, discipleship, and household item donations suggest these areas might benefit from increased awareness and promotion. The data highlights a balanced approach, integrating financial, educational, and emotional support to effectively address community needs.

However, the data also highlights the presence of a significant number of young adults within the support group, many of whom are not financially equipped to contribute large sums but offer their time, skills, and energy. This mirrors trends in Pentecostal churches across Nigeria, where youths are vital to the operational and evangelical efforts of the church, engaging in volunteerism, outreach, and event management. Their contribution, while not always monetary, is indispensable in driving the success of church programmes.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data reveals significant insights into the needs and socio-economic circumstances, underscoring the necessity for economic empowerment initiatives. The survey also highlights critical areas of need within the Nigerian Pentecostal Churches. This reflects the pressing need for economic empowerment, particularly through initiatives that enhance job readiness and provide practical skills. The high interest in attending training sessions underscores a commitment to personal development. Moreover, the data reveals substantial socio-economic challenges, including unemployment and underemployment, with many respondents working in low-paying or unstable jobs like security and cleaning. These circumstances necessitate targeted interventions to provide vocational training, financial literacy, and support for small business development.

In Nigerian Pentecostal churches, financial contributions from members are critical in supporting various evangelism and church expansion projects. The findings indicate that older members in established careers are pivotal in financing need-based evangelism. They provide substantial financial backing, contributing towards infrastructure, church growth, and funding social welfare initiatives like food banks, healthcare, and educational support. The involvement of older members in providing mentorship to younger members is another important factor. In the broader Nigerian Pentecostal context, mentorship programmes are common, with older, experienced members helping to guide the youth in both spiritual and professional development. These intergenerational relationships foster a strong sense of community and help in sustaining evangelistic efforts, as younger members are equipped to take on leadership roles in the future. Similarly, the younger segment of the support group, though not financially strong, offers crucial non-financial resources like time, creativity, and labor. In the context of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, the youth are often at the forefront of church activities such as outreach programmes, evangelistic campaigns,

and administrative support. The findings suggest that while young adults may lack the financial capacity, their willingness to participate in church-driven programmes makes them an invaluable resource. This age group can be leveraged for roles in event planning, technical support (media and IT), and community engagement. Many Pentecostal churches in Nigeria already maximize this potential, involving their youth in missions, where their energy and innovative ideas are channeled towards outreach in both rural and urban areas. The study's findings reinforce the need for Nigerian Pentecostal churches to continue investing in their youth, recognizing that their contributions extend far beyond financial means.

Implications for Nigerian Pentecostal Churches

The insights from this study underscore the need for Nigerian Pentecostal churches to adopt a holistic approach to need-based evangelism, one that effectively combines the financial resources of older members with the energy and time resources of younger members. Churches must create platforms where both demographics can collaborate and contribute meaningfully. For instance, churches can establish formal mentorship programmes where older adults offer guidance, while youth handle the operational aspects of evangelistic campaigns. Furthermore, churches can explore more creative financing options, such as crowdfunding within the church community, allowing those with limited financial means to participate in small but impactful ways.

Finally, this analysis reaffirms the vital role that intergenerational collaboration plays in sustaining and growing evangelistic efforts in Nigerian Pentecostal churches. By recognizing and strategically leveraging the diverse resources within their congregations, Pentecostal churches can create robust support systems that drive both spiritual and socio-economic development in their communities. In summary, the support and financier group in Pentecostal churches in Nigeria reflects a dynamic, intergenerational mix of financial backing from established members and non-financial contributions from younger members. Both demographics are essential for sustaining church-led initiatives, including need-based evangelism. Nigerian Pentecostal churches must continue to harness the strengths of each group to foster evangelistic success and community upliftment.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role that need-based evangelism can play in addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by communities in Nigeria, particularly within Pentecostal churches. By integrating spiritual outreach with practical interventions such as education, vocational training, and community support, need-based evangelism offers a holistic approach to economic empowerment and poverty alleviation. This strategy not only meets the immediate physical needs of individuals but also equips them with the tools for long-term self-sustainability, fostering both spiritual and economic transformation.

The findings demonstrate that Pentecostal churches in Nigeria are uniquely positioned to lead such initiatives, given their deep community ties, moral authority, and commitment to service. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, the study reveals that need-based evangelism can effectively

mobilize resources, empower marginalized groups, and promote inclusive development. The involvement of church members in these programmes, from financial support to mentorship and volunteerism, is crucial in sustaining the efforts and achieving broader impact. Ultimately, need-based evangelism serves as a powerful tool for poverty alleviation and economic empowerment in Nigeria. By addressing both the spiritual and material needs of communities, Pentecostal churches can contribute to national development goals and help bridge the gap between faith and socio-economic progress.

Future Research

Future research could delve deeper into more specific case studies across different regions of Nigeria to gain a nuanced understanding of how need-based evangelism initiatives are implemented within various Pentecostal churches. Such case studies could highlight the unique socio-economic, cultural, and religious contexts in which these churches operate, providing a clearer picture of the local challenges they face and the specific strategies they employ for economic empowerment and poverty alleviation. This would allow for a comparative analysis, helping to identify best practices and adaptable models that can be applied across different communities.

Additionally, research could explore how these programmes can be scaled to create a broader, sustainable impact on a national level. Key areas to investigate include the resources required for scaling, the role of partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations, and the development of standardized frameworks for programme implementation. By understanding the infrastructure needed for expansion, such as leadership training, resource mobilization, and technological integration, churches can better strategize for long-term growth and sustainability.

Moreover, expanding these programmes to a national scale would require a focus on creating replicable models that can be adopted by other faith-based organizations, both within and beyond the Pentecostal tradition. This could involve developing adaptable curriculum and training resources for church leaders, establishing networks for resource-sharing, and fostering collaborations across denominations and religious groups. By promoting a model of need-based evangelism that is both scalable and adaptable, churches can play a pivotal role in addressing poverty and economic inequality on a larger scale, contributing significantly to national development efforts and fostering an inclusive approach to social change across faith communities.

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