

The Impact of Christianity on the Social-Economic Life of Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

The study examines the socio-economic situation in Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) and the role Christianity has played in responding to the contextual problems of the continent. It looks at emerging threats with socio-economic dimensions and the biblical foundations for engaging in societal transformation. In addition, it examines the biblical holistic approach and response to contemporary socio-economic challenges. The library research identifies the contributing factors to Sub-Sahara Africa's socio-economic struggles: poverty, disease, bad governance, and mismanagement of resources. The research also evaluates the ecclesiastical response to the identified challenges. Finally, the study proposes recommendations for churches.

Keywords: *Christianity, Socio-economic, Covid-19, Poverty, Church, Scripture, Sub-Sahara Africa.*

Introduction

This paper examines the impact of Christianity on Sub-Saharan Africa's socio-economic life. SSA represents the region below the Sahara Desert, among "the world's poorest but growing region."¹ This study does not cover all countries in SSA but rather a random investigation into selected representative states. The study examines the existence of Christianity in Africa—West, North, South, and East Africa. It looks at the prevalence of Christianity in the continent and especially the SSA region amidst the socio-economic challenges of Sub-Saharan Africa. In

¹ Zorobabel Bicaba, Zuzana Brixiová, and Mthuli Ncube, "Can Extreme Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa be Eliminated by 2030?" *Journal of African Development*, 19, No. 2 (2017): 93–110.

addition, it looks at the church's role in bringing transformation. On the part of the church, Mugambi chides the indifference of the African Church to matters of development,

Most African church leaders would say that our concern should be with the future of the church, rather than with helping the church develop into an active participant in Africa's future. An evaluation of curricula in theological institutions in Africa shows that in general, humanities and social sciences are excluded. Disciplines such as history, literature, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, economics, geography, and political science are considered too secular to be of concern in ministerial formation.

Mugambi's observation points to a more profound need and the lack of a proactive role on the part of the SSA church in matters of socio-economic nature.

Christianity in Africa dates back to the apostolic times in the first century. However, in this section, the paper will focus on the missionary era in Africa.² The missionary work in Africa traces back to the late 18th century with the establishment of the Sierra Leone state for the 1190 Nova Scotians of African descent in January 1792. The settlers, who were predominantly Christians, moved in with their preachers and denominational affiliations.³

Moreover, history records that these Africans had a missionary endeavor in their mind. It is noted that "Their arrival was of epoch significance. It marked the establishment of the first black church in modern Africa and arguably signified the beginning of the 'modern' missionary movement. In effect, the story of modern African Christianity began not with the White missionary agency but as the initiative of ex-African slaves."⁴ The formation of the Niger Mission led to the birth of Africa's first Anglican bishop—Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1807–1891). Arguably he is the most notable African Christian of the nineteenth century.⁵ From there, Christianity in West Africa spread in leaps and bounds.

In East Africa, missionary work began way back in the nineteenth century with the coming of the Church Missionary Society. Thomas O. Beidelman argues that the "initial contact with the Kaguru of Tanzania (formerly Tanganyika) was made in 1876 by CMS members en

² Christianity in Africa dates back to the early-most centuries. The book of Acts in the Bible records the salvation of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40), who received the message of the gospel on his way back to Ethiopia. Moreover, prominent early Church Fathers; Tertullian, Cyprian, were Africans. Pope Benedict XVI refers to Tertullian as an African church father. For a detailed introduction into the subject consult Mark Shaw, and Wanjiru M. Gitau, *The Kingdom of God in Africa: A Short History of African Christianity*. (Langham Global Library, 2020).

³ Ogbu Kalu, *African Christianity: An African Story*. (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2013), 203–204.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 204.

route to Buganda (now Uganda).”⁶ Owino et al. cite George Hewitt, who affirms that missionary operations began at the Kenyan coast around 1883 and gradually moved to the hinterland.⁷ Therefore, Christianity found its way to East Africa in the nineteenth century, and since then, much has happened not only in East Africa but also in Africa as a whole.

Though Christianity came through the foreigners, some Africans embraced it and accepted the new religion with all it brought along. For instance, Africans appended an additional ‘Christian/ Western’ name to their African names at the time of baptism. Today, Christianity is the dominant religion, with experts projecting that Africa will have the highest number of Christians globally by 2050. Jenkins projects that by 2050 72 percent of world Christians will live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.⁸

Problem Statement

Christianity is widespread in Africa, especially in SSA. Saleh observes that “Christianity is the major religion in many African countries. For example, in São Tomé and Príncipe, 97 percent of the population was Christian as of 2019. The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola followed with 96 percent and 95 percent of Christians, respectively.⁹ Expectedly, biblical Christianity teaches values and principles that can impact lives and communities. However, the numbers have not translated into the desired Christian impact in many cases. As a result, the socio-economic life of the continent is in dire condition despite the Christianity being the dominant religion.

The study investigates whether Christianity has had a meaningful impact on Sub-Saharan Africa’s socio-economic life. In order to achieve this, the study first discusses the status of the socio-economic context of Sub-Saharan Africa. Second, it explores Christianity’s contribution to Sub-Saharan Africa’s socio-economic life. Third, it examines how Christianity can bring a more meaningful socio-economic impact on Sub-Saharan Africa

⁶ Thomas O. Beidelman, "Contradictions between the Sacred and the Secular Life: The Church Missionary Society in Ukaguru, Tanzania, East Africa, 1876–1914." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 1 (1981): 73–95.

⁷ Joseph Ogutu Owino, Kazungu Joseph Jum, and Paul Amolloh Odundo. "Contribution of Church Missionary Society in Developing Western Education in Kaloleni District in Colonial Kenya (1890–1950): Historical Perspective." *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention* 4, no. 8 (2017): 3756–3760.

⁸ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The coming of Global Christianity*. (New York: OUP: 2011), 3.

⁹ Mariam Saleh, *African Countries with the Highest Share of Christians as of 2019*. (Statista Inc., 2019), 1.

The study contributes relevant information on the status of Christianity and the socio-economic context of Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, the findings of this study can form a reference point for further research. The study used library materials on the subject.

The Socio-Economic Situation of Sub-Saharan Africa

The socio-economic situation of Africa is characterized by poverty, disease, and hunger. This section focuses on these shades of the socio-economic failures in Africa.

The Problem of Poverty

In his book, *Hope for Africa and What the Christian Can Do*, George Kinoti observes that “the African people are facing a severe economic, political and social crisis, poverty is the most pressing of all Africa’s most depressing problems.”¹⁰ He argues that “the first manifestation of poverty is hunger.”¹¹ The poverty levels in many African states have been an enduring problem since independence.

Indeed, the situation is so dire that when describing Africa, poverty and social suffering have to take preeminence in international reports. Paris rightly observes that the Western media cannot describe Africa without referring to its severe food shortage, malnutrition, inadequate housing, clothing, medical care, disease, high infant mortality, illiteracy, and flawed education system.¹² Though this perception is harsh to the African reader, it bears some marks of truth. Mathurin concurs with this description and blames it on underdevelopment and abject poverty.¹³

In his book; *It is Expensive to be Poor*, author P.M. Marai argues that “everyone agrees that Africans are desperately poor.”¹⁴ While not everyone may agree with this, the general consensus, as observed in research, points to the fact that most Africans are generally poor. Jesse Mugambi weighs on this matter and points out that “in Africa, there is a vicious cycle involving poverty and deteriorating ecosystem.”¹⁵ Paris expresses the irony of the situation in Africa,

Despite its natural riches, Africa is known to the world as a poor continent. And although most people all over the world-especially children, women, racial minorities, or oppressed majorities lack the sufficient material resources required for a decent life, and live in a state of weakness, dependency and humiliation,

¹⁰ George Kinoti, *Hope for Africa and What the Christian Can Do*. (Nairobi: AISRED, 1994), 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*,16.

¹² Peter J. Paris, *Religion and Poverty: Pan African Perspectives*. (London: Duke University Press, 2009), 193.

¹³ Mathurin Hounnikpo, *Africa’s Elusive Quest for Development*. (Springer, 2006), 30.

¹⁴ Patrick Marai, *It is Expensive to be Poor: A Christian Perspective on Poverty*. (Nairobi: Pawhan Consultants, 2011), 15.

¹⁵ Jesse Mugambi, *Theology of Reconstruction: Explanatory Essays*. (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1999), 13.

the phenomenon of poverty seems more blatant and offensively incongruous among African people. Whether in Togo or Ghana West Africa, Kenya or Tanzania in East Africa, or at Soweto in South Africa, poverty strikes more severely and thousands of people are constantly at risk of hunger.¹⁶

Poverty is an issue that cuts across African states. In Kenya, the poverty situation is no different from that of the larger African continent. In matters of standards of living, poverty, and life expectancy, recent reports indicate that Kenya ranks in position 145 in terms of the human development index by the United Nations Development Programme.¹⁷

Moreover, according to the Daily Nation commentary, Kenya's newspaper, "Kenya as a country will not be able to combat poverty by 2030 unless radical measures are taken to rescue the 18 million people under the poverty line."¹⁸ In one of the chilling descriptions of poverty in the slum settlements, author Robert Linthicum of World Vision International paints this picture in a question-answer mode,

How heartbreaking is it for the poor in the cities? I was escorted into a vest-pocket slum of 2,000 settlements in Nairobi-Kenya, the mud and wattle slums of the city, with dirt roads and streams of open sewage. In this slum, my eyes were met by total devastation. The roof of every house was gone, the smell of smoke was heavy upon the air, and the single room of every house was charred and covered with litter of collapsing beams and thatch.¹⁹

Although Kenya is an economic hub of Eastern and Central Africa, this does not obliterate that most people live in adverse poverty conditions. This situation similarly extends to the people living in the expansive rural setups and the city dwellers.

The Impact of Diseases on the Socio-Economic Situation of Sub-Saharan Africa

Kinoti aptly observes that poverty leads to disease, and diseases lead to pain, inability to work, and death.²⁰ When a person is sick, one's productivity and economic output decline. Therefore, diseases not only cause pain but also directly impact the economic situation of a people. If a country has a sickly majority population, productivity is impaired. As a result, there will be a scarcity of essential commodities and starvation.

¹⁶ Peter J. Paris, *Religion and Poverty: Pan African Perspectives*. (London: Duke University Press, 2009), 193.

¹⁷ Emeka Chigozie, *Answers Africa. Poverty in Kenya: Statistics, Rate and Facts You Should Know*. <https://answersafrica.com/poverty-kenya.html> (Accessed Jan 7, 2020).

¹⁸ Samuel Karanja, "Kenya Ranked 6th on Extreme Poverty Index." *The Daily Nation*, Feb Wed, 18 2015, <http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Poverty-Africa-Index-Kenya-Inequality/1056-2628224-vqlg4v/index.html> (Accessed Jan 7, 2022).

¹⁹ Robert Linthicum, *Empowering the Poor: Community Organizing Among the City's Rag, Tag, and Bobtail*. (909 West Huntington: MARC, 1991), 7.

²⁰ Kinoti, *Hope for Africa and What the Christian Can Do*, 17.

Some the diseases like malaria though preventable, still claims a stake in deaths on the continent. Also, Africa grapples with deadly diseases like cancer, Ebola, and Covid-19, among others. These diseases are becoming a threat to livelihood in Africa. The section below focuses on emerging diseases like Ebola, cancer, and Covid-19 and how they affect SSA's socio-economic life.

The Ebola Outbreaks

As of 2014, the WHO confirmed an Ebola outbreak in West Africa where several thousand people lost their lives, leaving a trail of fear and panic. The WHO personnel lamented, “We are deeply concerned about the devastating effect of Ebola on reproductive health in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone in the context of continuous deterioration of socio-economic conditions and general health in affected countries.”²¹ The devastation brought by such an epidemic has long-term effects on people's lives.

This deadly scourge has hit several other African countries. For instance, outbreaks have occurred in Gabon, the Republic of the Congo, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.²² Ebola started as a minor disease outbreak before becoming a major epidemic. Munster et al. note that before 2013 the reported cases were relatively few. However, in between 2013–2016, about 28,646 cases were reported.²³ This outbreak became an epidemic partially because of the unprepared health facilities and personnel in the health facilities. Moreover, the medical research infrastructure for testing new vaccines and therapeutics is still underdeveloped.²⁴

Apart from the sheer loss of lives, the Ebola epidemic “resulted in an estimated \$2.2 billion loss in the gross domestic products of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea for a period stretching to more than two years.”²⁵ This (socio-economic) situation is a reality that many African countries have to face. The epidemic erodes human capital, which slows economic

²¹ Alexandre Delamou, Rachel M. Hammonds, Séverine Caluwaerts, Bettina Utz, and Thérèse Delvaux. "Ebola in Africa: Beyond Epidemics, Reproductive Health in Crisis." *The Lancet* 384, no. 9960 (2014): 2105.

²² Vincent J. Munster, Daniel G. Bausch, Emmie de Wit, Robert Fischer, Gary Kobinger, César Muñoz-Fontela, Sarah H. Olson et al. "Outbreaks in a Rapidly Changing Central Africa—Lessons from Ebola." *New England Journal of Medicine* 379, no. 13 (2018): 1198–1201.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1199.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1200.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1201.

growth and thereby retarding growth. The impact on the human capital directly affects economic growth.²⁶

The Covid-19 Pandemic

Since the first case of Covid-19 was discovered in 2019 in China in Wuhan city, Hubei province, the world has faced a new health challenge.²⁷ It marked the beginning of a gruesome experience for China and the rest of the world. According to WHO, as of June 2022, the confirmed cases worldwide stood at 532,887,351, while the recorded fatalities worldwide stood at 6,307,02.²⁸

This disease brought unprecedented destruction to nations, both physically and emotionally. Some parts of the world have already experienced the 6th wave. Though most developed countries withered the Covid-19 storm quite remarkably, especially with the introduction of the Covid-19 vaccines, Africa still struggles. According to the research by IMF researchers, “Around 11 billion doses are needed to fully vaccinate 70% of the world’s population against Covid-19. As of 4 July 2021, 3.2 billion doses had been administered, of these more than 80% of the doses have gone to people in high-income and upper-middle-income countries.”²⁹

The reality is that Africa is still reeling from the impact of this disease, with vaccine uptake still being a major problem; “Between February and May 2021, African countries received only 18.2 million of the 66 million doses they had expected through COVAX. Out of nearly 1.3 billion people in Africa, just 2% have received one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine. And a little over 1% — 26 million people — are fully vaccinated, according to the WHO’s Africa office.”³⁰ These disparities show the state in which Africa finds herself, especially in the fight against Covid-19.

The pandemic has “caused economic fluctuations globally, calling for an understanding of the behavior of macroeconomic variables.”³¹ According to economists, this is the global

²⁶ Kolawole Ogundari, and Titus Awokuse. "Human Capital Contribution to Economic Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa: Does Health Status Matter More Than Education?" *Economic Analysis and Policy* 58 (2018): 131–140.

²⁷ Li, Yuanzhe, FeiFei Guo, Yang Cao, LiFeng Li, and YanJun Guo. "Insight into COVID-2019 for pediatricians." *Pediatric Pulmonology* 55, no. 5 (2020): E1–E4.

²⁸ https://www.extranet.who.int/publicemergency.WHO_Health_Emergency_Dashboard_WHO_COVID-19_Homepage (Accessed, June 2022)

²⁹ Padma, T. V. "COVID Vaccines to Reach Poorest Countries in 2023—Despite Recent Pledges." *Nature* 595, no. 7867 (2021): 342–343.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 343.

³¹ Farayibi, Adesoji, and Simplice Asongu. "The Economic Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria." *European Xtramile Centre of African Studies, WP/20/042 (2020)* (2020).

image, and Africa is not spared in this melee. With the onset of lockdowns, the disruptions have caused emotional trauma and economic drawbacks. It is noted that “Africa bears a disproportionate burden of poverty and disease.”³² And even before Covid-19 struck, Africa was still largely struggling to feed and clothe her growing population. Covid-19 compounded the problem. Reports indicate that an additional 9.1% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa has immediately fallen into extreme poverty due to Covid-19, while 31.8 million people are severely food-deprived.³³

For a long time, Africa has depended on international monetary organizations and developed countries for loans to spur growth. However, with Covid-19, this becomes complicated. Ataguba vividly observes,

The fact is that many developed countries are substantially financing Covid-19-related activities in their own countries, which may leave little room for providing relief funds to developing countries. This further blurs the outlook in the current Covid-19 pandemic for most countries in Africa that rely on developed countries for official development assistance. This has highly affected Africa, with its high disease burden, poorly developed infrastructure and safety nets and weak health systems³⁴

Moreover, Covid-19 resulted in productivity upsets. For instance, “The opportunity cost of an individual’s time not spent in productive work activity due to Covid-19 is the productivity cost to an employer.”³⁵ This results in layoffs with catastrophic financial burdens of high magnitude. Moreover, “Commodity scarcity created by a decline in productivity (or reduction in imports from countries affected by the Covid-19 pandemic) has fueled a rise in general price levels (i.e., inflation).”³⁶ Consequently, this has pushed up the price of commodities, and as a result, crime has soared to an all-time high in recent times.

In West and South Africa, the situation is the same,

In Nigeria, for instance, the falling global price of oil in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic has forced the country to devalue the Naira. Importantly, the impact of several activities on GDP growth will indicate the implication of the Covid-19 pandemic on aggregate economic activities in countries. In South Africa, for

³² Ataguba, John E. "COVID-19 Pandemic, a War to be Won: Understanding its Economic Implications for Africa." *Applied Health Economics and Health Policy* 18, no. 3 (2020): 325–328.

³³ Teachout, Matthieu, and Céline Zipfel. "The Economic Impact of COVID-19 Lockdowns in Sub-Saharan Africa." *International Growth Centre* (2020).

³⁴ Ataguba, 325–328.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 326.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 327.

instance, the 2020 growth forecast was revised downward from 0.7 to 0.4% following the Covid-19 outbreak. The Covid-19 pandemic has also affected the stock and financial markets.³⁷

Additionally, most African countries depend on tourism for foreign exchange income. Covid-19 has badly impacted the African continent because of the travel restrictions, bans, and even lockdowns. Thus, “In South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, the country’s tourism sector has been devastated by the novel coronavirus pandemic.”³⁸ This situation is replicated in almost all the continent’s nations, with The Africa Report indicating that “in 2021, the decline in international tourist arrivals resulted in a loss of earnings for the continent estimated at between \$170bn–\$253bn.”³⁹

The Challenge of Missionary Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa

As earlier observed, Christianity in most parts of Africa started during the coming of Western missionaries. In an attempt to explain the foundations of Christianity during colonial Africa, Mugambi remarks that there existed a close relationship between the missionary work and the colonial enterprise,

The colonial state expected the missionary enterprise to turn the colonized Africans into docile, obedient subjects. In return, the colonial state gave grants to the missionary agencies for educational work and social services such as health, agriculture and vocational training. If Africans protested against the colonial establishment, the missionary enterprise was expected to cool the agitation through the pulpit and the classroom.⁴⁰

This missionary Christianity as Mugambi argues, “is still very much tied to its colonial and missionary past, even though it has evolved local characteristics.”⁴¹ He further points out that Africans were not supposed to rationalize ideas but rather accept them. Furthermore, missionary Christianity taught Africans that they were not to get entangled with the secular, worldly life but rather focus on the spiritual. As a result, this strategy made the African Christians docile.

³⁷ Ibid., 326.

³⁸ Rogerson, Christian M., and Jayne M. Rogerson. "Covid-19 Tourism Impacts in South Africa: Government and Industry Responses." *Geo Journal of Tourism and Geosites* 31, no. 3 (2020): 1083–1091.

³⁹ Alain Faujas, Covid-19 Has Cost the African Tourism Industry Billions of Dollars. (Road Business Park, UK: Jeune Afrique Media Group, 2021), 1.

⁴⁰ Jesse Mugambi and J. N. K. Mugambi, "African Churches in Social Transformation." *Journal of International Affairs* (1996): 194–220.

⁴¹ Ibid., 195.

One of the modern missionaries of Sub-Saharan Africa is the late Reinhard Bonnke. He held multiple open-air evangelistic campaigns in SSA for a long time. While reminiscing on Reinhard Bonnke’s perspective on Christianity, Gifford calls it non-liberating Christianity. He contrasts this type of Christianity, as propagated through evangelistic rallies and crusades, with liberative Christianity, which derives its momentum from the social sciences, helping people to reflect on their actual situations and to search for innovative solutions to their own problems. This kind of reflection, Gifford emphasizes, is available to all, and empowers ordinary people to take control of their social, political, and economic future.⁴² Gifford’s thinking is instructive in that it tries to give a glimpse of the context of African Christianity and why it is what it is. In responding to Bonnke’s understanding of Christianity, Gifford philosophically observes that “if evangelism is all that matters, there is something unchristian in preoccupying oneself with worldly concerns, or in focusing on one’s material circumstances.”⁴³

The Holistic Nature of the Biblical Message

In Genesis 1–2, before the fall of humankind into sin, God provided for humanity. He gave them a garden which they were to till and work on for sustenance (Gen 2:15–16). In reference to Genesis 2:15, “God intended from the beginning that the earth should yield its fruits as a result of human effort.”⁴⁴

In the Bible, God revealed his laws on how spirituality should impact how people relate to each other—with all fairness and moral consideration (Lev 19:13; 36; Prov 3:27; 22:22; 28:8). He warned against a form of godliness that is devoid equity and justice. Those who exploit and oppress the people in their leadership were (Ps 72:4; 146:7; Eccl 4:1; Prov 3:31; 28:16; Isa 1:17; 10:2; Jer 22:3; 50:33; Ezek 18:12; 22:29;). These portions of the Scriptures reveal God’s concern for people’s spiritual lives and other domains of life. It highlights God’s concern for the economic situation of his people.

Believers were taught how to relate with the poor and underprivileged since they are people created in God’s image and likeness. Hughes and Bennett contrast that “the keynote is struck in the law with its emphasis that the poor need ‘hand-up’ out of poverty rather than ‘hand-

⁴² Paul Gifford, *The Religious Right in Southern Africa*. (Harare: Baobab Books and University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1988), 95.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴⁴ Dewi Hughes and Matthew Bennett, *God of the Poor: A Biblical Vision of God Present Rule*. (Carlisle: OM Publishing, 1998), 156.

out’ which ultimately leaves them more-poorer and powerless.”⁴⁵ The Law of Moses (Ex 20) lays the foundation for the way humanity is to conduct life in fear of God.

The above Scriptures underline what Christian theology teaches or ought to teach. Christians ought to embody this holistic gospel. However, there is a mismatch, for the lived reality is different. The lives of the body of believers seem to be out of touch with the laid-out biblical foundation. The theology of justice, equity, and ethics seem to have been neglected. Christianity that does not concern itself with the people’s socio-economic situation has lost touch with the fundamental teachings of Scripture. The prime question remains, is Christianity positively impacting the social-economic atmosphere of the African continent?

In the New Testament, Jesus was born into a low-income family. Joseph and Mary could not afford to offer the normal offering for purification because of their economic status. So, instead of a lamb, they brought two pigeons to the temple.⁴⁶ Later, Jesus undertakes a holistic ministry in his ministry, meeting people’s physical and spiritual needs (Lk 4: 18–19). He ministered to the soul as well as to the physical needs of the body. For instance, in several cases, he healed the sick and fed the hungry (Matt 14:13–21; 15:38).

After the Lord’s ascension, the Apostles successively picked up on the ministry they had received from the Lord. They proclaimed the gospel and met the needs of people within a context where there was widespread poverty.⁴⁷ In this context, the church responded with generosity and concern. The Acts of Apostles 2–6 narrate the shared community life of the apostolic church: they shared resources, lived as a family, and deceit was not encouraged. In addition, the apostles actively organized and pooled resources through free will contributions to help the poor churches within and abroad (Rom 15:26; Phil 4:14). These are examples that the African church should emulate.

Contributing Factors to the Socio-Economic Struggles of Sub-Saharan Africa

Bad Governance

The issue of poor leadership and mismanagement of resources has greatly affected the socio-economic struggles of Sub-Saharan Africa. In his research, Kinoti identified bad governance as

⁴⁵ Ibid..158.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 107.

⁴⁷ Susan R. Holman, *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*. (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 19.

the main impediment to Africa's growth.⁴⁸ However, a mere pointing at the government as the primary culprit does not offer a meaningful solution. The question to be answered is who leads the government? More often than not, most of the African presidents or national leaders in SSA claim to be Christians. In Burundi, for example, the poorest nation in Africa, the late president Nkurunziza was referred to by the locals as the 'pastor'! In Kenya, the president and his deputy frequently attend worship services and claim to be Christians.

Hence, the question is, why has Christianity not offered socio-economic solutions through these leaders? Kinoti rightly remarks, "Africa under Africans has experienced more violence, violation of human rights, corruption, injustice, and oppression than did colonial Africa."⁴⁹ Paris concurs with Kinoti, "Many African hopes ended in disappointment, the change of guards government houses from White to Black meant nothing."⁵⁰ On the same breath, Marai laments over the Kenyan state of things, that "the impact of Christianity is absent in the various government sectors of the country; hence the church should ask itself why?"⁵¹ These scholars give the impression that the church in Kenya has largely abdicated its role in influencing the nation's socio-economic life. Later, this study acknowledges the positive initiatives by the church.

Marai rightly observes that these problems reveal that though Christianity is widespread in Africa, Christians have not allowed the biblical transformation to flow through their lives. There is still the dichotomy between the secular and sacred.

Mismanagement of Resources

The second cause of the socio-economic challenges is the mismanagement of resources. According to Kinoti, management is "the skillful or efficient use of resources to provide the goods and services people require."⁵² Biblically, management refers to stewardship, taking good care of God's resources for the benefit of the people. Therefore, national leadership should focus on well-laid-out pro-people agendas that address critical and essential services like food, water, shelter, healthcare, and education.

⁴⁸ Kinoti, 36.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁰ Paris, 296.

⁵¹ Patrick Marai, *It is Expensive to be Poor: A Christian Perspective on Poverty*. (Nairobi: Pawhan Consultants, 2011), 5.

⁵² Kinoti, 48.

The fact is that majority of African nations have been mismanaged, and people left desperate. In many SSA states, there is run-away corruption, embezzlement of public resources, ghost projects, and exploitation of natural resources to the disadvantage of the people, among other problems. Speaking of corruption in the South African government, Harry Munzhedzi opines that in the procurement process, “prices are inflated, contracts are awarded to friends or family, tenders are not advertised, bid committees are not properly constituted.”⁵³ These economic and social evils happen in a country where almost 90% of the people profess to be Christians.⁵⁴

Church’s Response

Against the context of socio-economic challenges, how has the church responded? In the fight against the socio-economic, the church has invested in different sectors of the economy. For instance, most mainstream churches in Kenya have founded schools, colleges, and universities. These initiatives in the education sector aim to train future leaders with biblical values. The church has also ventured into other sectors like economic empowerment initiatives, provision of healthcare services and training, environmental conservation, and civil society involvement to champion good governance and rights of the poor and underprivileged. The church, in many places, has played a role as the “moral conscience of society.” The church still needs to step up on these roles.

Notably, the church has not been proactive at the level of politics and governance. Henry Okullu rightly observed that “many church leaders in Africa nurse very strong political opinions, yet they dare not anyone speak about any social issues from the pulpit. The same leaders echo the slogan: ‘religion and politics’ do not mix.”⁵⁵ This leaves the church in its own bubble, aloof from the concerns within its surrounding.

On other fronts, church leaders have been accused of not engaging the leadership on their mandate; “the church in Africa has been slow in giving guidance which the African nations have needed to work out their national aspirations. Instead, many church leaders have jumped into the

⁵³ Pandelani Harry Munzhedzi, "South African Public Sector Procurement and Corruption: Inseparable Twins?." *Journal of Transport and Supply Chain Management* 10, no. 1 (2016): 1–8.

⁵⁴ Robert C. Garner, "Religion as a Source of Social Change in the New South Africa." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 30, no. 3 (2000): 310–343.

⁵⁵ Henry Okullu, *Church and Politics in East Africa*. (Nairobi: Uzima Publishing House, 1974), 5.

bandwagon and have accepted suggestions mooted by politicians uncritically.”⁵⁶ Even worse, “The standard reaction of the church against social evils has been fear.”⁵⁷ Again, Henry Okullus’s observations are valid. The church needs to be proactive in its role and become the salt and the light of the world (Matt 5:13,14) and custodian of truth.

Marai also observes that the church, which should provide direction to the members who form the bulk of the populace, has instead “folded her hands and only desperately watch the secular world take initiatives in world affairs which affect her.”⁵⁸ Perhaps the thinking underlying this approach is the belief that “the church’s duty is that of curing the soul and has nothing to do with the social life of the people and politics.”⁵⁹ Marai calls this a bad theology, the theology that “Christians belong to heaven and not the sinful world.”⁶⁰ Christianity must do away with this kind of theology to make a lasting impact. In addition, the church has a God-given responsibility to demonstrate and model how social justice should be achieved, valued, and defended. The church should actively participate in providing solutions to the socio-economic issues facing Africa

Conclusion

This study has examined the socio-economic challenges of SSA. Some of the identified causing socio-economic challenges include abject poverty, bad governance, mismanagement of resources, and diseases. In addition, the study looked at the holistic gospel as taught in the Bible and proposes that Christians in Africa should overcome the false distinction between sacred and secular and be a solution to the challenges Africa faces. The church has an opportunity to influence the trajectory of many SSA economic futures because a majority of the population claim to be Christians. Therefore, the church should step out in its role in society to live out its mandate as salt and light of the world. Furthermore, the biblical holistic gospel should cause the church to address the people’s physical and spiritual needs. To this end, the study makes the following recommendations.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁷ Julio De Santa Anna, *Towards a Church of the Poor: The Work of an Ecumenical Group on the Church and the Poor*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), 142.

⁵⁸ Marai, 10.

⁵⁹ Henry Okullu, *Church and Politics in East Africa*. (Nairobi: Uzima Publishing House, 1974), 10.

⁶⁰ Marai, 11.

The church in the African continent has a God-given obligation to: first, be the light of the world by leading by example in championing truthfulness in leadership, and good stewardship of resources, even though this might involve suffering (Mat 16:24). Second, the church should warn, rebuke, and expose the corrupt individuals in the leadership and demand their prosecution in the courts of law to deter such ill behavior which is affecting the general public. Third, the church should influence the public to be faithful in their duties by observing godly values. Fourth, the church should provide the blueprint for equitable development and fairness in all developments. Fifth, the church should empower the people to start income-generating activities to help alleviate suffering and empower people in communities to be economically stable

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