

Faith in Action: A Christian Ethical Appraisal of Poverty-Alleviation Interventions in the Anglican Diocese of Abuja, Nigeria

Moses Adebolu Adetunmbi, Ph.D. & Akeredolu Paul Idowu (Ph.D. Student)

Department of Religion and Development Studies,
Faculty of Humanities
Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria



Abstract

Poverty remains one of the most persistent socio-economic and ethical challenges confronting societies across the world, and Nigeria is no exception despite its abundant natural and human resources. This study presents a Christian ethical appraisal of poverty-alleviation interventions documented within the Anglican Diocese of Abuja. Grounded in an integrated theoretical framework combining Christian Social Ethics, the Anglican Five Marks of Mission, and Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, the study critically examines documentary evidence relating to the diocese's reported interventions in education, healthcare, economic empowerment, humanitarian assistance, and community development. Employing a qualitative documentary research design, data were drawn from a defined and bounded set of theological literature, diocesan and denominational publications, and relevant empirical and policy studies published between 2010 and 2024. The findings indicate that available documentary sources report diocesan involvement in vocational training, educational scholarships, healthcare outreach, and support for vulnerable groups and suggest engagement in partnerships with government and non-governmental organizations. However, the study is careful to distinguish reported alleviation activity from demonstrated poverty reduction, given the absence of longitudinal outcome data in the sources reviewed. The findings further reveal that documentary evidence on financial resourcing, institutional capacity, monitoring systems, and beneficiary participation remains limited. The study argues that the Diocese's reported poverty-alleviation activity constitutes a documented expression of Christian ethical responsibility, while cautioning against overstating its measurable developmental impact in the absence of primary evidence. It concludes that the Anglican Diocese of Abuja, on the basis of available documentation, represents a significant faith-based actor in poverty-related intervention and recommends more rigorous monitoring, beneficiary-inclusive programming, and empirically grounded follow-up research to substantiate outcome claims.

Keywords: Faith in Action, Anglican Church, poverty alleviation, Christian ethics, Capability Approach

Introduction

Poverty remains one of the most pressing socio-economic and ethical challenges confronting contemporary society, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria. Despite the nation's abundant natural resources, human capital, and economic potential, a substantial proportion of Nigerians experience multidimensional poverty, manifested in inadequate income, unemployment, poor healthcare, limited educational opportunities, food insecurity, social exclusion, and inadequate access to basic infrastructure (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). This reality presents not only an economic concern but also a profound ethical challenge that demands

collective action from governments, civil society organizations, and faith-based institutions. The persistence of poverty raises critical questions regarding justice, equity, human dignity, and social responsibility.

Christian ethics views poverty not merely as an economic condition but as a moral issue that undermines the God-given dignity of every human being. Scripture consistently affirms God's concern for the poor, the oppressed, widows, orphans, and strangers, while repeatedly calling God's people to demonstrate compassion, generosity, and justice (Deuteronomy 15:7–11; Proverbs 19:17; Isaiah 58:6–12; Matthew 25:31–46; James 2:14–17). Consequently, the Church is called not only to proclaim the Gospel but also to embody it through practical service.

Throughout Christian history, the Church has responded to poverty through charitable works, education, healthcare, social welfare, and community development, integrating evangelism with social responsibility in what is often termed integral or holistic mission. The Anglican Communion has formally affirmed this integration through its Five Marks of Mission, which explicitly identify responding to human need through loving service and seeking to transform unjust structures of society as constitutive dimensions of mission alongside evangelism (Anglican Consultative Council, 2012).

This study adopts the Five Marks as part of its analytical framework precisely because they provide an institutionally authoritative, rather than merely aspirational, basis for evaluating the diocese's activity against its own tradition's stated mission commitments. Within Nigeria, the Anglican Church has emerged as one of several prominent faith-based institutions contributing to national development through schools, hospitals, vocational centres, microfinance initiatives, and humanitarian interventions (Ahiamadu, 2019; Bowers du Toit, 2019). The Anglican Diocese of Abuja occupies a distinctive position within this landscape. Beyond its designation as the seat of Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja presents a documented paradox of concentrated political and economic opportunity alongside significant urban poverty.

FCT-focused analyses have noted rapid population growth driven by rural-urban migration, extensive informal settlement development on the city's periphery, and labour-market precarity among urban youth (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023; World Bank, 2024). This combination of proximity to national wealth and persistent urban deprivation makes the Diocese of Abuja an analytically distinctive, rather than merely convenient, case: it allows examination of how a faith institution operating in the shadow of the nation's political centre responds to poverty that is comparatively under-theorised relative to rural poverty in Nigerian scholarship.

An ethical appraisal, as distinct from a purely developmental assessment, examines whether documented interventions reflect biblical principles of justice, love, accountability, stewardship, inclusion, human dignity, and empowerment and whether they move beyond short-term relief toward structural transformation. This requires a vocabulary that does not conflate the existence of an intervention with proof of its outcome. Existing scholarship on Nigerian faith-based organisations has tended either to catalogue humanitarian activities descriptively or to evaluate government poverty policy, with comparatively limited work applying a rigorous, source-bounded ethical analysis to a single Anglican diocese (Ahiamadu, 2019; Haynes, 2017). This is not to claim an absolute absence of literature on religion and development in Nigeria, which is considerable, but rather to note a narrower gap: few studies combine a defined documentary methodology with

an explicit ethical-analytical framework at the diocesan level. This study positions its contribution within that narrower and more precisely specified gap.

This study therefore undertakes a documentary, ethically framed appraisal of the Anglican Church's reported role in alleviating poverty within the Anglican Diocese of Abuja. It investigates the theological and ethical foundations of the diocese's social ministry as reflected in available sources, examines the nature of its documented poverty-alleviation programmes, identifies the evidential and institutional challenges affecting these interventions, and proposes recommendations explicitly derived from the study's findings.

Conceptual Clarifications

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify the key concepts used throughout this study, since they carry precise and distinct meanings within Christian ethical and development discourse.

Poverty. Poverty is understood here as a multidimensional condition encompassing inadequate income, unemployment, poor healthcare, limited educational opportunity, food insecurity, and social exclusion, rather than a purely economic deficiency (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Poverty Alleviation. This refers to deliberate interventions intended to reduce the immediate burden of deprivation, such as food distribution, medical outreach, or scholarships, without necessarily addressing the structural causes of poverty.

Relief, Alleviation, Poverty Reduction, and Transformation. This study distinguishes four related but distinct concepts: relief refers to immediate assistance to vulnerable people; alleviation refers to interventions that reduce immediate deprivation; poverty reduction refers to measurable improvements in socioeconomic conditions; and transformation refers to interventions addressing the structural causes of poverty and inequality. This distinction is applied consistently throughout the study's analysis.

Christian Ethics. Christian ethics refers to the moral principles derived from Scripture and Christian tradition, particularly love, justice, compassion, stewardship, human dignity, and service, which guide the Church's engagement with social issues (Stassen & Gushee, 2016).

Holistic Mission. Holistic, or integral, mission describes an understanding of the Church's calling in which evangelism and social action are inseparable dimensions of Christian witness, rather than competing priorities (Stott, 2006; Wright, 2006).

Capability. Drawing on Sen (1999), capability refers to the substantive freedoms and opportunities a person has to achieve the kind of life they value, such as being educated, healthy, or economically self-reliant, as distinct from merely receiving material assistance.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates three complementary frameworks to move beyond a descriptive list of ethical principles toward a structured analytical model. Christian Social Ethics provides the normative foundation, emphasising that authentic Christian faith must find expression in practical service to humanity, guided by love, justice, mercy, and stewardship (Stassen & Gushee, 2016). It supplies the evaluative vocabulary, dignity, compassion, and accountability, used throughout the appraisal.

The Anglican Five Marks of Mission (Anglican Consultative Council, 2012) operationalise this ethic within the specific institutional tradition under study.

The Marks, to proclaim the Gospel; to teach and nurture believers; to respond to human need through loving service; to transform unjust structures of society; and to safeguard creation, provide a denomination-specific benchmark against which the diocese's reported activities can be measured on their own institutional terms, rather than against an externally imposed standard alone. Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (Sen, 1999) supplies the developmental analysis that distinguishes charitable relief from genuine empowerment.

Sen's central claim, that development should be understood as the expansion of substantive freedoms and capabilities rather than income growth alone, allows this study to ask not merely whether the Diocese distributes assistance but whether its documented interventions plausibly expand beneficiaries' capabilities in education, health, and economic participation or merely relieve immediate deprivation. Together, these three frameworks generate the study's core analytical distinction between relief, alleviation, poverty reduction, and transformation, which is applied to each thematic finding in the results and discussion that follow.

Literature Review

Existing scholarship on religion and development consistently affirms that faith-based organisations play a significant, though unevenly documented, role in poverty alleviation across Sub-Saharan Africa. Stott (2006) and Wright (2006) argue that evangelism and social action are complementary rather than competing dimensions of Christian mission, a position that underlies the Anglican Communion's own Five Marks of Mission (Anglican Consultative Council, 2012). Sen (1999) reframes development as the expansion of human capability rather than income growth alone, a lens increasingly applied in faith-based development literature to distinguish empowerment from dependency-creating charity (Myers, 2011).

Studies specific to Nigeria, such as Ahiamadu (2019) and Bowers du Toit (2019), document extensive faith-based involvement in education, healthcare, and humanitarian response, while cautioning that such involvement is not always accompanied by rigorous outcome monitoring or beneficiary participation. Haynes (2017) and Deneulin and Bano (2009) further note that religion-and-development scholarship has often been descriptive of activity rather than critically evaluative of its structural or transformative impact, a gap this study directly addresses at the diocesan level. This study adopted a qualitative documentary research design, combining descriptive and analytical elements: the descriptive component identified poverty-alleviation activities attributed to the Anglican Diocese of Abuja in available documentary sources, while the analytical component evaluated these activities against the integrated theoretical framework of Christian Social Ethics, the Five Marks of Mission, and the Capability Approach.

Given the study's exclusive reliance on secondary sources, the documentary corpus was deliberately bounded: it comprised official Anglican Communion and Church of Nigeria publications and policy statements; publicly available Diocese of Abuja reports; peer-reviewed journal articles on Christian ethics and faith-based organisations in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa; national statistical and policy reports from the National Bureau of Statistics, World Bank, UNDP, and UNICEF; and biblical texts and theological commentaries used for normative interpretation. Sources were drawn from publications dated between 2006 and 2024, with priority

given to material from 2015 onward to reflect the contemporary socio-economic context of the Federal Capital Territory.

Sources were included where they made specific, attributable reference to Anglican Diocese of Abuja programming, provided empirical or policy data contextualising the Diocese's operating environment, or contributed directly to the theoretical framework; sources were excluded where claims about Diocesan activity could not be traced to an identifiable institutional publication or where data pre-dated 2006. Institutional sources were identified through official Anglican Communion and Church of Nigeria publication channels, while academic sources were identified through subject-relevant searches using terms including "faith-based organisations," "poverty alleviation," "Anglican," "Nigeria," and "Christian ethics."

Extracted material was coded thematically according to the intervention and challenge categories presented in the results, with themes derived inductively from recurring content and then mapped deductively onto the study's relief–alleviation–reduction–transformation distinction. Credibility was addressed through source triangulation, cross-referencing institutional claims against independent academic or statistical sources where possible, and through explicit flagging of claims that rely solely on institutional self-reporting without independent corroboration. The study is explicitly positioned as a documentary and conceptual case analysis rather than an empirical impact evaluation: where the corpus provides evidence only that an intervention exists or is reported, the study describes this as documented alleviation activity and does not claim measurable poverty reduction unless outcome-level evidence is explicitly cited.

The principal limitation of this approach is its exclusive reliance on documentary sources; it does not include interviews, focus groups, or field observation with clergy, diocesan officials, or beneficiaries, which constrains the study's ability to verify institutional claims against beneficiary experience or to assess programme outcomes longitudinally. Consequently, the study's conclusions are framed throughout using moderated, evidence-appropriate language such as "documentary evidence suggests," "reported to," and "appears to contribute," rather than causal claims of impact, and future research combining this documentary baseline with primary fieldwork is identified as a priority.

Results and Discussion

Documentary sources indicate that the Anglican Diocese of Abuja frames poverty alleviation as an integral aspect of Christian mission rather than a separate humanitarian activity, consistent with Church of Nigeria publications that describe social intervention as continuous with evangelistic mission (Church of Nigeria, 2020) and with the Anglican Consultative Council's (2012) formal embedding of "loving service" and "transforming unjust structures" as co-equal to proclamation within the Five Marks of Mission. This suggests an institutionally sanctioned rationale for the Diocese's activity, though the corpus does not permit direct verification of how consistently this rationale is applied at the parish level within Abuja specifically.

On education, diocesan and denominational publications reference the operation of Anglican-owned schools and scholarship schemes intended to support economically disadvantaged students (Church of Nigeria, 2020); consistent with Sen's (1999) Capability Approach, education-focused interventions are, in principle, the category of activity best positioned to expand beneficiaries' substantive capabilities rather than merely providing relief if access, quality, and completion

outcomes are sustained, though the corpus reviewed does not contain enrollment figures, completion rates, or post-scholarship outcome data specific to Abuja, so this finding is best read as documented alleviation activity with plausible, but not evidentially confirmed, capability-expanding potential.

On healthcare, sources reference medical outreach and health-awareness activity associated with Diocesan social ministry (Church of Nigeria, 2020), consistent with relief and short-term alleviation and resonant with the healing ministry model described in Luke 4:18–19, though the corpus does not provide evidence of sustained primary healthcare access improvements or reduced out-of-pocket health expenditure among beneficiaries, and this should therefore be read as documented relief and alleviation activity rather than a confirmed contribution to health outcomes.

On economic empowerment, institutional sources reference vocational training and skills-acquisition programming, the category that most directly engages Sen's capability framework since skills acquisition is designed to expand economic agency rather than create dependency; however, the reviewed corpus does not include employment-rate, income-change, or business-survival data for programme graduates, so the claim that such programmes have enabled beneficiaries to generate income and improve their livelihoods is not fully supportable and is accordingly moderated: available sources indicate that such programmes are designed to promote economic self-reliance, while whether they demonstrably do so cannot be confirmed without beneficiary-level outcome data.

On humanitarian assistance, sources reference support directed at widows, orphans, internally displaced persons, elderly persons, and persons living with disabilities, generally in the form of food, clothing, and emergency relief (Church of Nigeria, 2020); this is most accurately categorised, under the study's relief–alleviation–transformation distinction, as relief, necessary and ethically significant, but not, on the evidence available, transformation of the structural conditions producing displacement or disability-related exclusion, satisfying the compassion and human-dignity criteria central to Christian Social Ethics without, on present evidence, satisfying the Fourth Mark of Mission's structural-transformation standard.

On community development, general institutional statements reference collaboration with government agencies and non-governmental organisations, without specifying named partner organisations, dates, or joint programme outcomes traceable in the corpus, so this finding is reported with appropriate caution as documentary evidence that "points to" rather than "confirms" active strategic partnership at the diocesan level, consistent with broader patterns of faith-based organisational collaboration documented elsewhere in Nigeria (Ahiamadu, 2019).

Applying the study's critical evaluative questions surfaces several governance-related gaps in the available documentation: the corpus does not specify how beneficiaries of scholarships, humanitarian assistance, or vocational training are selected, raising an open question about transparency; no source specifies whether programmes are open to non-Anglican beneficiaries, a question directly relevant to the universality of the mandate in Matthew 25:35–40; no source provides evidence of participatory planning involving beneficiaries, a gap relevant to the dignity-versus-dependency distinction central to the Capability Approach; and publicly available financial reporting specific to poverty-alleviation programming in the Abuja Diocese was not located within the corpus reviewed.

These gaps are reported as findings about the state of available documentation rather than evidence of poor practice, but they constrain the strength of any positive ethical claim that can be responsibly made. Contextual statistical reports point to financial resource constraints, rising inflation, unemployment, and insecurity as pressures on faith-based social programming generally in Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023; World Bank, 2024), and the absence of a documented diocesan monitoring and evaluation framework specific to Abuja is itself a finding, consistent with the broader institutional-capacity gap noted across Nigerian faith-based organisations in the literature (Bowers du Toit, 2019).

Taken together, these findings are broadly consistent with prior literature on faith-based organisations in Nigeria, which similarly documents extensive involvement in education, healthcare, and humanitarian response without always establishing measurable poverty-reduction outcomes (Ahiamadu, 2019; Bowers du Toit, 2019). This study's contribution lies not in discovering a novel pattern of activity but in applying a more disciplined evidentiary and theoretical lens to that pattern at the level of a single, under-studied diocese.

Applying the Five Marks of Mission as an internal institutional benchmark clarifies that humanitarian relief to widows, orphans, and internally displaced persons satisfies the Third Mark comfortably, but the documentary record provides much weaker evidence that diocesan activity satisfies the Fourth Mark, since structural transformation would require documented advocacy on unemployment, governance, or systemic inequality, and the corpus contains general institutional statements to this effect but no specific, attributable advocacy campaign or policy engagement traceable to the Abuja Diocese, an unintended consequence worth naming explicitly: an institution may be highly active in relief while remaining comparatively passive on the structural advocacy dimension of its own stated mission, a charity-versus-transformation tension consistent with broader critiques in the faith-and-development literature (Myers, 2011; Deneulin & Bano, 2009).

These findings also connect directly to specific Sustainable Development Goals: documented educational support corresponds most directly to SDG 4 (Quality Education); healthcare outreach to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being); vocational training and microenterprise support to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth); reported partnership activity, where verifiable, to SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals); the governance gaps around beneficiary participation, selection transparency, and financial accountability to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions); and the unresolved question of non-Anglican inclusion to SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

The study's theoretical contribution, considered against this integrated framework, is to demonstrate that a documentary appraisal of a single diocese can meaningfully distinguish reported relief from confirmed transformation, provided the researcher resists the common tendency in faith-and-development literature to treat programme existence as a proxy for programme impact, offering a transferable analytical tool for future documentary studies of other dioceses or denominations facing the same evidentiary constraints.

Conclusion

This study has provided a Christian ethical appraisal, grounded in an integrated framework of Christian Social Ethics, the Anglican Five Marks of Mission, and Sen's Capability Approach, of poverty-alleviation interventions documented within the Anglican Diocese of Abuja. The findings indicate that the Diocese is reported, through institutional and denominational publications, to be

engaged in education, healthcare, vocational training, humanitarian assistance, and community-development activity consistent with its tradition's holistic understanding of mission.

The study has been deliberately cautious in distinguishing documented alleviation activity from demonstrated poverty reduction, given its exclusive reliance on secondary, largely institutional sources. Significant gaps remain in publicly available documentation regarding beneficiary selection transparency, participatory programme design, financial accountability, and structured monitoring and evaluation, gaps that constrain, without foreclosing, a stronger positive ethical assessment of the Diocese's practice. On present evidence, the diocese is more confidently described as an active and mission-consistent contributor to poverty-related relief and alleviation in its operating context than as a demonstrated agent of measurable, structural poverty reduction.

The Anglican Diocese of Abuja therefore represents a significant, if incompletely documented, faith-based actor in Nigeria's broader landscape of poverty-related intervention. Strengthening the evidentiary and institutional foundations identified in this study, through improved monitoring, beneficiary participation, and, ideally, future primary research, would allow considerably stronger claims to be made about its contribution to sustainable, transformative development.

Recommendations

Building on the findings presented above, this study offers the following recommendations, each derived explicitly from a specific finding rather than proposed as a generic suggestion.

1. The Diocese should establish a structured monitoring and social-impact reporting mechanism, recording beneficiary numbers, programme costs, and follow-up outcome indicators such as employment status, health access, and school completion, in direct response to the documented absence of monitoring and evaluation systems.
2. The Diocese should introduce beneficiary-participation mechanisms in programme design and selection, publishing clear and accessible selection criteria, in direct response to the absence of documented participatory planning or transparent selection procedures.
3. The diocese should commission or support longitudinal beneficiary-outcome assessment for its vocational and educational programmes, given the absence of employment, income, or completion data needed to confirm claims of capability expansion.
4. The diocese should publish accessible financial accountability reporting specific to its poverty-alleviation programming in response to the absence of publicly available financial reporting identified in this study.
5. The Diocese should develop and publish a poverty-alleviation policy framework that explicitly addresses structural advocacy on unemployment, governance, and inequality in fulfillment of the Fourth Mark of Mission and in response to the relief-transformation gap identified in this study.

References

- Adeyemo, T. (Ed.). (2006). *Africa Bible Commentary*. Zondervan.
- Adogame, A. (2010). How God became a Nigerian: Religious impulse and the unfolding of a nation. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 28(4), 479–498.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2010.512826>
- Ahiamadu, A. (2019). Faith-based organizations and community development in Nigeria. *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 22(1), 45–58.

- Anglican Consultative Council. (2012). *The five marks of mission*. Anglican Communion Office.
<https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>
- Anglican Communion Office. (2022). *The Anglican Communion*.
<https://www.anglicancommunion.org>
- Bowers du Toit, N. (2019). Faith communities and sustainable development in Africa. *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies*, 75(4), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i4.5595>
- Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). (2018). *Constitution and canons of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)*. Church of Nigeria.
- Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). (2020). *The Church's mission and social responsibility*. Church of Nigeria.
- Deneulin, S., & Bano, M. (2009). *Religion in development: Rewriting the secular script*. Zed Books.
- Haynes, J. (2017). *Religion and development: Conflict or cooperation?* Palgrave Macmillan.
- Holy Bible, New International Version. (2011). Biblica.
- Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version. (1989). National Council of Churches.
- John Paul II. (1987). *Sollicitudo rei socialis [On social concern]*. Vatican Publishing House.
- Myers, B. L. (2011). *Walking with the poor: Principles and practices of transformational development (2nd ed.)*. Orbis Books.
- National Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Nigeria's Multidimensional Poverty Index (2022 Survey)*. National Bureau of Statistics. <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng>
- National Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Nigeria Labour Force Survey 2023. National Bureau of Statistics*. <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng>
- Samuel, V., & Sugden, C. (Eds.). (1999). *Mission as transformation: A theology of the whole gospel*. Regnum Books.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.
- Stassen, G. H., & Gushee, D. P. (2016). *Kingdom ethics: Following Jesus in contemporary context (2nd ed.)*. InterVarsity Press.
- Stott, J. (2006). *Issues facing Christians today (4th ed.)*. Zondervan.
- United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. United Nations. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>
- United Nations Development Programme. (2021). *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index*. UNDP & Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2023). *Human development Report 2023/2024*. UNDP. <https://hdr.undp.org>
- United Nations Children's Fund. (2023). *The state of the world's children 2023*. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org>
- World Bank. (2022). *Poverty and shared prosperity 2022: Correcting course*. World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1893-6>
- World Bank. (2023). *Macro poverty outlook: Nigeria*. World Bank.
- World Bank. (2024). *Nigeria development update*. World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/publication/nigeria-development-update>
- Wright, C. J. H. (2006). *The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's grand narrative*. InterVarsity Press.
- Wright, C. J. H. (2010). *The mission of God's people: A biblical theology of the Church's mission*. Zondervan.