

Volume 1, Issue No.2, pp 13-19; June, 2019

www.researchersjournal.org

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Received April, 2019; Accepted and published June, 2019

The Church and the Nigerian Economic Recession

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Abstract

In Nigeria, in recent times, life has become very hard for people; inflation has increased such that many people are unable to afford their basic needs. Similarly, governments at all levels are unable to perform their duties effectively due to low income, financial constraints and the diminishing economy which tends to be harsh. The above situation has been summarized as an economic recession. This paper discusses its meaning, its causes, its effects on the church, the meaning of the church, how the church should respond to economic recession and the way forward. In the process it is observed that the economy has experienced a downturn due to both internal and human factors and external or factors beyond human control. These have adversely affected and limited the economic ability of the masses, and hindered them from living comfortably. The church is also affected adversely, because the church members, who are the sources of revenue for the church, cannot support her effectively as they would have done. Due to this, the church is advised to tackle the situation in two ways: Firstly, from a biblical, consolatory perspective, and secondly from the physical position of encouraging their members to work hard, and the introduction, adoption and intensification of strategic poverty alleviation strategies such as investment in agriculture, skills acquisition, consumption of local goods and services, less demand for foreign goods and cooperation among churches to pursue the common welfare of all.

Keywords: church, economic recession, economic downturn and church's charity.

Introduction

Meaning of economic recession

It refers to a downturn in economic activity. It involves a setback and a decline in trade and economic activities (Amadeo, 2017). It is described as a significant decline in economic activities spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months; it is normally visible in real gross domestic product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production and wholesale/retail sales (Amadeo, 2017).

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific period, less the income from foreign investments (Kirkpatrick, 1983). During recession, businesses cease to expand, the GDP reduces, the rate of unemployment rises, manufacturing and industrial production slows down and consumers spending reduces (Amadeo, 2017). This situation is generally caused by the following: inflation, falling prices of oil, the violence in the oil producing areas of Nigeria, bad debts accumulation over a period, corruption and bad government. At this point, it is necessary to look at the meaning of the church.

The meaning of the church

The word church has various meanings.' It firstly refers to a house set apart for public worship, secondly, it refers to the whole body of Christians, thirdly it refers to a particular denomination of Christians, lastly it refers to any group with a common creed which may not necessarily be Christian (Kirkpatrick 1983).

Smylie (1997) adds that the word church is derived from the Greek word "Kyriakon" which means 'belonging to the Lord'. It originally designated the place where the apostles and evangelists gathered believers for fellowship and worship. It also refers to the Christian community as a whole or a body of Christian believers. This is derived from

the Greek word 'ekklessia' which originally meant an official assembly of citizens (Britannica 1998). The various meanings or forms of the church have been affected by economic recession in Nigeria in some ways. These effects are examined in this work. However, it is necessary to have an idea of the causes of economic recession in Nigeria.

Causes of the Nigerian economic recession

According to Shido-Ikwu (2017), the Nigerian economic recession is caused by two major factors, which can be grouped into internal and external. The internal factors include the overdependence on oil production for government revenue, low savings, political risk, official corruption, the low demand of oil by major trading partners. Others are lack of clarity over economic policies, wrong policy choices and lack of strategy for private capital. Still under internal factors, in the area of security, there are challenges posed by Niger delta militancy on oil production. In addition, the herdsmen/farmers conflict, along with the activities of Boko Haram and armed bandits, have adversely affected agricultural production, and hence the economy.

The external causes are those which are beyond human control. They include natural disaster, climate change, wars, conflicts, uprisings, epidemics, floods, erosions and droughts. These have contributed in various ways in worsening the economy of Nigeria. Floods and erosions have destroyed farms, droughts have contributed to famines.

Effects of economic recession on the church in Nigeria

Economic recession has hindered, delayed or discouraged the initiation, construction, maintenance and completion of some physical church projects and programmes. It has weakened and reduced the abilities of some members to contribute to or support the work and progress of the church. On the other hand, it has also made some Christians to be more hardworking, enterprising, more prayerful and committed to God in

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order to survive the hard times, whereas some others have abandoned the faith due to the hardship. It has also made some church members to look for various ways of survival, some of which may be wrong, unethical or unbiblical. This includes bribery and corruption, fraud, immorality and even extortion of members by some religious leaders.

How the church should respond to economic recession

The church, being a bible based organization, should start and base its response to recession mainly on the bible, in addition to other physical efforts. Biblically, the church should admonish members to take consolation and comfort from the word of God. For instance, God warned believers about it in 2nd Tim. 3:1. He promised to provide for his people in Psalm 34:10, and Philippians 4:19. The situation will bring about good for God's people. Romans 8:28, and there is a time for everything. One day, things will change for good (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

In addition, members should be encouraged and admonished to continue to give tithes and offerings to God, despite the hard times, Malachi.3:8-12. This is the most appropriate time to give what you have to God so as to have a reward in heaven and more blessings from God (Mathew 6:19-21; Luke 6, 38). On the physical side, the church members must be encouraged to work, invest and spend wisely (Proverbs 20:4; 13:4; 31:11-18; Mathew 10:16). They should also be security conscious, careful and watchful, so as to prevent robbery, kidnappings or to avoid falling into the hands of fraudsters.

In addition, various strategic responses to poverty which are carried out by some Pentecostal prosperity churches, should be intensified, continued and adopted by other churches. These include the award of scholarships, provision of employment, donation of food items to the needy within and outside the church in order to improve their economic wellbeing, and the financing of small scale businesses through the granting of loans. Others

are the establishment of welfare departments to care for and promote the welfare of members and non-members, visitations to orphanages, prisons and hospitals to make donations to the needy, and the recommendation of members for jobs, appointments and other posts.

Iwe, (1985) supports these efforts by suggesting that the church should always be reasoning out, experimenting on and exploring new avenues and solutions to meet the problems of humanity. This implies that the church should be creative and devise ways of creating jobs, empowering the people and improving their standards of living. Such investments include establishment of printing presses, construction of boreholes and production of potable water, provision of cheap media services (video coverage), to members on commercial basis.

There is a need for a full disentanglement of Nigerian churches from unnecessary foreign cultural and administrative control (Uka, 1999). This will provide the room for the indigenous administration to take the welfare needs of the members more effectively. Moreover, it is needful to consider the adoption of the economic manifesto of Leader O. O. Obu of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, who advocates the return of people to agriculture as the way out of economic hardships (Mbon, 1986).

Obu's suggestion seems to agree with the view of Afimia (2017) who advocates that in order to surmount the effects of economic recession, individuals should invest in agriculture so as to bring down the price of foodstuff and ensure food security. Afimia, (2017) further advocates that individuals should cut down their appetites for foreign made goods and services that are available in the country, and increase their demand for locally made goods and services. This will improve foreign reserves and ensure a favourable balance of trade. He also adds that people should invest in the local economy instead of investing abroad.

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On a similar note, Kale, Maigari and Haruna (2017) do advocate that credits and loans should be made easily available to consumers and investors. They further advocate the investment in skills acquisition in information technology, telecommunications, agro-allied work, sports, health and security. The adoption and pursuit of these and other approaches by the church, both corporately and on individual basis could greatly improve the welfare of the church.

Conclusion and recommendations

The economic situation in Nigeria has caused great hardship, poverty, hunger and crime in the society. This is confirmed by Marshal and Solomon (2017) who reject and debunk the declaration by world economics in April 2017 that Nigeria's economy has come out of recession. They see this as a political and illusory statement which is far from the reality on ground, because the masses are still suffering from the effects of the recession. They argue that the indicators of sales manager index (SMI) that was used by the world economics to make the declaration, only capture the transaction and activities of the political elites who are in the position to spend foreign currency for everything, but do not reflect the true position of the Nigerian economy which is still in a recession.

In view of these, the church as a body and as individuals should do the following: take consolation in the word of God, be prayerful and thankful to God, invest and spend wisely, avoid wasteful and unnecessary spending, be security conscious, support the church by giving tithes and offerings, render assistance to others in cash or kind according to one's ability. There is also a need for all churches to co-operate in the effort of tackling economic recession. This might necessitate the joint pursuit of the problem through bodies like Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN). In addition, people should be optimistic and look forward to a better future.

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