

# United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Faith-Based Organizations: An Assessment of Nigerian Baptists Social Ministries

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**Abstract:-** This paper examines the roles of the Nigerian Baptists Social Ministries in the pursuit of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) in the realization of a better living standard for the people of the world without jeopardizing the interest of future generations. It rounds off by suggesting some ways for better future performance for the Baptist Social Ministry. With the theory of secularism, the paper investigates how these UNSDGs came into existence, and the purpose they were designed to achieve by 2030. In addition, the paper considers some definitions of some concepts in the conceptual framework, the roles of the Faith-Based organizations in the lives of their members. It also considers the set-up of the social ministry of the Nigerian Baptists. Furthermore, the paper probes into the activities of the social ministry of the Nigerian Baptists at the local church, conference, and convention levels. The paper also establishes how the Baptists have contributed in improving the lives of the general public as a way of influencing the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, before conclusion and recommendations.

**Keywords:-** Sustainable Development, Faith-Based Organizations, Nigerian Baptists, Social Ministry.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates, and appraises the roles of the Nigerian Baptists' Social Ministries in pursuit of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals of 2030. Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) like the Nigerian Baptists have vital roles to play in the Sustainable Governance of any given nation. Faith-Based Organizations also are mission-based that depend on the social values of their particular faiths, which most often draw on the tenets of their peculiar faith doctrine. This paper, examines the contribution of a Faith-Based Organization, the Nigerian Baptists in uplifting the living standard of the people around them, with the study of the social ministries of the Baptists in Nigeria. A Faith-Based organization is more inclusive than the term 'religious organization' because it also includes non-congregational faith beliefs. Faith-Based organizations are grassroots organizations that are locally active, but some are active on an international scale. This paper also examines sustainable development goals of the United Nations which target

achieving a better and more sustainable future for the people around the world. In addition, this paper aims to create an awareness on the need to carry out more researches on this particular aspect of the church ministry that is under researched, and to encourage stakeholders to begin to pay more attention to the social ministry of the church. Finally, the paper considers the challenges of the Social Ministries of Nigerian Baptists and gives suggestions on how to improve on their pursuit of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There are three basic concepts that this paper considers for our discussion. They are Sustainable Development Goals, Faith-Based organizations and Social Ministry.

**Historical Development of Sustainable Development Goals:** The concept of Sustainable Development is said to have originated from the 1987 Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, titled "Our common future". The definition of Sustainable Development in this report gained global acceptance among sustainability practitioners, researchers, and activists. According to the Brundtland Reports, Sustainable Development refers to "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Amodu, 2019: 69). The critical finding of the World Commission on Environment and Development concerning the connections between things in nature, eventually led the United Nations to the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, which was later transformed into the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals also known as Global Goals, which are interrelated and interconnected, call for universal action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. On this basis, it should be noted that the content and intent of the 17 sustainability development goals reflect the character of the many interlocking crises facing the planet (Amodu, 2019: 69).

Odejide (2011: 7) also sees Sustainable Development "as a pattern and path of economic and social development compatible with the long-term stability of the environmental system, particularly those essential to human well-being..."

It is inter-disciplinary, and issues of the economy, environment, and societal intersect. Moreover, the scholar also agrees with the opinion that sustainable development is all about "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs." (Odejide, 2011: 7)

This work stands on the premise that the sustainable development goals are a collection of 17 global goals that are designed to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all the people on this planet. The SDGs, set in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and intended to be achieved by the year 2030, is part of United Nations' resolution 70/1, the 2030 Agenda. (Wikipedia, Last edited, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2020).

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are as follows: No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good health and Well-being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Reducing Inequality, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life Below Water, Life on Land, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and Partnerships for the Goals (Amodu, 2019).

**Faith-Based Organizations:** A faith-based organization is an organization that derives inspiration and guidance for its activation from its teachings and principles of the faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within the faith (Scoth, 2019). Based on this definition, it is pertinent to note that an FBO should be connected with an organized faith community either in the form of a specified religious ideology, with specified staff members and volunteers or leadership from a particular religious denomination. Furthermore, other qualities that qualify an organization as "Faith-Based" are religiously oriented mission statements or initiation by a religious organisation. (Scoth, 2019).

FBOs can be measured through several factors: the first is based on 'objective' or 'function'. Wolfgang (2013) has developed a five-fold typology of the basis of function and/or objective of FBOs.

- Faith-Based representative organizations or apex bodies consist of adherents of the faith and represent them through engagement with the state.
- Faith-Based charitable or development organizations mobilize the faithful and engage in activities in support of development initiatives and fund and manage poverty alleviation programmes. They are mostly subsidiaries or associated with Faith-Based representative organizations. They are the most visible forms of FBOs in developing countries.
- Faith Socio-political organizations which interpret and display faith as a political construct, organizing and mobilizing social groups based on faith identities but in pursuit of broader political objectives or promote faith as a socio-political construct, as a means of uniting

disparate social groups based on faith-based cultural identities.

- Faith-Based missionary organizations which spread key faith measures beyond the faith, by actively promoting the faith and seeking converts to it, or by supporting and engaging with other faith communities on the basis of key faith principles, and
- Faith-Based radical, illegal or terrorist organizations which promote radical or militant forms of faith identity engage in illegal practices based on faith beliefs or engage in armed struggle or violent acts justified on the grounds of faith (Wolfgang, 2013).

The second position is that of McCarthy, J and Castelli, J. (1999), who combined geographical coverage and denominational independence to produce a three-fold typology of:

1. Congregations: Locale specific community organized around religious worship.
2. National Networks- The social services components of major denominations.
3. Freestanding religious organizations- Service organizations that are separate from any congregation or religious domination.

They have a broad geographical scope ranging from neighbourhood emergency food and welfare agencies to large national organizations. (McCarthy, 1999)

#### ➤ *The Features of Faith-Based Organizations*

In Nigeria, some religious practices are closely associated with ethnic identity and act as a manner of access or lack of access to state resources in a context of representative state-society relations. In other words, FBOs have a very strong political identity and they also pursue political goals and objectives through an interrelationship of development, missionary and radical organizations.

Afolabi (2016) argues that all over NIGERIA, religion plays an important role in the daily lives of her citizens, the way people interact with one another; their choices of dressing, food or politics are mostly influenced by religion. In other words, religion and politics are intertwined and this empowers man to function in his society by contesting for a political position so as to affirm his ideology. Religion has been an indispensable phenomenon in Nigeria. It has become an important factor in political discourse (Adigwe and Gray, 2007). Afolabi (2016) further argues that the influence of religion is not only limited to politics but its power also influences virtually all other facets of life. Political power affects economic prosperity, social life, religion, educational advancement and the psyche of the society. The three dominant religions in Nigeria are: Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. All these religions have ideologies that give room for interaction between religion and politics. It should be noted on this premise that majority of Nigerians cannot do without politics as well as religion in their everyday life. Based on this, it could be argued that since Nigerians make use of both religion and politics, they tend to politicize religion and involve religion in politics. Thus, Nigerian politics is

characterized chiefly by “politicization of religion and religionization of politics” (Adogame, 2006: 128)

In the light of these views, it can be assumed that Faith-Based Organizations in Nigeria can be identified with the following features:

- Social Ministries, which work in Correctional Centres (Prisons), among Drug Addicts, Abandoned children, Juvenile homes, Disabled People's Homes and so on.
- Educational Services: Pre-schools, illiteracy programmes, training colleges, universities.
- Health Services which include: clinics, hospitals, open-air health services, childhood immunization and the like.
- Provision of essential services such as emergency food, clothing, shelter or financial aid.
- Community development: housing development, job provision, and training, business recruitment.
- Human Rights Campaign -Well-being advocacy.
- Family Support Services: after school programmes, childcare, domestic abuse programmes, day-care for older adults, counseling for couples. (Olarinmoye, undated)

➤ *Concept of Social Ministries.*

Generally, the social ministry is set up to meet the physical needs of disadvantaged people; such needs cover include provision of food, clothes, payment of bills, such as hospitals, house rents. In recent times, the roles of social ministry have been expanded beyond this level, to the level of meeting the physical and spiritual needs of an individual. Social ministry, therefore, is about serving people and it is not a membership-drive oriented ministry. Furthermore, Social Ministry workers, are people who always look for people who need help, the less privileged people and those whose situation is very pathetic, unbearable and that are living below the acceptable UN living standard.

A Christian religious scholar, Eniola, (2018: 1) defines social ministry as "Gospel in action". It is proclaiming Christ not only in words, but words backed with action. It is another way of expressing the mission of Christ to mankind. Social ministry is also about caring and bearing with one another, it is sacrificing one's comfort for the sake of others.

Social ministry, to Ekong, (2018) means making believers sensitive to the needs of others, opening their eyes and ears to recognize injustice, suffering, and the plight to those who have fallen by the wayside. Social ministry, if used wisely, could be a tool for evangelistic mission. Apart from meeting people's physical needs, it could open the door to sharing the good news of the kingdom. It has a role in Church overall community service. Through this medium, Christians can "express their faith and love for God and man by serving those in need." (Ekong, 2018) Therefore, Social ministry means meeting the needs of others around us. Furthermore, social ministry comprises an option for those affected by poverty and marginalization. It is not applicable to all people, but in the spirit of Jesus, it is based on and in solidarity with the poor. Social Ministry poses the question Mother Theresa often asked: Do we

know our poor people? (Buggs; 2020). Social ministry is about serving people and it is not membership-driven (for example; baptism), but need-driven. (Social Ministry in Solidarity; 2013) In addition, social ministry has been extended beyond personal and /or material welfare care and strives to achieve a changed perspective; viewing the world from the viewpoint of the poor (Social Ministry in Solidarity, 2013). In another dimension, social ministry helps in the celebration of God's love for all people in the world, serving the people both locally and globally through partnerships with other interested organizations.

In effect, social gospel is evangelism through kingdom establishment, (that is; social justice, social reform); Social ministry is a needs-meeting ministry, wherein believers express their faith and love for God and man, but by serving those in need. Social gospel views social action as the gospel; social ministry views social action as love manifested because of the gospel (Rothra, 2015). One can conclude that Social ministry is evangelistic activities outside the worship center environments. It involves social activities in support of marginalized people; the downtrodden, people in captivity, in hospital, people who are stressed and depressed, the lonely, the abandoned, aged, abused, drug addicts, prostitutes, the disabled, children with retarded growth and so on.

➤ *The Pursuit of Nigerian Baptists Social Ministries in relation to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.*

Baptist is a term describing individuals belonging to a Baptist Church or Baptist denomination. The name is derived from a conviction that followers of Jesus Christ are commanded to be baptized (by immersion in water) as a public display of their faith (Ajayi, 2009: 1). In addition, Baptist Christians are commonly identified as Christians who emphasize the authority of the Scripture, salvation through faith in Christ, congregational Church government and religious liberty. (Pierard, 2005: xv).

The Nigerian Baptist Convention is one of the major Christian denominations in Nigeria. As many Baptists in Nigeria widely believe, the denomination "is a handiwork of God". Its foundation was laid by Jesus Christ, who intends to present his glorious Church to God at His Second coming (Shurden, 2001). The members of this denomination are known and called "Baptists". These Christian believers have their origin in a foreign mission of the Southern Baptist Convention of the United States. The Nigerian Baptist Convention (their highest ruling body) was officially formed in 1914.

According to the Nigerian Baptists, social ministries are about caring for one another; they are meant to comfort others who are in deplorable situations. The vision is: "As God's agents of transformation, we assist to meet social needs." The mission is: "To empower believers in the need of task of meeting social needs to empower the less privileged to become self-reliant." Meanwhile, their core values are: "To assist in any way that everybody will experience the abundant life that comes from Jesus (John

10:10) and, Social ministries must be central to the life of a Church in obedience to the Gospel (Matt 25: 35-46) (Eniola, 2018: 2).

Through social ministries, the Nigerian Baptists aspire to contribute to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in assisting Nigerians to alleviate the suffering of the commoners and the less privileged.

➤ In this paper, the contributions of the Nigerian Baptists will be assessed through each of the following UN Sustainable Development Goals. They are as follows:

1. No Poverty- Almost in every continent of the world, poverty affects all age groups differently, with the most devastating effects experienced by children and teenagers in Africa and Asian countries. Poverty affects their health, nutrition, education, and security, on a large scale that affects their psychological, spiritual, and emotional advancement. The average poverty rate for sub-saharan Africa stands at about 41%, and of the World's 28 poorest countries, 27 are in sub-saharan Africa all with a poverty rate above 30% as at November, 2018 (Nirav Patel, 2018) The major reason for this is the low level of their economic growth and wide differences in equality of citizens and poor management of their human and natural resources.

To assist the people in this aspect, the Nigerian Baptists recently secured a parcel of land at Ijaye, in Ogun State to begin an empowerment programme to train widows, secondary school dropouts, unemployed graduates, children from humble backgrounds, very low-income earners, orphans and so on. The title given to this programme is "Skills Acquisition and Certification". The available courses that are offered to the trainees are: Catering, Fashion Design, Shoemaking, Bread making, Hair making, and Bead making. This Baptists Skills Acquisition Training and Empowerment Centre was established out of concern for the increasing rate of unemployment in Nigerian society (Plecher, 2020) which invariably affects many homes. There is the need for gainful employment to curb poverty, crime rate, suicide and other ills which are the major issues affecting Nigeria as a nation in contemporary times. Meanwhile, this Centre reported to have successfully graduated about 10 who have become masters of their own in different locations in Nigeria in 2019.

2. Baptist Social Ministries and Zero Hunger- UNSDG on Zero Hunger is basically aimed at ending hunger in all continents of the world. It is an effort that focuses on making food available, that is assurance of food security and provisions of basic food nutrition. This also includes promotion of sustainable agriculture. Therefore, in a nutshell, it is the aim of the UN to eliminate hunger and under-nutrition latest by 2025.

It is against this background that the Baptists in Nigeria, through their Social Ministries, have been pursuing this goal from various angles.

Apart from the Baptist Skills Acquisition Certification Centre, the Baptists, in order to ensure zero hunger and to curb societal vices have engaged in rehabilitation and vocational advancement ministry. The ministry pursues the goals through the organization of workshops to teach different trades such as technical skills, catering, furniture and fashion designing. The programme is specifically designed to provide means of livelihood for inmates released from Correctional Services (prisons); drug addicts, cultists, prostitutes and those from home care and orphanage centres. It also embraces those who want to learn petty trade to alleviate poverty.

In addition to this, during this year's (2020) Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, the ministry at both the local church and Convention levels, reported engaging in the distribution of food items to several homes and institutions where feeding has become a formidable task. For example, the University of Ibadan Baptist Church in April, 2020 identified some families that could not adequately feed themselves, for financial assistance through its social ministry department. In a similar manner, Akobo Baptist Church, and many other sister Baptist Churches in Ibadan also extended their generosity to the less privileged people around their localities.

At the Nigerian Baptist Convention level, the social ministry gives their direct relief materials to victims of disasters to alleviate their immediate needs; the materials could be money, household utensils and so on. The ministry from time to time also visits correctional services (Prison Yards) with food items to ensure that the inmates are better fed with quality food. Likewise, University of Ibadan Baptist Church (UIBC) through its Social Ministry has also taken it as its responsibility to distribute food items to needy student members of the church during examination periods and those with special needs among the university population even if they are not members of the church. Furthermore, according to the committee chairman's report, on 29<sup>th</sup> June, 2019, the church's Social Ministry in order to fulfil its function in reaching out beyond its immediate environment visited a children's orphanage in Bodija, Ibadan. During this visit, the Church supported the orphanage with financial assistance and church members not only supported the children financially but also supported them with several gift items. Furthermore, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December, the UIBC also visited Tabitha Children's Home at Ring Road, Ibadan. During this visit, the children's home was supported with cash gifts and other various gift items. In addition, it was reported that Christmas packages were also given to students within the University campus that did not go home for Christmas festivals.

On Good Health and Well-Being for people, this UNSDG targets ensuring healthy lives and the promotion of well-being for all at all ages. The UN through this goal, also aims at achieving universal health coverage, giving access to essential drugs and medical vaccines and ending the preventable death of newborns and children under 5 and epidemics that terminate lives en masse. Such epidemics targeted by the UN are AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria, and

water-borne diseases among others. According to a popular adage, "Health is wealth". A sick person is believed to be someone who has discomfort in any part of his/her body and the discomfort causes him/her pain such that he/she does not have enough strength to carry out his/her normal duty.

In dealing with the sick, the Baptist Social Ministry on health reported that they usually sit with them for a while, for one on one interactions to enable them to find out where the church can assist them. After the interaction, the ministry representatives report the critical areas to the hospital social welfare to enable the sick persons to have a speedy recovery. Furthermore, through the church, the ministry confirmed that any sick person that cannot afford the hospital bills is assisted financially. In addition to these relief materials like beverages, cash for the purchase of drugs, baby wares, and so on, are presented to the hospital authority for distribution to the patients who could not afford their medical expenses.

The Ibadan Conference (that is, the state level), a unit under NBC, also reported through the Secretary that the conference allocates funds for the purchase of drugs for patients in government hospitals within the Ibadan metropolis and also helps them in other areas such as payment of hospital bills and so on to enable them to enjoy good health. This is also what is being practiced in other conferences of Nigeria Baptists in Nigeria.

Nigerian Baptists Social Ministry also recorded their influence in the pursuit of quality education. United Nations desires to ensure there is inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all people of the world. In addition to this, by 2030, the UN intends to achieve the target of ensuring that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and equality primary and secondary education in all continents of the world. Also, the UN, through this goal advocates effective learning environments and early childhood education for children in all parts of the world.

Baptist Social Ministry at different levels has contributed to the pursuit of quality education in Nigeria. For example, at the conference level, Ibadan Conference reported paying the school fees of some students at the Rehabilitation Centre, Moniya, Ibadan that were unable to afford the fees. Similarly, the Social Ministry of the Conference in its 2019 annual report confirmed the renovation of students' hostels to improve the living conditions of students in the centre. Similarly, the conference also reported helping some students to pay for their West African Examinations Council (WAEC) fees to enable them to sit for the secondary school certificate examinations.

Moreover, the ministry has assisted many of the inmates at the Correctional Service to prepare for WAEC, pay for the examination fees and to guide them to pursue higher certificates in tertiary institutions. Similarly, the Baptists in Nigeria, through their social services, have also reported their involvement in rehabilitating the destitute, drug addicts, prostitutes through giving of sound education and economic empowerment to enable such people to become useful citizens of Nigeria.

Generally, the Baptist Social Ministries have also been involved in the pursuit of the reduction of inequality, in ensuring that there is peace, justice, and strong institutions. Reducing Inequality of the UN is about bridging the gap in income equality within and among countries. The aim is to eradicate extreme poverty, to sustain income growth of the bottom 40% of the population at a higher rate than the national average. Similarly, peace, justice, and strong institutions are designed to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and to provide an enabling environment for accessing justice for all and for building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This would ensure the reduction of violent crime, sex trafficking, forced labour and child abuse globally. This is a pursuit of a peaceful and just society that guarantees the safety and security of lives and properties for all.

The Baptists in Nigeria, in this regard, through their annual reports, (Eniola, 2018) confirm their relevance in this regard by counseling the criminals on the streets, and their ministry to the addicts in the Nigerian communities. The fact is that all over the world, no society is devoid of touts, street urchins (commonly called "area boys"), children roaming the streets aimlessly, without a place to live. Similarly, drug and substance addiction is a universal phenomenon that threatens the existence and survival of the human race. Meanwhile, many promising careers have been destroyed by addiction and many youths that are involved in drugs are engaged in vices all over the nation. There are traffickers, drug addicts, prostitutes, cultists, alcoholics, and other perpetrators of other social vices on the streets. These people need to be rehabilitated into society.

The Baptists in Nigeria are lending financial support to such people, in addition to giving them sound education, moral upbringing, provision of accommodation, and skill acquisition programmes which will enable them to be integrated into the society.

On a final note, in addition to the above, the Baptists also confirm that there are various programmes for the aged. The ministry for the aged plans different programmes like a Sunday Focus on the aged, where the church representatives worship with the homebound aged. There is also a day retreat that allows the aged to be cared for through health programmes. Excursion to places of interest (not long-distance) and also their involvements in several other programmes that are of great interest have been of a great benefit to the aged.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BETTER PERFORMANCE.

Based on the assessment of the contributions of the Nigerian Baptist Convention listed above in fulfillment of the UNSDGs, the following is recommended for better performance.

First, there is a need on the part of the Nigerian Baptist Convention at all levels, the local churches, associations, conferences, and the convention itself to inject more funds into the ministries for the pursuit of UNSDGs for better performance. As at present, one of the challenges of this ministry is the shortage of funds. Several programmes have been scheduled but the inadequacy of funds has prevented their execution. Injecting more funds will enable these ministries to perform better in improving the welfare of the less privileged people. Besides, the Nigerian Baptist Convention needs to create more awareness of the importance of the social ministries within her membership to enable them to give more support to the ministry and to enable them to perform better in the actualization of these SDGs. If more awareness is created, there is assurance of better performance from the Baptist denomination.

Furthermore, the Nigerian Baptists can add more value to these SDGs through collaboration with other faith-based organizations, the government, other interested institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have the interests of the welfare of the common man in mind. Pooling resources can give better results in the pursuit of these SDGs.

Finally, the Nigerian Baptist Convention and other authorities at different levels need to give more attention to the training of staff in these ministries. As of now, there are paid staff and voluntary personnel. The commitment of staff, especially the voluntary personnel, will be greatly enhanced if they are adequately trained and equipped.

### IV. CONCLUSION

To round off, it is significant to remark that social ministry is a ministry that addresses diverse problem areas in human lives (Eniola, 2018: 114). Examples of such areas in the Nigerian Baptist social ministries include prison, physically challenged, hospital, orphanage, home, and family care, aged, relief, addicts and skills acquisition center, and vocational training.

To effectively implement their social programmes, the Nigerian Baptist Convention needs people with a large heart. The convention needs financial and moral support from people who are self-sacrificing, hospitable, accommodating, painstaking, humble, loving, and trustworthy, and who have a teachable, spirit, that can adapt to any condition.

Though this paper has proved, to a certain extent, that the Nigerian Baptist Convention has performed fairly well in the pursuit of SDGs. The paper also shows that NBC still has a lot of grounds to cover and they should be eager to channel more of their resources (financial and personnel) to the pursuit of UNSDGs and nation-building. Through their social ministries, the Baptists in their limited way can also help in the reduction in the rate of unemployment in Nigeria through; establishment of more hospitals with modern facilities, reduction in crime rate through enlightenment, re-orientation and financial empowerment of the destitute, prison inmates, prostitutes, abandoned children and so on.

On a final note, parts of the funds used for gigantic church auditorium, cars and security, can be diverted to the actualization of the UNSDGs, which will eventually improve the living standard of Nigerians irrespective of their religious affiliations, tribe, sex, and educational background.

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