

Churches and the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria

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Abstract

The prominent role of churches and other faith-based organisations (FBOs) in providing palliatives to the public during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic demonstrates that they can potentially contribute to multi-stakeholder engagements and partnerships for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) even during crisis. It is therefore beneficial to foster synergy between the development activities of the churches and the achievement of the SDGs. There is however limited empirical research on the role of churches within the context of the attainment of the SDGs in Nigeria. This study therefore highlights the church-SDGs in Nigeria. Data was obtained for this purpose through semi-structured interviews of twenty-two (22) religious leaders and/or high-ranking members (RL) of fourteen (14) churches drawn from the prominent Christian denominations - Anglicans, Jehovah Witnesses, Roman Catholics and Protestants. The participants in the study were purposefully selected and the data obtained from the interviews was analysed through content analysis. The results show that Nigerian churches have antecedents in implementing development projects of different sizes, according to their available resources. These projects are often focused on the provision of financial support to members, feeding programmes, healthcare services, provision of water, and building and running of schools in their host communities. The results also show that the RLs believe their churches are well positioned to contribute the most to attaining the goals of SDG1 – no poverty, SDG2 – zero hunger, SDG3 - good health and wellbeing and SDG4 - quality education given their antecedents. Based on the foregoing, this study concludes that churches in Nigeria can continue to contribute to the SDGs by linking their ongoing projects to specific SDGs, to promote coherence. The study therefore recommends that the Nigerian government should engage more with RLs for SDGs implementation programmes and create incentives that encourage churches to link their projects to the SDGs agenda.

Keywords: Churches, Faith Based Organizations, Nigeria, Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

Following the global adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, Nigeria has established a variety of domestic mechanisms to promote the local implementation of the SDGs across the country. Mechanisms established for this purpose at the federal level of government include the establishment of the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs (OSSAP-SDG), a Committee on SDGs in the upper and lower chambers of the National Assembly and an Inter-Ministerial Committee on SDGs to coordinate the engagement with Ministries, Departments and Agencies as it relates to SDGs. Similar mechanisms for the localisation of the SDGs have also been established in the thirty-six (36) states of the federation. Nonetheless, the attainment of the SDGs in Nigeria continues to be hampered by various governance challenges, including the low level of

awareness and inadequate agency among Nigerian citizens about the SDGs.¹ One institution that has been identified as a possible solution to overcoming these challenges are faith-based organisations (FBOs), such as churches, mosques and temples.² This call for the inclusion of FBOs in development initiatives such as the SDGs is driven in part by the increase in the number, influence and visibility of FBOs³ and a shift towards development frameworks that are more suited for understanding development in poorer and less developed parts of the world.⁴ In this regard, FBOs also possess important organizational features such as their popular legitimacy and motivational qualities,⁵ strong donor networks⁶ and historical rootedness⁷ that have seen them emerge as key and effective partners in driving development in their respective host communities.

Within the context of Nigeria, the FBOs – SDG link is further enhanced by the influential role of religion and religious leaders in the lives of their members⁸ and the proliferation of churches especially.⁹ The prominent role of churches and other faith-based organisations (FBOs) in supporting socio-economic interventions, including the provision of palliatives to the public, during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic demonstrates that they can potentially contribute to multi-stakeholder engagements and partnerships for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) even during crisis. It is therefore beneficial to foster synergy between the development activities of FBOs and the implementation of the SDGs. This study mainly focuses on the churches. While the developmental activities of churches in Nigeria have been studied,¹⁰ there is a gap in knowledge regarding church activities relating to the SDGs. This perspective is important because, in addition to improving the government – church SDG partnerships, the hierarchical structure of most churches vests significant influence over development and social initiatives in religious

¹ Chimezie Njoku, 'Awareness of Climate and Sustainability Development Issues among Junior Secondary School (JSS) Students in Port Harcourt Metropolis of River State, Nigeria' (2016) 8(29) IJCI <<http://ijci.wccai-international.org/index.php/IJCI/article/view/40/32>> accessed 1 July 2020.

² Idowu Akinloye, 'Towards the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria: Maximizing the Influence of Religious Leaders' (2018) 4(39) STJ <<https://ojs.reformedjournals.co.za/stj/article/view/1861>> accessed 21 June 2020.

³ Michael Jennings, Gerard Clarke and Timothy Shaw, (eds), *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁴ EA Brett, *Reconstructing Development Theory: International Inequality, Institutional Reform and Social Emancipation* (Palgrave Macmillan 2009).

⁵ Rick James, 'What is Distinctive about FBOs? How European FBOs Define and Operationalise their Faith' (International NGO Training and Research Centre 2009) <<http://www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/482/Praxis-Paper-22-What-is-Distinctive-About-FBOs.pdf>> accessed 14 June 2020.

⁶ Elizabeth Ferris, 'Faith-Based and Secular Humanitarian Organizations' (2005) 87(858) RRC <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/irrc_858_ferris.pdf> accessed 2 July 2020.

⁷ Michael Jennings, Gerard Clarke and Timothy Shaw, (eds), *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁸ Oluwaseun O Afolabi, 'The Role of Religion in Nigerian Politics and its Sustainability for Political Development' (2015) 3(42) NJSS <<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/00fc/5c8d16d87263e6eabb48c0265ffb63f22a7a.pdf>> accessed 25 June 2020.

⁹ Boniface Obiefuna, Kanayo Nwadior and Ikenna Umeanolue, 'Costs and benefits of proliferation of Christian denominations in Nigeria' (2016) 17(19) UJAH <<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ujah/article/view/137180>> accessed 1 July 2020.

¹⁰ Eric Anozie, 'Christian Church: A Catalyst for Economic Development in Nigeria' (2013). 7(4) ARR <<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/afirev/article/view/96686/86002>> accessed 14 September 2020.

leaders of churches¹¹. In light of the above, the main thrust of this paper is gaining some insight into the church-SDGs link in Nigeria by focusing on religious leaders' and high ranking members (RLs) understanding of the SDGs as well as their willingness and ability to promote SDGs related projects.

The first section of this chapter briefly introduces Nigeria's SDGs strategy. This is followed with an overview of the links between the church and the SDGs in Nigeria and an analysis of the theoretical framework for the study, based on literature review. The next sections explain the methodology adopted for the study and the study results. The final sections are the discussion of findings and the conclusion.

Nigeria's SDGs Strategy

The Nigerian government's SDG strategy is linked to the nation's Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) (2017-2020). The ERGP was adopted in 2017 on the back of an economic recession, experienced in the 2nd quarter of 2017. It mainly seeks to stimulate economic recovery and identifies 6 priority SDGs that are crucial to achieving this objective (SDG1 – no poverty, SDG3 – good health and well-being, SDG4 – quality education, SDG5 – Gender Equality, SDG8 – decent work and economic growth, SDG16 – peace justice and strong institutions and SDG17 – partnerships for the goals).¹²

However, with less than three months left to the end of the ERGP implementation period, the strategy does not appear to be yielding the desired results. A recent global assessment¹³ indicates that Nigeria is lagging behind in the 6 priority SDGs, as well as the other 11 SDGs. The country is currently ranked 160 out of 193 countries with respect to SDG achievement and is experiencing major challenges, with progress either stagnating or decreasing in all the SDGs with the exception of two goals: SDG12 - responsible consumption and production and SDG13 - climate action. The reasons for the poor implementation of the SDGs in Nigeria have been identified as including not only the low levels of awareness among Nigerians about the SDGs,¹⁴ but also the overreliance on the oil and gas sector, infrastructural deficits, economic recessions and humanitarian crisis,¹⁵ poorly equipped library and information centres,¹⁶ corruption and poor leadership,¹⁷ and more recently the COVID 19 pandemic¹⁸.

¹¹ Olalekan Dairo, "Church Leadership in Nigeria in the Light of Leadership Qualifications in Timothy 3:1-7". 2014 4(6) RHSS <<https://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/download/11895/12239>> accessed 12 September 2020.

¹² OSSAP-SDGs.2020 *Nigeria: Integration of the SDGs into National Development Planning. A Second National Voluntary Review*. (Nigeria, 2020). <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26308VNR_2020_Nigeria_Report.pdf> accessed 15 September 2020.

¹³ Jeffrey Sachs and others, *The Sustainable Development Goals and Covid-19. Sustainable Development Report 2020* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

¹⁴ Njoku (n 1).

¹⁵ OSSAP-SDGs, *Implementation of the SDGs: A National Voluntary Review* (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2017) < <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16029Nigeria.pdf>> accessed 1 July 2020.

¹⁶ Oyemike Victor Benson, Emmanuel Uwaize Anyanwu, Charles Onuoha and Elizabeth Nwauwa, 'Priorities and Challenges of Actualizing Sustainable Development Goals: Perspectives of Library and Information Professionals in Owerri, Nigeria' (2016) 9(40) JAIST < <https://www.jaistonline.org/9vol2/JAIST%20PAPER%206%20Priorities%20and%20Challenges%20of%20SDGs.pdf>> accessed 1 July 2020.

¹⁷ Benyin Adah and Ugochukwu Abasilim, 'Development and its Challenges in Nigeria: A Theoretical Discourse' (2017) 6 MJSS 275.

Some progress has however been recorded with respect to administrative actions aimed at domesticating the SDGs, such as the realignment of the National Statistical System (NSS) with the requirements and indicators of the SDGs and the development a home-grown analytical framework for assessing how policy making can better address the indivisible nature of the SDGs.¹⁹

Churches and the SDGs

Christianity was introduced into present-day Nigeria around 1472 by Portuguese traders and it initially failed to gain a foothold.²⁰ However, over the years the influence and popularity of Christianity grew among the population as a result of various factors such as the abolition of the slave trade,²¹ increased activities of foreign missionaries,²² the emergence of African and Nigerian indigenous churches²³ and the rise of Pentecostalism and the formation of an umbrella body for all Christian churches - the Christian Association of Nigerian (CAN).²⁴ Today Christianity is one of the dominant religions in the country, with approximately 47% of the population identifying as Christians.²⁵ The Christian denominations in Nigeria include the Catholics, Anglicans, African Independent Churches and a several decentralized Pentecostals.

Churches have historically played important roles in driving development both globally and within their host communities. For instance, the Church is credited with preserving literacy after the fall of the Western Roman Empire,²⁶ providing the basis upon which academic institutions were developed²⁷ and ending the practice of human sacrifices, infanticide and polygamy.²⁸ While the perception of the roles of churches are/have not always been positive, due to some Churches' links to colonialism, gender inequality²⁹ and slavery³⁰ and the

¹⁸ OSSAP-SDGs (n 12) 5.

¹⁹ *ibid* 21.

²⁰ Taiye Adamolekun, 'Proliferation of Churches and its Impact on National Development in Nigeria' in Jide O. Akinbi (ed) *Towards A better Nigeria* (Ben Quality printers 1999).

²¹ Michael Crowther, *The Story of Nigeria*. (Faber and Faber 1978).

²² Jacob A Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (Longmans 1965).

²³ Joseph A Omoyajowo, 'An African Expression of Christianity' in Basil Moore (ed), *Black Theology: The South African Voice*. (Hurst, 1973).

²⁴ Taiye Adamolekun. 'Main Trends in the Church Growth in Nigeria' *ESJ* 8(23)

<<https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2012.v8n23p%25p>> accessed 14 September 2020.

²⁵ CIA, 'World Fact Book: Nigeria' (Cia.gov, February 2019) <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/attachments/summaries/NI-summary.pdf>> accessed 4 July 2020.

²⁶ John Brooke and Ronald Numbers (eds), *Science and Religion Around the World* (Oxford University Press 2011).

²⁷ Charles Haskins (1898). 'The Life of Medieval Students as Illustrated by their Letters' (1898) *TAHR* 3(2)

<<http://bibnum.enc.sorbonne.fr/omeka/files/original/b19ac61b2644baf21109db58fd481afc.pdf> 203–229> accessed 20 September 2020.

²⁸ Chadwick Owen, *A History of Christianity* (St. Martin's Press 1998); Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950: Oxford History of the Christian Church* (Clarendon Press 1996).

²⁹ Edward Andrews, 'Christian Missions and Colonial Empires Reconsidered: A Black Evangelist in West Africa, 1766–1816' (2010) *JCS* 51(4)

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/1f8a/145fead024df7c183a52495a2f81d4dce4ae.pdf?_ga=2.152955321.1266376449.1601669393-1108183182.1593927172> accessed 20 September 2020; Hannelie Wood, Gender inequality: The Problem of Harmful, Patriarchal, Traditional and Cultural Gender Practices in the Church. (2019) *HTS* 75(1)

<<https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/5177/12482#7>> accessed 19 September 2020.

³⁰ Scott Malcomson, *One Drop of Blood: The American Misadventure of Race* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000).

dominant focus of some churches on the prosperity gospel,³¹ churches have nevertheless served as key providers of ethical, spiritual, organizational and material resources necessary for driving development in a variety of areas, including poverty alleviation, health, education, climate change, gender based violence and water and sanitation.³²

Globally, the Church's role in development has in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, with churches playing 2 key roles in support of the SDGs: the raising of awareness about the SDGs and the linking of ongoing Church projects to the SDGs. With respect to the first role, churches have organized activities and initiated programmes aimed at raising awareness about the SDGs among both members of their congregations and the public.³³ In addition to this, churches have also established funds such as the Sustainable Development Goals Fund (SDF) established by the Episcopal Diocese of New York³⁴ for the execution of SDGs related projects. The second role of Churches recognizes the fact that, prior to the SDGs churches were actively involved in development projects with some links to the SDGs. This has seen different church groups identify specific SDGs that their work is focused on. For example, the Lutheran World Federation identified SDG3 – good health and well-being, SDG4 – quality education, SDG5 – gender equality, SDG6 – clean water and sanitation and SDG10 – reduced inequalities as goals which its members are actively involved in,³⁵ the Anglican Consultative Council suggests that a significant majority of churches of the Anglican Communion have ongoing focus on SDG1 – no poverty, SDG2 – zero hunger, SDG3 – good health and well-being and SDG4 – quality education,³⁶ the Presbyterian Church has linked work through its aid projects to the different SDGs³⁷ and the Anglicans, Catholics and Evangelicals in the Dominican Republic identified SDG2 as their main priority.³⁸

³¹ A Critical Analysis of the Social Implications of Gospel Merchandising Among Nigerian Christians Today' (2019) HTS 75(1)

<http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-94222019000100037&lng=en&nrm=iso> accessed 20 September 2020.

³² Julius Oladipo, 'The Role of the Church in Poverty Alleviation in Africa' (2000) 17 TAIJHMS 4; Susan Markens, Sarah Fox, Bonnie Taub and Mary Gilbert, 'Role of Black Churches in Health Promotion Programs: Lessons from the Los Angeles Mammography Promotion in Churches Program' (2002) 92 AJPH; Thomas Reuter, 'The Green Revolution in the World's Religions: Indonesian Examples in International Comparison' (2015) 6 Religions 4; Vhumani Magezi and Peter Manzanga. Gender-based Violence and Efforts to Address the Phenomenon: Towards a Church Public Pastoral Care Intervention Proposition for Community Development in Zimbabwe' 75 HTS 4.

³³ Lutheran World Federation, 'Waking the Giant: Churches for Development' <<https://wakingthegiant.lutheranworld.org/>> accessed 1 October 2020; Sujata Jena, 'Church has Important Role in Spreading the SDGs' (*Matters India*, 23 July 2019) <<https://mattersindia.com/2019/07/church-has-important-role-in-spreading-sdgs/>> accessed 20 September 2020.

³⁴ The Episcopal Diocese of New York, 'The Sustainable Development Goals Fund of the Episcopal Diocese of New York' <<https://www.diocesenya.org/sdgif/>> accessed 21 September 2020.

³⁵ Lutheran World Federation (n 32).

³⁶ The Anglican Consultative Office, (*The Anglican Communion*) 'The Anglican Communion and the Sustainable Development Goals' <<https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/at-the-un/the-anglican-communion-and-the-sustainable-development-goals.aspx>> accessed 15 September 2020.

³⁷ The Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations, 'Study and Devotional Guide on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals' (The Presbyterian Church 2019) <<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/SDG2-Final-Edited-October-16-2019.pdf>> accessed 12 September 2020.

³⁸ United Nations Task Force on Religion and Development, 'Engaging Religion and Faith-Based Actors on Agenda 2030/The SDGs' (United Nations 2018) <https://www.partner-religion-development.org/fileadmin/Dateien/Resources/Knowledge_Center/2017_Annual_Report_UNIATF.pdf> accessed 15 September 2020.

Furthermore, a study on religious institutions in Argentina, found interventions were linked to SDG4 – quality education, SDG8 – decent work and economic growth, SDG10 – reduced inequalities, SDG13 – climate action, SDG16 – peace, justice and strong institutions and SDG17 – partnerships for the goals³⁹. Another study from Spain⁴⁰ found that FBOs contributed to SDG1 – no poverty, SDG3 – good health and well-being, SDG4 – quality education, SDG16 – peace, justice and strong institutions and SDG17 – partnerships for the goals.

A similar pattern follows within the Nigeria context, with the different Christian denominations focusing on either awareness campaigns or the linking of ongoing projects to specific SDGs. For example, the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria contributes to SDG2 and SDG3 by distributing micronutrients among vulnerable groups in order to reduce maternal and child malnutrition.⁴¹ Church groups have also created SDG awareness by translating the SDGs into local languages and through the adoption of slogans from religious dogma.⁴² Believers Love World (also known as Christ Embassy), a major Pentecostal church in Nigeria has identified SDG1 – no poverty, SDG2 – zero hunger, SDG3 – good health and well-being, SDG4 – quality education, SDG5 – gender equality, SDG6 – clean water and sanitation, SDG8 – decent work and economic growth, SDG11 – sustainable cities and communities, SDG16 – peace, justice and strong institutions and SDG17 – partnerships for the goals as key focus areas.⁴³ The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), another major Pentecostal church in Nigeria, has also linked some of its ongoing projects in health, education and feeding to the SDGs.⁴⁴

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes the instrumental theory of religion and the bottom-up theory of development to explain the general importance of religion in Nigeria and why churches are well positioned to promote the achievement of the SDGs.

The instrumental view of religion examines religion and by extension FBOs based on their positive and practical contributions to development.⁴⁵ Based on this, the focus is on the role

³⁹ UNDP Argentina ‘The contribution of Faith-based Organizations to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Argentina’ (UNDP, 2019) <

<https://www.ar.undp.org/content/argentina/es/home/library/Agenda2030/OBF0.html>> accessed 1 May 2020.

⁴⁰ Montserrat Gas-Aixendri and Silvia Albareda-Tiana, ‘The Role of Religion in Global Sustainability: A Study on Catalonia’s Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals’ In Leal Filho and Consorte McCrea (eds) *Sustainability and the Humanities* (Springer 2019).

⁴¹ United Nations, ‘Maternal and Child Micronutrient Nutrition Program’ (sdgs.un.org)

<<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/partners/?id=9548>> accessed 12 September 2020.

⁴² United Nations, ‘Localizing SDGs: Communicating SDGs (sdgactionawards.org)

<<https://sdgactionawards.org/initiative/749>> accessed 14 September 2020.

⁴³ The Inner City Mission for Children, (theinnercitymission.ngo) <<https://theinnercitymission.ngo/about/>> accessed 12 September 2020.

⁴⁴ His Love Foundation, (Facebook 4 September 2019) <https://web.facebook.com/hislovefdn/posts/address-by-pastor-idowu-iluyomade-the-special-assistant-christian-social-respons/230289237900688/?_rdc=1&_rdr> accessed 1 October 2020.

⁴⁵ Peter Berger, ‘Some Second Thoughts on Substantive versus Functional Definitions of Religion’ (1974) 13(125) JSSR <

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1384374.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A8e2ae2be19485395c96aff31379247fa>> accessed 14 May 2020.

of FBOs as service providers and implementers of development cooperation.⁴⁶ This view is also relevant for exploring how the integration of religion into development initiatives could make such initiatives to be more effective.⁴⁷ Studies that have adopted the instrumental view of religion have shown that religious organizations continue to play positive roles in making development more effective,⁴⁸ thus making the case for connecting religion and development. The attainment of the SDGs requires the implementation of projects and initiatives that impact positively on society and make practical contributions in areas such as reduction of hunger, poverty and gender inequality, among others. As shown in the previous section, the role of churches within the context of the SDGs fits within the instrumental view of religion, because churches are generally expected to utilize their various ethical, spiritual, organizational and material resources in either raising awareness about the SDGs or executing projects that are linked to specific SDGs.

The bottom-up theory of development emphasizes the need for development to be more compatible with people's realities, cultures and religion.⁴⁹ Within the context of religious studies, it sheds light on the role of religion in political and social mobilisation from the grassroots level of the society and the resulting need to recognise the religious beliefs of the people at the grassroots.⁵⁰ The bottom-up approach is important because in most developing countries, such as Nigeria, a significant number of people live in rural areas that the government has a hard time reaching with development initiatives. However, in such settings, people still organize themselves for religious practices⁵¹ and religious leaders may in these settings influence the moral-political climate by mobilising the members in their congregations.⁵² The proliferation of churches in Nigeria⁵³ also increases the likelihood of the presence of churches and their organizational strengths in rural areas. This places churches as strong potential partners for driving the SDGs from a grassroots level.

⁴⁶ Francois Gauthier and Tuomas Martikainen (eds), *Religion in the Neoliberal Age: Political Economy and Modes of Governance* (1st edn, Routledge 2013).

⁴⁷ Malcom Harper, D.S.K Rao and Ashis K Sahu, *Development, Divinity and Dharma: The Role of Religion in Development and Microfinance Institutions* (Practical Action Publishing 2008).

⁴⁸ Ekong E Ekong, Rural Based Religious Organizations and Rural Community Development: The Case of Six Local Government Areas in South Western Nigeria (1983) 5(1&2) IJA; Fabian Nnadi, Religion as a Factor in Social Development, in Malachy Okwueze (ed), *Religion and Societal Development: Contemporary Nigeria Perspective* (Merit International Publication, 2004); Berry Evan. (2014). Religion and Sustainability in Global Civil Society. Some basic findings from Rio+20. *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* (2014) 18(3) GRCE.

⁴⁹ Mustapha Hashim Karfi, 'Secularization and Development in Africa: A Terrific Façade' (2013) 13 GJHSSC <https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume13/3-Secularization-and-Development.pdf> accessed 1 July 2020.

⁵⁰ James Beckford, 'Hope and creativity: The Shifting Nexus Between Religion and Development' In Mathew Guest and Martha Middlemiss Lé Mon (eds), *Death, Life and Laughter—Essays on Religion in Honour of Douglas Davies* (Routledge 2017).

⁵¹ Jill Oliver and Quenton Wodon, 'The Role of Faith-inspired Health Care Providers in Sub-Saharan Africa and Public-Private Partnerships: Strengthening the evidence for faith-inspired health engagement in Africa' (World Bank Group 2012) <<https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/851911468203673017/strengthening-the-evidence-for-faith-inspired-health-engagement-in-africa>> accessed 4 July 2020.

⁵² Robert Wuthnow, 'Can Religion Revitalize Civil Society? An Institutional Perspective' In Corwin Smith (ed), *Religion as Social Capital* (Baylor University 2003).

⁵³ Boniface Obiefuna, Kanayo Nwadiakor and Ikenna Umeanolue, 'Costs and benefits of proliferation of Christian denominations in Nigeria' (2016) 17 UJAH 19 <<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ujah/article/view/137180>> accessed 1 July 2020.

Methodology

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 22 religious' leaders and high-ranking members (RL), chosen from 14 different churches located across Nigeria. For the purpose of this study, RLs are defined as men and women with formal affiliations to Christianity who play influential organisational roles within their congregations. To ensure diversity with respect to the churches, the RLs were chosen from different Christian denominations: Anglican (2), Catholic (2), Protestant (17) and Jehovah Witness (1). In qualitative studies, such as this, data saturation rather statistical power analysis is the key determinant of sample size⁵⁴ and this has been found to occur at 12 interviews⁵⁵, between 20 – 40 interviews⁵⁶ and after the 17th interview⁵⁷. The sample size of 22 utilized in this study is thus sufficient for meeting the stated data saturation threshold.

Purposive convenience sampling, a non-random sampling technique that involves the deliberate choice of participants due to the qualities they possess, was utilized in selecting the participants. The key criteria in the choice of participants with this sampling technique, are the participants knowledge, experience, willingness and availability.⁵⁸ Given that the study's focus was on SDGs from the perspective of Churches, RLs were considered to be in the right position to provide the needed data. These RLs were selected primarily with the help of members familiar with the workings of each of the different churches, who suggested names of different RLs for possible inclusion in the study. This led to an initial list of 35 RLs, all of whom were contacted with the aid text messages. 22 RLs (15 men and 7 women) responded positively and indicated a willingness to participate in the study.

Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain the necessary information from the different participants. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews had to be conducted over mobile phones. The interview guide contained 17 questions covering the various aspects of the study and each of the participants received a copy of the questions prior to the actual interview being conducted. The questions were a mix of closed and open-ended questions. For instance, in order to measure the participants' perception of the Nigeria's performance with respect to the SDGs, participants were asked to answer the following question using a Likert scale: "How well do you think Nigeria has performed in achieving

⁵⁴ Lee-Jen Suen, Hui-Man Huang and Haso Hsien Lee, 'A Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling' (2014) *Hu li za zhi TJN* 61(3). <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24899564/>> accessed 1 October 2020.

⁵⁵ Greg Guest, Arwen Bunce and Laura Johnson, 'How Many Interviews are Enough? An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability' (2006) *Field Methods* 18(1) <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1525822X05279903?journalCode=fmxd>> accessed 12 September 2020.

⁵⁶ Ashley Hagaman and Amber Wutich, 'How Many Interviews are Enough to Identify Metathemes in Multisited and Cross-Cultural Research? Another Perspective on Guest, Bunce, And Johnson's (2006) Landmark Study' (2017) *Field Methods* 29(1). <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1525822X16640447>> accessed 12 September 2020.

⁵⁷ Jill Francis and others, 'What is an Adequate Sample Size? Operationalising Data Saturation for Theory-Based Interview Studies' (2010) *Psychology & Health* 25(10) <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08870440903194015>> accessed 12 September 2010.

⁵⁸ Russel Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (3rd edn, Alta Mira Press 2002); John Cresswell and Vicki Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Method Research* (2nd edn, Sage 2011).

objectives associated with the SDGs?” A follow-up open-ended question asked the participants to explain what factors they had used to arrive at rating of the governments’ performance on the SDGs. To identify priority SDGs that Churches could contribute to, participants were asked to identify SDGs that needed to be prioritised by the Nigerian government, SDGs that might be in conflict with the teachings of Christianity and SDGs that their churches could contribute to the most. Participants were also asked to identify specific community development projects undertaken by their churches and what methods would be best for raising awareness about the SDGs among church members. Credibility of the instrument was determined using expert review, as recommend by some authors.⁵⁹ Consequently, prior to conducting the study, the data gathering instrument was reviewed with 2 RLs and the initial instrument was altered based on their comments.

Data Analysis

The data that was gathered from the interviews was analysed through content analysis. The objective of content analysis is to systematically transform a large amount of text into a highly organised and concise summary of key results.⁶⁰ The first step in the process is the familiarisation with the data gathered. For this study, familiarization involved repeated reading of the data whilst actively searching for patterns. Next followed the division of the text into meaning units and subsequently condensing of these meaning units. The third step was the formulating of codes and the final step involved the development of categories and themes.

Results

Nigeria’s Performance in Relation to the SDG’s

Participants were asked to indicate how well they perceived that Nigeria had performed in the attainment of the SDGs and their reasons for this assessment. Responses obtained are shown below in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Rating of Nigeria’s SDGs Performance

| S/N | Response | Frequency | % |
|-----|--------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Very Poorly | 9 | 41 |
| 2 | Poorly | 12 | 54 |
| 3 | Can’t Say | 1 | 5 |
| 4 | Well | 0 | 0 |
| 5 | Very Well | 0 | 0 |
| | Total | 22 | 100 |

Table 2: Reasons for Rating

| S/N | Criteria | Frequency | % |
|-----|---------------------------------|-----------|----|
| 1 | Current State of Infrastructure | 19 | 86 |
| 2 | UN Progress Metrics | 1 | 5 |

⁵⁹ Carolyn Waltz, Ora Strickland and Elizabeth Lenz, *Measurement in Nursing and Health*, 5th Edition 2016. Springer Publishing Company; Robert Gable and Marian Wolf and Instrument Development in the Affective Doman: Measuring attitudes and values in Corporate and school settings. 2012. Springer Science and Business Media.

⁶⁰ Christian Erlingsson and Petra Brysiewicz, ‘A Hands-on Guide to doing Content Analysis’ (2017) 7 AJEM 93 <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211419X17300423>> accessed on 1 July 2020.

| | | | |
|---|--------------|-----------|------------|
| 3 | No Response | 2 | 9 |
| | Total | 22 | 100 |

Table 1 shows that the overwhelming majority of the RLs (95%) indicated that they felt that Nigeria had performed poorly/very poorly in her attempt to achieve the SDGs. The different factors affecting the RLs ratings of Nigeria’s performance regarding the SDGs are shown in Table 2. The majority (86%) of factors identified by the religious leaders were categorised as “Infrastructure”. Reference was repeatedly made to the poor state of hospitals, roads, drainage, electricity, security and schools across the country. Some of the responses provided include:

“Take for example, pipe borne water, there is no pipe borne water to households in Nigeria. Practically, everyone has to sink a borehole by themselves and even when they do this, there is no government mandated testing of the water to ensure that it is clean.”

“For instance, Goal No. 7, most parts of Nigeria are still in darkness. We are yet to celebrate 24 hours of uninterrupted electricity supply. Practically every house in the country owns a generator.”

“We currently have poor roads, healthcare facilities, schools, epileptic power supply. The fact that even the presidential clinic in Aso Rock can’t attend to the president, is evidence that we are not doing well.”

“Things like water and power supply are still considered to for only the rich and those that can afford to pay for them. A government that can’t provide these things can’t meet up with these SDGs.”

“I think the most important reason for that is very poor communication between the government and the people. Most people are totally unaware of the SDGs, what they mean and what achieving them can mean for the people) ...statistics in many of the sectors show that little or nothing has been done. There's still a very high rate of unemployment and underemployment (as a matter of fact, I think there's more underemployment in Nigeria than even unemployment). People still don't have clean portable water except they provide for themselves and given the gross imbalance in our economic table not many people can really afford to provide their own portable water. Many people still live under unthinkable housing or should I say shelter conditions. Our education sector seems to be turning out higher numbers of graduates and yet lower and lower numbers of quality manpower to grow our economy and guarantee development. Mortality rate is on the rise, life expectancy is reducing significantly, insecurity and political destabilization seem to have become Nigeria's second name.”

“We have poor facilities throughout the country, due to issues such as corruption among politicians. The poor state of things in the country has

now been made more apparent and even worse as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic” you check throughout the country.”

Churches and the SDGs

Participants were asked to identify specific SDGs that they felt were in conflict with their religious beliefs, SDGs that should be prioritised in Nigeria and SDGs that religious institutions could contribute to the most. Their responses to these questions are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3: Churches and the SDGs

| S/N | SDGs List | Opposition / Reservations | Prioritise in Nigeria | Leading Role from Churches |
|-----|---|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | Zero Poverty | - | 22 (100%) | 22 (100%) |
| 2 | Zero Hunger | - | 22 (100%) | 22 (100%) |
| 3 | Good Health and Well-Being | - | 22 (100%) | 22 (100%) |
| 4 | Quality Education | - | 22 (100%) | 17 (77%) |
| 5 | Gender Equality | 5 (23%) | 10 (46%) | 6 (27%) |
| 6 | Clean Water and Sanitation | - | 4 (20%) | 4 (18%) |
| 7 | Affordable and Clean Energy | - | 5 (23%) | 1 (5%) |
| 8 | Decent Work and Economic Growth | - | 4 (18%) | 1 (5%) |
| 9 | Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure | - | 3 (14%) | 1 (5%) |
| 10 | Reduced Inequalities | - | 4 (20%) | 1 (5%) |
| 11 | Sustainable Cities and Communities | - | 1 (5%) | - |
| 12 | Responsible Consumption and Production | - | 2 (9%) | - |
| 13 | Climate Action | - | 1 (5%) | - |
| 14 | Life Below Water | - | - | - |
| 15 | Life on Land | - | - | - |
| 16 | Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions | - | 3 (15%) | 4 (18%) |
| 17 | Partnerships for the Goals | - | 2 (9%) | 1(5%) |

Table 3 shows that a minority of religious leaders (23%), identified SDG5 as the only SDG that they had some level of opposition to. Participants indicated that, while not opposed to acts of female empowerment such as ensuring girls get to go to school and encouraging financial independence of women, they were against any actions that in their opinion sought to alter the prescribed roles of men and women within a family structure, as established in religious teachings. Some of the responses provided as explanations for this, include:

“SDG 5 based on my understanding, is limited to only female empowerment and ending discrimination among women. Issues such as maybe gay rights and contraceptives are beyond what role churches might be able to perform.”

“In the Bible the role of men and women are established, such that the man is considered to be the head of the household and the woman his support. I am opposed to anything that might change that.”

“A woman is meant to be supportive of her husband and a helper to him. When things happen that lead to a woman to no longer play this helper role, I as a pastor can’t encourage such.”

Table 3 also shows that all the participants identified SDG1 (100%), SDG2 (100%), SDG3 (100%) and SDG4 (100%) as goals which the Nigerian government needs to prioritise. In the course of the interviews, various RLs frequently mentioned that certain goals that are essential to human survival and basic needs (such as food, water, sanitation and healthcare) have to be attained first before others could be tackled. In addition, it was also suggested that some of the goals, such as SDG11, SDG12, SDG13, SDG14 and SDG15, were too “foreign” or “advanced” for Nigeria. Some responses provided by the RLs include:

“From looking at the different SDGs provided, some just seem to foreign and advanced for a country like Nigeria. We have other pressing issues that need to be addressed first.”

“I think things like hunger and health need to be properly addressed before we can look at other goals. You can’t be telling sick or hungry people about climate change and things like that.”

“Several of the SDGs require the public to first be educated about their importance. Without that many people will simply just ignore them.”

“Without first addressing issues such as the serious unemployment in this country, most people, especially the youths among us, won’t take other SDGs seriously. The government needs to provide jobs for people first.”

“Health is wealth and I mean that if people get sick and they can’t afford the right treatment, it will be virtually impossible for them to think about any other issues, no matter how the government may promote them.”

Table 3 also shows that the majority of the RLs identified SDG1 (100%), SDG2 (100%), SDG3 (100%) and SDG4 (77%) as those that they believed that churches could contribute to the most. For a majority of the RLs, these particular SDGs were based on requests they had received from members of their congregation over time. A sample of some of their responses include:

“A lot of the time, my members come to me with requests for assistance with money for hospital bills and school fees and I give what I can afford.”

“I saw a member who I had noticed was not coming to church, when I enquired why, he said his child had been sick and he was struggling to raise money for drugs. These are some of the stories, I get, and I have to help when I can.”

“When service ends most days, I find people waiting for me with different problems and requests. What I have discovered is that most of the time, it’s all about money for drugs or for food or for rent or something.”

“This COVID-19 situation has not helped, but my members in addition to counselling usually identify problems they have connected to money. Some time back, a member reached out because he needed money to start a business. That’s some of the kind of requests that I get.”

Raising SDG Awareness

Participants were asked what strategies could be adopted for raising awareness about the SDGs among members of their congregations. The analysis and breakdown of their responses is shown below in Table 4.

Table 4: Promotion of the SDGs in Churches

| S/N | Means of Promotion | Frequency | % |
|-----|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Special Programmes | 21 | 75 |
| 2 | Flyers / Posters / Announcements | 4 | 14 |
| 3 | Sermons | 3 | 11 |
| | Total | 28 | 100 |

Table 4 shows the 3 main approaches which the RLs identified for promoting the SDGs. Conducting special programmes (75%) for promoting SDGs awareness was the most proposed means of promoting the SDGs. This was followed by proposals for the use of flyers/posters announcements (15%) and preaching about the SDGs in sermons (2%).

Intervention by Churches

Participants were asked to identify specific projects or initiatives undertaken by their churches to help improve living conditions of their members or immediate communities, and thereby promote development. The responses to these questions are shown below in Table 5.

Table 5 – Interventions by Religious Institutions

| S/N | SDG List | Frequency | % |
|-----|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1 | Financial Handouts | 14 | 25 |
| 2 | Interest Free Loans | 9 | 16 |
| 3 | Medical Support | 10 | 18 |
| 4 | Education | 10 | 18 |
| 5 | Skills Acquisition | 7 | 12 |
| 6 | Boreholes | 4 | 7 |
| 7 | Road Repairs | 2 | 4 |
| 8 | Peace Initiatives | 1 | 2 |
| | Total | 57 | 100 |

Table 5 shows that 8 different types of projects/development initiatives undertaken by churches were identified. Financial handouts (25%) were the most common type of initiative, followed by medical support (18%) education (18%), interest free loans (16%) and skill acquisition workshops (12%).

Financial handouts typically involved the handing out of money to particular members to assist them in overcoming personal difficulties. Interest free loans on the other hand, were handed out to members, specifically for business start-up or expansion purposes.

Medical support was executed in two principal forms: churches building hospitals, which could be utilized by both members of the church and the general public, and the invitation of healthcare professionals to provide medical services to members.

Education was provided in two primary forms. First, some of the participants indicated that their religious institutions had built schools attended by both the church members and the public. Second, projects for education also took the form of the scholarship grants for members at various levels of education.

Finally, skill acquisition workshops, were aimed at promoting entrepreneurship among members, for them to become financially stable.

Participants further indicated that the type and size of the different initiatives were usually driven by the needs of congregation members or the immediate community in which the church was located and the resources available to the church. Thus, while certain initiatives, such as financial handouts and scholarships were aimed specifically at members of the church, other more capital intensive projects such as the repair of roads, the provision of boreholes and medical support, were executed by the bigger churches for the benefit of both members and the immediate community.

Some of the responses recorded that led to the categorizations used in Table 4, include:

“(Our church) has been performing different roles, over the years. Quality schools and hospitals have been established, with scholarships being awarded to thousands. When the situation requires it, relief materials are given out frequently and we also get involved in housing, water, electrification projects and road rehabilitation.”

“The Church has built schools and skill acquisition centres. We also provide free medical care and have sunk boreholes in rural communities.”

“At this point, focus is more on church members rather than non-members and the wider community. The focus is mainly on poverty alleviation in different forms. Sometimes it’s money to pay bills or for business purposes.”

“We try to do different things such as the monthly distribution of palliatives, the maintenance of the road leading to the church and the giving of money to indigent members to establish businesses. Depending on the person or situation, you make it a loan or just a gift.”

“We try to provide support for education, health facilities and special care for the poor and less privileged. I also try to focus more on those I think are in more serious predicaments, when compared to others.”

Discussion of Findings

The dominant view among the RLs was that Nigeria is performing poorly in its efforts to attain the SDGs. This view is supported by official reports on performance indicators on Nigeria’s SDGs progress.

SDG1 – no poverty, SDG2 – zero hunger, SDG3 – good health and well-being and SDG4 – quality education, were identified as the SDGs which need to be prioritised by both the government and FBOs. Similar views have been expressed by FBOs in both Ethiopia and India.⁶¹ The recurrent prioritisation of this cluster of four SDGs, together with SDG5 and SDG6, particularly in developing regions, is driven by a basic-needs approach (BNA). The BNA focuses on the removal of mass deprivation through meeting consumption needs such as nutrition, housing, clothing, health, sanitation, potable water, education and transport.⁶² One key determinant of the BNA is poverty⁶³ and with reports showing that Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the highest number of people living in poverty,⁶⁴ the focus on this cluster of SDGs in Nigeria is therefore unsurprising. Conversely, in developed regions where there is relatively less poverty, it is the goals of SDG7 – affordable and clean energy, SDG12 – responsible consumption and production and SDG13 – climate action that appear to pose the biggest challenges⁶⁵ rather than the SDGs cluster driven by BNA.

Raising awareness about the SDGs has previously been identified as one of the important roles played by Churches and this study found a clear preference for utilization of experts / special programmes in performing this role rather than posters / flyers and the incorporation of SDGs themes in sermons. This creates the potential opportunity for various government agencies to work with RLs and their institutions to promote the SDGs through organising SDGs awareness programmes for the church congregations. It is important to note that, while the SDGs may fit into the marketable dimensions⁶⁶ of the Church's mission, to be more effective the marketing of SDGs in Churches must be linked to the spiritual identities and values of congregants. For instance, with the emergence of SDG5 as the only SDG with the potential for conflict among churches in Nigeria, it may be more challenging to enlist churches in promoting SDG5 targets wholly. The perception of SDG5 among the RLs is not unsurprising. Opposition to SDG5 was found among FBOs during attempts to domesticate the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in Nigeria.⁶⁷ Similar reservations to SD5 were also found a FBOs in other countries,

⁶¹ Emma Tomalin, Jorg Hausteine and Shabaana Kidy, 'Religion and the Sustainable Development Goals' (2019) 17 TRFIA 102 102 < <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2019.1608664>> accessed 1 July 2020.

⁶² Dulcie Krige, *The Basic Needs Approach to Development: The Question of Education for Black People in Natal* (Centre for Social and Development Studies, University of Natal Durban, 1990) < <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/30266883.pdf>> accessed 14 June 2020.

⁶³ Derill Watson II, 'Poverty and Basic Needs' in David Kaplan (ed), *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics* (Springer 2014) < https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-94-007-6167-4_442-1> accessed 1 July 2020.

⁶⁴ Homi Kharas, Kristofer Hamel, and Martin Hofer, 'The Start of a new Poverty Narrative' (brookings.edu, 19 June 2018) < <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2018/06/19/the-start-of-a-new-poverty-narrative/>> accessed 4 July 2020.

⁶⁵ Derek Osborn, Amy Cutter and Farooq Ullah, 'Universal Sustainable Goals: Understanding the Transformational Challenge for Developed Countries' (Stakeholder Forum 2015) < https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1684SF_-_SDG_Universality_Report_-_May_2015.pdf> accessed 30 June 2020.

⁶⁶ Bruce Wrenn, 'Religious Marketing is Different' (2011) 32 SMQ 1. This paper argues that marketing principles should only be applied to the relational objectives of religion such as the offering of social services and the creation of community.

⁶⁷ Oluwafunmilayo Para-Mallam, Bolatito Lanre-Abass, Fatima Adamu and Adebayo Ajala, 'The Role of Religion in Women's Movements: The Campaign for the Domestication of CEDAW in Nigeria' (2011) Religion and Development Research Programme Working Paper 59/2011 1 < https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a6ae5274a27b200083d/working_paper_59_complete_for_web.pdf> accessed 4 July 2020.

including Ethiopia, India and the United Kingdom.⁶⁸ This opposition is attributed to both prevalent cultural, socio-economic practices and theological interpretations of Bible passages, such as Ephesians 5: 21-33 and Colossians 3: 18, which reinforce the perception of men as preeminent human beings compared to women.⁶⁹

Overall, when analysed within the framework of the SDGs, the interventions by religious institutions in Nigeria, fit primarily into SDG1 – no poverty, SDG2 – zero hunger, SDG3 – good health and well-being and SDG4 – quality education. Secondary SDGs include, SDG8 – decent work and economic growth, SDG9 – industry, innovation and infrastructure and SD16 – peace, justice and strong institutions. The focus in particular on SDGs (1 – 4) by churches, again fits in with the BNA to development in developing countries like Nigeria and suggests that religious institutions are already actively contributing to those SDGs which they consider as priority and as those they believe they can contribute the most to. Entrepreneurship, which is linked to SDG8 – decent work and economic growth, is not only highly desired by individuals in Nigeria,⁷⁰ but has been linked to the attainment of the SDGs in Nigeria.⁷¹ The lack of emphasis on SDG9 – industry, innovation and infrastructure, despite it being a major problem in Nigeria might be linked to the fact that infrastructure is owned and controlled by government, a factor which influenced the actions of FBOs in another study.⁷² Another barrier, given the funds available to most FBOs, could be the enormous cost associated with infrastructure in Nigeria.⁷³ Furthermore, the lack of interventions by religious institutions towards SDG16 might be linked to the notion that Christianity as a religion already espouses similar principles through biblical teachings. The teachings cover relevant such themes as being peacemakers, being created in the image of God, unconditional love towards God and people, confession, repentance and reconciliation.⁷⁴ These messages, delivered during sermons, might be considered enough by Churches in particular, and thus no pressing need for SDG16 specific projects or interventions exists.

Conclusion

This study sought to examine the role of Churches in the attainment of the SDGs in Nigeria. The findings from the study indicate that SDG1 – no poverty, SDG2 – zero hunger, SDG3 – good health and well-being and SDG4 – quality education are in addition to being the goals that RLs consider to be most important to Nigeria and Churches, are also the goals which a majority of Church interventions are directed towards. The primary reason for the

⁶⁸ Emma Tomalin, Jorg Hausteijn and Shabaana Kidy (n 60)

⁶⁹ Rose Uchem, *Gender Equality from a Christian Perspective* (SNAAP Press 2005).

⁷⁰ Omole Iyayi and Stephen Obeki, 'The Dark Triad and Entrepreneurship Intentions among Nigerian University Students' (2018) 13 NAMJ 145.

⁷¹ Nikolaos Apostolopoulos, Haya Al-Dajani, Diane Holt, Paul Jones and Robert Newbery, 'Entrepreneurship and the Sustainable Development Goals' in Paul Jones (ed), *Contemporary Issues in Entrepreneurship Research* (Emerald Publishing Limited 2018).

⁷² Emma Tomalin, Jorg Hausteijn and Shabaana Kidy (n 60).

⁷³ Jamilah Nasir, 'Lawan: Cost of Infrastructure Projects in Nigeria Highest in the World' *The Cable* (Nigeria, 2 July 2019) <<https://www.thecable.ng/lawan-cost-of-infrastructure-projects-in-nigeria-highest-in-the-world>> accessed 14 June 2020.

⁷⁴ Tsjeard Bouta, Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, 'Faith-Based Peace-Building: Mapping and Analysis of Christian, Muslim and Multi-Faith Actors' (Clingendael Institute & Salam Institute for Peace and Justice 2005) <<https://gsdrc.org/document-library/faith-based-peace-building-mapping-and-analysis-of-christian-muslim-and-multi-faith-actors/>> accessed 4 July 2020.

prioritisation of these particular SDGs is the high level of poverty within the country. Given that SDG1, SDG3 and SDG4 are also among the priority SDGs identified by the Nigerian government in its ERGP, an opportunity exists for cooperation between the government and Churches with respect to the promotion of the relevant SDGs. As stated, religion and religious leaders have significant influence over members of their congregations, and this can be harnessed to organise workshops and similar activities for improving public awareness of SDGs and strengthening agency for promoting the achievement of the SDGs. However, the onus is on government and its relevant agencies to cultivate the partnership for SDGs implementation with Churches as the latter continue to initiate development programmes within their communities and these need to be coherent with the SDGs and the overall national development agenda. Moreover, the Nigerian government stands to benefit when Church projects can be linked to specific SDGs, thereby increasing the nation's SDGs rating. The government therefore needs to develop incentive schemes to encourage churches and other FBOs to link their current and future projects to specific SDGs.