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The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria and Societal Development

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Abstract:

The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) is a group of churches that believes in the experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit through speaking in tongues and the manifestation of spiritual gifts. PFN has collaborated with development agencies, individuals and PFN member churches to improve the standard of living of numerous Nigerians. Ogbu Kalu (2008) points out that the Pentecostal community serves as a social security network that brings solace to a community of suffering. However, the establishment of non-governmental organisations in Pentecostal churches in light of the failure of the Nigerian state to provide adequate social services to its citizens has implications on the churches themselves. Kalu probes if the Pentecostal churches work for the benefit of the entire society or use social services and evangelism as a means of growing their numbers? In line with this postulation, this study explores the ways by which PFN has alleviated socioeconomic problems in the country single-handedly and in collaboration with development organisations and individuals. The study discusses the implications of these socioeconomic programmes in the Christian community and society at large. It also examines the prospects and challenges of PFN partnering with individuals and developmental organisations. The research uses a qualitative approach with primary and secondary sources from in-depth interviews, participant observation, sermons of PFN leaders and bibliographical sources. The case study is PFN in the south-west of Nigeria from the founding year in 1985 to 2015.

The Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria and Societal Development

PFN and the Socioeconomic Situation in Nigerian Society

In 1985, different types of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria – Classical Pentecostals, Indigenous Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals (Ayegboyin and Ukah, 2002) – formed the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) as an ecumenical group. It was inaugurated on 14th November, 1986 in Lagos and was incorporated on 12th June, 1989 (Oyeniran, 2005; Okomolehin, 2014; Ukachi, 2013).

Supporting his view with Psalm 24:1: 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein', Obijole (1993) elucidates on the fact that Christianity cannot and has never stood aloof of economic interest of the society because Christians are integrated human beings whose lives cannot be divided into compartments. He further explains that since the whole life is under the judgment, love and grace of God, man is responsible to Him for his conduct in political, economic, international, personal, private and social affairs (Obijole, 1993). Speckman (2016) argues that it would be incorrect to aver that African Churches are not involved in development work. Instead, he states, all the different forms of Christianity on the continent (mainline, African Independent Churches and Pentecostals) have participated in societal development with different perspectives. Following Obijole, Christians – and also Pentecostals – in Nigeria could not have detached themselves from socioeconomic activities, as there are persons in need in the society and there are injunctions in the Bible which instruct on kindness, love, help, care and passion.

There now seems to be a relation between the growth of the Pentecostal movement and the socio-political and socioeconomic situation in Nigeria. This is due to the fact that Nigerian Pentecostal ministries and churches grew drastically as a result of the economic and socio-political development of Nigeria after 1960. Ojo (1988) clarifies that the rapid growth of urbanisation in the seventies was a consequence of the oil boom. This period was also characterised by social unrest and political uncertainties (Ojo: 1988). In addition, Akinola (2001) observes that the period in question was filled with socio-political tensions and a collapse in virtually all state institutions to the extent that there were no provisions for social services and the Pentecostal movement promised spiritual solutions for these social problems through prayers.

Buttressing the point, Adogame observes that:

This so-called era of 'oil-boom' and successive military regime sparked off popular discontent and organized protests at both private and public levels. The perceived dismal failure of the period led to the belief in some segments of the society that problems can only be resolved religiously. Thus, religious communities particularly the then new Christian movement with Pentecostal and charisma persuasion served as an avenue where claims of alternative source of problem resolution are legitimized. (Adogame, 2005:1)

One can argue that the prospects of healing, accurate prophecies, miracles and visions added to the rapid growth of the Pentecostal movement. The fact that in Nigerians' indigenous religion much significance is attached to spiritual solutions contributed to this development. The spiritual activities of the African Independent Churches and Pentecostals serve as an alternative to the spiritual activities of the African Traditional Religions.

However, at this early stage the involvement of Pentecostals in the socioeconomic dislocation earlier indicated was predominantly spiritual. At that time, Nigerian Pentecostals were urged to exonerate themselves from politics and governance as well as from social issues. Only later were projects on social

transformation seen as a means of preserving lives and a channel to bring life back to the decaying socioeconomic system of Nigerian society (Oyedepo, 2005). In-depth interviews conducted with key leaders of PFN, namely Omobude (2015), Ukachi (2015), Dada (2015), Akinola (2015), Oke (2016), Akin-Akinsanya (2016), Banwo (2015) and Opayinka (2015), confirmed that PFN realised the need to get involved in providing socioeconomic services only at a later stage. However, once this was the case, services were strongly advocated at all levels of the fellowship and donations towards it were given both in cash and kind. A good number of socioeconomic projects were put in place to demonstrate the practicability of God's provision for society alongside the spiritual solutions. The socioeconomic activities of PFN in Nigeria encompassed diverse areas: education, medical services, economic empowerment, legal matters and governance. However, the PFN historical records were silent about the socioeconomic activities for the sake of modesty, as claimed by the key leaders from its inception in 1985 till around 2000 (Omobude, 2015; Ukachi, 2015; Dada, 2015; Akinola, 2015; Oke, 2016; Akin-Akinsanya, 2016; Banwo, 2015; Abifade, 2015; Opayinka, 2015).¹ The stance of the fellowship then was in Matthew 6:3, which says: 'But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.' This belief of the PFN of not getting involved initially and being silent about records of their socioeconomic projects is likely to have influenced the opinion of Gifford in Nigeria's case (Gifford 1998) as pointed out by Adogame (2016) that Africa's 'new churches' do not have any 'conscious social agenda' in mapping their 'direct political involvement, strategies for entering the political arena and the attenuated political theology that they canvass'. While some socioeconomic projects were executed by PFN single-handedly, others were executed in partnership with individuals, Pentecostal churches and ministries, and development agencies. The next section provides examples of some such projects PFN has executed in south-west Nigeria.

Examples of Some Socioeconomic Projects of PFN in South-West Nigeria (1985–2015)

Education

In Ekiti State, PFN collaborated with the Chapel of His Glory to embark on a scholarship scheme in 2006. The programme focuses on giving financial support to students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. By 2015, about eighty students had benefited from the scholarship. The members of the two groups, Chapel of His Glory and PFN, are always enjoined to donate financially to sustain the programme, and over 3 million naira (about €7,000) has been raised and spent so far (Salami, 2015).

In 2006, Bishop Reuben Oke of The Redeemed Evangelical Mission in collaboration with PFN in Ogun State started a project called 'Care Ministry' to support some indigent students of Moshood Abiola Polytechnics in Abeokuta. This Ministry provided free accommodation and free medical care for the students. In addition, the care ministry catered for the spiritual needs of the students through prayers, spiritual counsels and words of admonition from the scriptures. To sustain the ministry financially, special offerings were usually collected during Sunday service from members of the church (Oke, 2016).

For vocational training, Osun State PFN collaborated with a group named Operation Blessing (OB) in early 2011 to train more than twenty people in fashion designing for four months. Fifteen people were also trained in computer skills (Adebayo, 2015).

The Ogun State PFN contributed to improving the primary education in Ipokia Province in collaboration with other stakeholders in 2012. Facilitated by efforts of PFN representatives, well-furnished classrooms

¹ PFN is at present effusive in participating and filing adequate and necessary records about its developmental projects.

were provided for Iganalade Primary School, Ibooro Primary School and Ijako Primary School. Similarly, classrooms at Sala-Orile were renovated (Dada, 2015).

A group named Christian Chaplaincy partnered with PFN in Oyo State to instil morality in secondary school students. They visited many secondary schools in both urban and rural areas of Oyo State to educate secondary school students on morals they need to imbibe to have an ideal society (Adeniyi, 2015).

In 2014, Ogun State PFN in Egba Province donated free school uniforms to indigent pupils of Owu Baptist Primary School, Abeokuta. In this same vein, free school sandals were distributed to pupils who attended school barefooted at the African Primary School, Owu, Abeokuta (Kirin, 2015).

One of the major preoccupations of PFN in Osun State is to ensure that secondary school students pay their West Africa Examination Certificate (WAEC) examination fee with ease. Osun State PFN paid the WAEC fee for about 100 secondary school students from the 1990s till 2015 (Adebayo, 2015; Adeyemo, 2015). Also, prizes are awarded on an annual basis to any student with excellent results in the examination.

Health

The most common health service is free mobile outpatient clinics with free medications and occasional colloquia on health matters. One example is the Chief Shepherd Mission, who for more than 15 years collaborated with medical professionals in PFN in Oyo State for medical missions in rural areas. Chief Shepherd Mission also offers maternity services at moderate charges.

Also, Christian Chaplaincy is engaged in a project called *Igbo Owe*². Christians from PFN, irrespective of church affiliation, usually join the group. Christian Chaplaincy's focus is to evangelise rural areas and give free medications to the sick (Adeniyi, 2015).

Osun State PFN from the year 2004 till around 2011 was in partnership with 'Operation Blessing' and executed free health service programmes, sending medical professionals and medical drugs to different areas. Through the programme, Osun PFN treated 16,838 outpatients, gave 1,735 pairs of glasses and conducted hepatitis and HIV tests for 765 people (Adebayo, 2015).

The PFN at Yewa Region Ogun State teamed up with Bishop Samuel Akinola Dada of All Believers Congregation from Lagos to organise a project tagged 'Medical Crusade' in 18 villages in 2011. The team diagnosed people's ailments and gave necessary treatments for free. Added to this was the distribution of clothing for people in need (Dada, 2015).

Ogun State PFN swayed the Millennium Development Goals' (MDGs) team around 2012 to start maternity centres at Igbogila and Igbokofin of Yewa Region. They persuaded the team to donate six motorcycles in 2005 to ease mobility during emergency treatment (Dada, 2015).

Lagos State PFN chapter teamed up with Lagos University Teaching Hospital in 2012 to run free screening for prostate cancer for men (Kehinde, 2015). Also, in 2015, members of the chapter were implored to donate blood to the blood bank at the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (Kehinde, 2015).

² *Igbo Owe* is a Yoruba tradition. It is a form of cooperative work in which farmers especially from the same local community work together on one another's farm in rotation. The target was to make farm work faster as nobody was expected to be lazy in the group. This term was adopted by a Christian group in evangelism.

A health talk was organised by Ogun State PFN in February 2014 for the general public at the Church of the Lord Revival Ministry, Ajaka, Sagamu (Soile, 2014). Colloquia on health matters were organised for the public at Epe in September 2015 and Kosofe in October 2015 (Kehinde, 2015).

Economic Empowerment and Humanitarian Services

For economic empowerment and humanitarian services in Ekiti State between 2004 and 2006, PFN in collaboration with Industrial Development Cooperation in Abuja organised a skill acquisition programme. Skills acquired included making of pastries, soap and fertiliser. About 500 people benefited from this programme (Salami, 2015).

The general body of PFN in the south-west started in 2007 a 'Trade Fair' programme for the general populace in south-west Nigeria. This was organised to encourage people with small-scale industries to market their products. The Fellowship at Iwo, in 2010, donated grinding machines, motorcycles and generators for financial empowerment. Close to thirty people benefited from this kind gesture (Adeyemo, 2015).

At Ilesha in Osun State, seminars were organised for ministers and interested members to help them discover their economic potentials. These took place in 2007, 2008, 2011 and 2012. Also, in 2013, Osun State PFN visited prison inmates at Ilesa prison and liaised with the prison authority on how to rehabilitate pardoned inmates and those that have completed their jail terms (Balogun, 2015).

Also, Ogun State PFN, between 2012 and 2013, went into collaboration with Arewa Cottons to provide jobs to unemployed people. The team made available cotton seedlings, farm implements and machinery, while the residents released their lands. At harvest, farm products were exported to generate financial gains and empowerment. Bayo Otayemi, the Head of Department of Entrepreneurship Development and Economic Empowerment, PFN Ogun State, was the coordinator of the project (Dada, 2015; Otaru, 2015).

At Ijebu Ode North East Province, PFN organised colloquia on skills acquisition in 2013 and 2014 to give people financial empowerment. Skills acquired included hat, soap and bread making, hall decoration and baking different types of pastries (Olubote, 2015). In 2014 at Iresi, Evangelist B.B. Maranatha on behalf of PFN gave hybrid cassava stems to farmers to plant.

In 2015 Lagos State PFN organised a training workshop on how to become security guards. This was in conjunction with the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC). The chapter gave out sewing machines, hairdryers and coolers to women to enable them to make ends meet. In addition, the PFN chapter in July 2015 organised general skills acquisition in soap, bread, cake and hat making as obtainable in other states at Apapa, Lagos for over 200 people.

From the examples above, it becomes clear that PFN usually supplies free human resources, and at times offers financial support to accomplish these projects. Most of the time, the main financial resources are provided by the partners.

Prospects of the Partnership of Developmental Agencies with PFN

In light of Kalu's notion, it has been ascertained that Pentecostal churches in Nigeria also team up at times with other stakeholders. However, Thiani (2016) observes that unlike the mainline churches, African Initiated Churches have got money by generating funds locally; they do this not relying so much on western donations. At times, their clergies imitate the tent making ministry of Paul (Acts 18:3) to generate funds for sponsorship of these projects, encourage the church to engage in viable investment

projects and also gear members up to pay tithes, offerings and donations. According to him, this proved that these sets of churches in which PFN falls do not really need to rely on foreign help unless it is of absolute necessity (Thiani, 2016). This however does not imply that foreign or local development agencies should not collaborate with PFN. It only signifies that the fellowship already has something at hand – whether a lot or a little – and just needs a top-up.

Moreover, Pentecostal churches in Nigeria today are seen to be ‘crowd pullers’. As indicated by Anderson, the Pentecostal and Charismatic constitute the fastest growing group within Christianity today (Anderson, 2004). Pentecostal churches and ministries are numerous and found almost everywhere in Nigeria. They make use of makeshift worship centres such as shops, uncompleted buildings, event centres, school classrooms, mountains, large tents and small sheds, and big edifices that serve as permanent auditoria for worship by some of them. Felix Omobude, the National President of PFN, explained in an interview that PFN is the fastest growing arm of the church in Nigeria despite being within half a block³ of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Besides, there is hardly any part of the nation where PFN is not felt. To some this is called proliferation of Pentecostal churches. However, Felix Omobude expressed that the word ‘multiplication’ should be used instead of ‘proliferation’ in order not to denigrate the Pentecostal churches. He emphasised that the growth of PFN is a result of the revival of the Pentecostal churches and that society should expect more such growth (Omobude, 2015). Certain things however must have been responsible for the attraction of Pentecostals to the Nigerian masses. According to Kalu:

Pentecostal ethics empowered survival through the inoculation of self-control, discipline, initiative, aspiration, mutual self-help, economic thrift practices, spiritual healing ethics of trust worthiness, cleanliness, psychological cleansing from insidious corruption and wholeness through the expulsion of unruly spirit... also, Pentecostal optimism has been a strong weapon in changing the social structure of Christian membership. (Kalu, 2008:139)

Speckman (2016) points out that African Christians, especially professionals, were attracted to Pentecostal churches because they offer both the spiritual and the material needs. As observed in the course of this study, leaders of PFN at its different levels were oriented towards improving the lives of unemployed, uneducated, sick and destitute people. PFN is a good avenue to reach many people easily. Moreover, PFN already runs a programme that favours ‘development from below’ (Adogame, 2016). Development from below, according to Adogame, are local epistemologies of development, human progress and flourishing which capture the everyday lived experiences of people and how they navigate the exigencies of life to make sense of their existence (Adogame, 2016).

Added to the above is the existing vigour of PFN as an ecumenical group. Oyalana describes ecumenism as the movement for worldwide cooperation among Christian churches separated by distance, practice, doctrine and history (2000). Ecumenism fosters unity among denominations, and avoids waste of resources, skills and talents. The ecumenical strength has helped PFN execute socioeconomic projects without prejudice against any societal group because there is an advantage of easily combining many resources needed for the projects. Furthermore, Kalu expressed that Pentecostals formed umbrella associations to serve as a pressure group and to instill discipline among the members (Kalu, 2008). If PFN serves as a pressure group for the Pentecostals in Nigeria, there is a tendency to hold its integrity in higher esteem. As a matter of fact, in terms of discipline, Omobude (2015) confirmed that the

³ PFN is a twin association with Christian Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (CPFN) which comprises The Apostolic Church, Christ Apostolic Church and The Saviours Apostolic Church.

fellowship tries most times to follow up by questioning misbehaving churches or members and by playing the necessary advisory roles.

PFN leaders also observed that PFN's socioeconomic programmes are of good value and often of higher standards than those of government institutions. For the programmes on education, especially schools founded by member churches have higher and better standards than the existing public or government schools, as stated by the key PFN leaders Ukachi (2015), Omobude (2015) and Banwo (2015). In these schools, laboratories are well equipped, libraries are well stocked with current books, there is proper classroom management, teachers are well remunerated, student hostels are well furnished, and there is stable electricity (powered by generator) and well-equipped information and communication technology centres. Many of these facilities are often lacking in government schools (Ukachi, 2015; Omobude, 2015; Banwo, 2015). For medical activities, beneficiaries commented that the services are of high quality and that PFN has filled the gap of some services that are no longer available in the government hospitals (Annual Reports from Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria and Operation Blessing, 2004; Annual Reports from Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria and Operation Blessing, 2010; Annual Reports from Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria and Operation Blessing, 2011). The fellowship has also positively affected lives in numerous villages of south-west Nigeria through education on health and sanitation. Therefore, the quality employed by PFN in rendering socioeconomic services could be maximised by development agencies, if there is collaboration.

Moreover, the organisational structure of PFN reaches the grassroots. They operate and hold regular meetings in every region of the country in order to reach individual Pentecostal churches or ministries directly and duly. Therefore, developmental projects can easily reach targeted beneficiaries in every nook and cranny if PFN is used as a channel.

PFN member churches have been found attractive to youths in their membership structures, as the fellowship is innovative and dynamic in their programmes. Many new ideas and orientations in Christianity have been seen to have come from this group. They move as fast as possible to keep up with the latest technological innovations (participant observation, 2012–2015). More so, PFN at all levels is never idle in items of activities. This is because they claim that they could be led by the Holy Spirit to organise any programme at any time (participant observation, 2012–2015). These programmes include various forms of prayer meetings, revival, praise programmes, talent hunts, talent shows, welfare and humanitarian programmes, healing services, sport, anointing services, quiz competitions and musical concerts, which are all attractive to the youths. Kalu (2008) affirms that the members of Pentecostals are predominantly youths and female. Nigerian Pentecostals are very unique in their relationships with the youths and could thus easily influence the future of the society (Oyedepo, 2000).

Challenges of the Partnership of Developmental Agencies with PFN

PFN as a fellowship is aware of some unfaithful members of the fellowship who have mismanaged some amount of money posted towards the welfare and empowerment of others. However, Okonkwo expressed that despite the fact that some covetous members had pilfered the wealth of the church in the past, most PFN ministers maintain financial integrity (Okonkwo, 1999). Ukachi was thrilled that in very recent years financial mismanagement in 'high places' has virtually faded away among PFN as the founding fathers took financial integrity very seriously. Omobude said that disciplinary measures had been put in place for offenders and this has really helped the fellowship to correct some anomalies (Omobude, 2015). The implication of this is that the PFN was and is still ready to take action against corruption in its own ranks.

In line with the above, the ambiguous role of the 'prosperity gospel' popular among PFN's member churches is likely to be a challenge. Pentecostal churches are often criticised for placing too much emphasis on prosperity and material wealth. Members are often persuaded to contribute more than their tithes and offerings, to embark on expensive projects like expensive church buildings. According to Omobude, PFN churches and ministries are the ones with the largest cathedrals and membership (Omobude, 2015). As well observed by this research, the preaching of the prosperity gospel is conversely seen by some people in the society as a weakness. Kalu (2008) listed money as one of the factors that have caused the highest number of scandals in churches. However, he views the prosperity gospel from the angle of evangelisation, which is a cost-intensive enterprise in the modern world. Strangely, according to Kalu (2008), many describe the Pentecostals' rapid growth, use of media, crusades and expansive structure without paying attention to the costs they are facing. According to him the incorrect outsider's impression is that pastors build churches just for money. Notwithstanding, he does not deny the fact that money could betray the moral underbelly of some Christian groups (Kalu, 2008: 141). Meanwhile, the Pentecostal Fellowship has not left this course unaddressed. Archbishop Benson Idahosa admonished PFN shortly before his demise that they should build ministry and integrity, and not finance. He emphasised that Christianity is not a show business and that God is not against wealth but that He is against wealth that will make someone forget Him (Idahosa, 1997). Mike Okonkwo clarifies that the church of God is the distributor of God's wealth and abundance on earth and so must have money, but that pastors must not manipulate people to give money (Okonkwo, 1999). Ukachi explicates that in these recent times, the church is trying to balance health and wealth messages with spirituality (Ukachi, 2015). The prosperity gospel and the Pentecostal churches can be viewed from different angles; as truly observed, the Pentecostal churches are givers. They exchange gifts among themselves; they give towards spiritual programmes and to society. These cases show a 'plough back' or 'recycling' of wealth syndrome. This nevertheless does not erase the obvious fact that some of the church leaders live flamboyantly; they see themselves in succession of Abraham in the Bible, who was also rich and close to God.

Recommendations

In order to reach successful collaborations of development agencies with PFN, the study gives the following recommendations:

- An official introduction is quite important to initiate a relationship. There is need to consolidate relationship formally. This may call for official meetings, interactive sessions, conferences and workshops. There will be the need to have a memorandum of understanding (MOU). This is because as well observed, the PFN will not intend to jeopardise their vision of evangelism for anything.
- Another side to the immediate past point is that the agency should allow PFN to participate duly. The agency should not assume or generalise people's need. They should allow the beneficiaries to state their specific needs to avoid waste of resources and time.
- There is an essential need for open supervision and monitoring. Adequate reports and feedbacks must be requested for and documented appropriately. These should be done by all the parties involved affably to advocate truthfulness. The agency must not be unnecessarily strict as this may scare the partner and thus the beneficiaries.
- The study also recommends that PFN church members should guide their ostentatious lifestyle with integrity or if possible, avoid it. If corruption is a general bane in the Nigerian society, then the

Pentecostal movement must be a place to correct such; Pentecostals are to be good examples of trustworthiness. Also, disciplinary measures should be enforced on any member who violates the imperatives of integrity and accountability.

Conclusion

PFN has improved Nigerian society through socioeconomic projects like education, medical services, economic empowerment, legal matters and governance. There is a possibility of partnership of development agencies with Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria to develop Nigeria, because human rights, good governance, human welfare and social justice constitute common goals of development agencies and PFN. Akinola (2015) clarifies that one of PFN's responsibilities is to promote good governance, because the fellowship understands the fact that good governance will promote peace, justice and the provision of social amenities; thus, it serves as a smooth platform for the propagation of the gospel. Therefore, PFN sees itself as a stakeholder in the overall governance of Nigeria as a nation (Akinola, 2015). This produces, therefore, a form of symbiotic relationship. While the paramount aim of PFN is to preach the gospel, development agencies aim at improving the socioeconomic status of the society. However, the two can still work in unity. Jesus Christ, who is the example of Christians, was also engaged in socioeconomic activities. He provided food for the hungry, He preached to the poor (Matt 14:13–21; Mk 6:34–44; Lk 9:11–14); He was compassionate to heal all kinds of diseases (mirrored in health and medical services) even when they all came in their multitude in the eventide (Mk 1:32–34; Mt 8:16) and they went home rejoicing. He interfered and gave fair judgment during the trial of a woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:49). He normalised the economic activities of the temple to stop the bad example of corruption, fraud and robbery in the Jewish society. In summary, this study advocates partnerships between development agencies and PFN so as to improve the physical, spiritual and socioeconomic life of Nigerians.

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