

**The Role of Catholic Church in Curbing Economic Hardship in Ekwulobia, Anambra State**

**Author:**

<sup>1</sup>Chika Ike   
<sup>2</sup>Victor Chukwuebuka Omeke 

**Affiliation:**

<sup>1</sup>Foundation Programme / JUPEB  
 Madonna University, Nigeria  
<sup>2</sup>Department of Religious and  
 Cultural Studies, University of  
 Nigeria, Nsukka

**Corresponding author:**

Victor Chukwuebuka Omeke

**E-mail:**

ebukaomeke11@gmail.com

**Dates:**

Received: 14 Jun., 2024  
 Accepted: 29 Jul., 2024  
 Published: 20 Sept., 2024

**Citation:**

Ike, C., & Omeke, V. C. (2024). The Role of Catholic Church in Curbing Economic Hardship in Ekwulobia, Anambra State. *Nsukka Journal of Religion and Cultural Studies*, 12(2), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13810309>

**Disclaimer:**

All opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the editors of Nsukka Journal of Religion and Cultural Studies (NJRCS).

**Copyright:**

©2024. Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license



**Abstract**

Economic hardship has become a pervasive challenge in contemporary Nigeria, threatening the welfare of citizens. The struggle for survival has intensified, with traditional means of livelihood proven insufficient to support families. Ekwulobia, Anambra State, is particularly affected, with a geometric increase in food costs compromising nutrition and well-being. This study argues that the Catholic Church plays a vital part in addressing hardship challenges prevalent in Ekwulobia, Anambra State, Nigeria. By adopting the teachings and practices of Jesus Christ towards the destitute, the Church provides sustainable livelihoods, improve nutrition, and enhance the well-being of the affected population. This research employs a phenomenological approach to explore the Church's potential response to economic hardship in Ekwulobia, with an emphasis on: understanding the reasons for economic hardship in Ekwulobia, Examining the Church's beliefs and customs on poverty alleviation etc. The study posits that the Catholic Church's intervention can significantly alleviate economic hardship in Ekwulobia by addressing the immediate needs of the affected population and promoting sustainable livelihoods. The findings suggest that the Catholic Church in Ekwulobia adopts a more proactive role in addressing economic hardship through sustainable livelihood programs and social services.

**Keywords:** Role, Catholic Church, Curbing, Economic hardship, Ekwulobia

**Introduction**

This paper examines the role of the Catholic Church in curbing economic hardship in Ekwulobia. Ekwulobia is a town in Anambra state, Nigeria with nine villages. It's divided into two parts: Ezi and Ifite. Recently, Nigeria has been facing many problems due to bad governance. Ekwulobia is also affected, with high prices, food scarcity, and poverty. The notable and the most disturbing are inflation and economic sabotage. There is a dearth of food provision and an increase in price of other basic human necessities like the cooking gas and fuel. Poverty and economic hardship in Ekwulobia town have disempowered both the poor and the rich amongst them. Nothing is moving as it used to be. Ekwulobia is known for its exceptional hospitality, and resourceful particularly in its warm reception of strangers. This commendable attribute has led to the town being affectionately referred to as "Ekwulu," a moniker that translates to "Ekwulobia, a haven for strangers" or "Ekwulu na anabata ndi obia," meaning "Ekwulobia, a welcoming community for all visitors." And with this fact, the Igbo speaking town in south-eastern Nigeria called Ekwulobia witnessed a lot of development to the extent that the state government of Anambra state acknowledged Ekwulobia town as one of the major cities in Anambra state but the present hardship in Ekwulobia has changed the face of Ekwulobians.

The present economic hardship in Ekwulobia and the effect it has on the citizens and their environment was analysed by Fatile and Igbokwe-Ibeto "A country cannot truly claim to be developed if most of its people are still struggling with extreme poverty" (Fatile & Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2012).The failure of traditional rulers in the town to tackle and resolve the economic hardship bedeviling the town since the inception of the past president of Nigeria, Mohammed Buhari as the president of Nigeria and the take-over of the present president of Nigeria, Tinubu has resulted to all manner of crime in the land. The persistent increase in the cost of food items, housing, fuel, cooking gas among others in Ekwulobia town and the enormous challenges it poses has made them a vulnerable community. The rate of poverty in Ekwulobia has scuttled the economic development of the town. Since the government has little or nothing to offer in order to ameliorate the situation, there is need for the Church to perform her role as a caring mother that she is. The research adopted the phenomenological design. This method is apt for this study because the research discusses the current experience of the people of Ekwulobia. Sources of data were both primary and secondary: primary data was from oral interview while secondary data included textbooks, journals, articles, dictionaries and so on.

**Ekwulobia People: Its Brief Ethnography**

Ekwulobia is a town in Anambra State, Nigeria. It's an important town and the center of Aguata local government. The town was founded by a kind and generous man named Ekwulu, who welcomed strangers. This tradition of hospitality continues today, with many people moving to Ekwulobia and being accepted by the community. The town has nine villages, divided into two groups: Ezi and Ifite. Ekwulobia is famous for its colorful masquerades, called Achukwu, which perform during festivals like Christmas and Easter. The town also celebrates special events like the new yam festival and honors its elderly leaders. The traditional leader of Ekwulobia is Chief Sir Emmanuel Chukwukadibia Onyeneke (Raphel Eze, personal communication, 10<sup>th</sup> September, 2023).

### Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices

The people of Ekwulobia have traditional religious beliefs and practices. Some of these have changed due to outside influence. They believe in a Supreme Being called Chiokike, who is the creator and controller of all things. They consider Him the greatest God and approach Him with respect and fear. To connect with Chiokike, they worship smaller gods and spirits like Otalu, Ezejingu, and Udo. These gods are kept in special buildings or under trees and are cared for by priests. People show respect to the priests and gods by offering them food and other items. The people of Ekwulobia also believe in lesser spirits, including the souls of their ancestors. They think that God is the source of all life, solves problems, and takes care of the world. They believe in other gods, but Chiokike is the most important. They still practice some traditional customs, like masquerading (Achukwu Ukpo), where they dress up as ancestors and visit people. The people offer them food and dance with them.

### The Historical Origin of Catholic Church in Ekwulobia

The Catholic Church came to Ekwulobia in 1925. Before that, the Anglican Church had been there for many years. The Catholic Church started in a place called Adazi and moved to Ekwulobia through a priest named Rev Fr. Albert Bubendorff. At first, the people of Ekwulobia who wanted to be Catholics had to travel far to attend church services. They asked the priests to start a church in Ekwulobia, and it was first located at a police station called Agudo Umuchi. The priests, Rev Bubendorff and Rev Fr Liddane, came from other towns to lead the services. The church was given land by two local men, Ezekafor Nwadayi and Ezekafor Okeke. The first people to become Catholics in Ekwulobia were baptized in 1926. They were led by priests who came from other towns. As more people became Catholics, the church needed a bigger space. A new piece of land was given to the church, but it was a scary place where dead bodies had been left. A brave priest, Rev Fr. Liddane, cleared the land and showed the people it was safe. They built a mud church and a house for the headmaster. The pioneer Christians were Albert Okolocha, Ruben Ogwatta, Hezekiah Ezeuchu, Alfred Ezechukwu and Moses Nwosu. Others were: James Ike, Ezekiel Nwankwo, George Nwankwo and Peter Anojue (Ike, personal communication, 8th December 2023).

### Economic Hardship in Ekwulobia

There is massive hardship in Nigeria today and Ekwulobia town in Anambra State is not excluded. Economic hardship could be attributed to bad, corrupt and selfish governance. The wealthy few get richer every day, while the poor struggle to survive. The implication of this is that the poor becomes exposed and are ever ready to do anything in order to survive. They sell their conscience, and morality becomes a past story to them. They can be easily influenced with money in order to survive. Some of them are being used as sex machines, hired killers, thugs, and kidnappers and so on. Economic hardship has great effect both on individual person and the society at large. They affect people's spirits, bodies, relationships, and minds. Also, they make the environment dangerous for those living there.

The economic hardship in Ekwulobia town has led to a surge in motorcycle riders popularly called *okada*, as many youths have abandoned their education or other livelihoods to take up riding Okada as a means of survival (Nwosu 2017). This is often a last resort, as it is a risky and unstable occupation. The increase in Okada riders is a clear indication of the economic struggles faced by the community. Furthermore, the rise in child hawkers is a heartbreaking consequence of economic hardship (Mba 2012). Families are so struggling that they are forced to send their children out into the streets to sell goods, putting them at risk and denying them a formal

education. This not only affects the children's future opportunities but also perpetuates the cycle of poverty.

The closure of local industries, such as the Ekwulobia Textile Mill, has had a devastating impact on the community. The significant job losses and economic disruption have led to further economic hardship, making it difficult for families to make ends meet. The economic hardship has also had a tragic impact on healthcare, particularly for pregnant women (Ilechukwu, 2019). The increase in maternal mortality rates is a clear indication of the struggles faced by expectant mothers, who are unable to afford antenatal care or delivery services. Additionally, the rise in school dropouts is a sign of the economic struggles faced by families, who are no longer able to afford school fees or materials (Eze 2015). This not only denies children an education but also limits their future opportunities, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. The economic hardship has also led to an increase in housing rents, as landlords take advantage of the demand for housing to increase rents.

This makes it difficult for low-income families to afford decent housing, leading to overcrowding and poor living conditions (Nwosu, 2017). Finally, the rise in crime rates in the town is a consequence of economic hardship, as desperate individuals turn to crime as a means of survival. This includes burglary, theft, and armed robbery, which can have serious consequences for victims. The increase in crime rates is a clear indication of the economic struggles faced by the community. It has brought our young girls out from their parents' house to the streets for prostitution. Some of the graduates that are unemployed roam the streets and get themselves involved in one fraud or the other. Economic hardship in Ekwulobia has also led the youths into joining cultism, many of them have turned out to become ritualists; armed robbery has become the order of the day just as the use and sale of hard drugs is no longer a crime among the youth. All manner of social vices has turned out to be a problem that has spread and become deeply rooted into the bone marrow of our young ones. Overall, the economic hardship in Ekwulobia town has had far-reaching consequences, affecting every aspect of life in the community. It is essential to address these issues to improve the lives of the people of Ekwulobia.

### Effects of Economic Hardship

Economic hardship refers to a state of financial struggle or difficulty, often resulting from factors like poverty, unemployment, or financial crisis. The effects of economic hardship can be far-reaching and impact individuals, families, and communities in various ways, including:

- i. **Reduced living standard:** Economic hardship in Ekwulobia town can lead to a decrease in income, forcing individuals and families to cut back on essential expenses like food, housing, and healthcare etc.
- ii. **Food Insecurity:** Food insecurity is a pressing issue in Ekwulobia town, where economic hardship and migration have made People don't have enough food to eat. They don't have healthy food to eat either. This is a big problem. Many residents struggle to make ends meet, forcing them to prioritize spending on other essential needs over food. This results in a range of negative consequences, including malnutrition, hunger, and food rationing. The situation is further complicated by migration, as remittances from migrants may not be sufficient to support food needs, and migrants themselves may face food insecurity in their new locations. This can have a ripple effect, impacting not only the migrants but also their families back home. To address food insecurity, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach that tackles the root causes of the problem. This requires a focus on sustainable agriculture initiatives to

- iii. increase food availability, as well as support for local food systems and markets. Additionally, food assistance programs can provide a vital safety net for vulnerable populations, while nutrition education and awareness campaigns can help residents make informed choices about their diet. Ultimately, addressing food insecurity in Ekwulobia town will require a sustained effort to improve household incomes and food purchasing power, ensuring that residents have reliable access to nutritious food and can break the cycle of poverty and hunger.
- iv. High level of Unemployment and Jobs Loss : unemployment is a major problem of our time, and the town of Ekwulobia is also affected. Many people in Ekwulobia can't find work, even though they are able and willing. This is a big problem for the town and the country. It's made worse by corruption and poor management. Experts say it's a major challenge for Nigeria. When people don't have jobs, they can't support themselves and their families. This leads to problems like crime, low self-esteem, and poor mental health. Every government tries to fix the economy, but so far, none have succeeded. As more people are born, the problem of unemployment gets worse. It's a serious issue that affects everyone. Udabah (1999) argued that the primary cause of poverty in poor countries is the failure to effectively use the skills and talents of their workforce, unlike wealthier nations. Fadayomi (1992) and Osinubi (2006) believed that unemployment stems from ineffective use of a nation's workforce, especially in rural areas. According to Muhammad, Inuwa, and Oye (2011), unemployment is a major obstacle to development. Alanana (2003) notes that joblessness has far-reaching and devastating effects on the economy.
- v. Increased Poverty and Hunger: Measuring poverty can be done in different ways. Researchers use social indicators to assess economic hardship and affluence. They look at direct measures of deprivation, such as lack of food, heat, or healthcare (Bauman 1998, Mayer and Jencks 1993). Income alone does not always show a household's true needs. Some households may still struggle with basic necessities despite having a decent income. Additionally, individual household members may suffer due to unequal sharing of resources. In these cases, direct measures of hardship can provide a useful indication of poverty, especially when comparing across countries. Many sociologists prefer these measures.
- vi. Increase in suicide: The increase in suicide rates in Ekwulobia town can be attributed to a complex interplay of factors, primarily driven by economic hardship. The town's residents face significant financial struggles, including high levels of poverty and unemployment, which can lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair. This economic strain can be particularly overwhelming in a community where access to mental health resources is limited. The lack of mental health professionals, counseling services, and support groups in Ekwulobia town means that individuals struggling with mental health issues often go without proper care. This can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and disconnection, as individuals may feel they have nowhere to turn for help (Conger, & Martin, 2010). Furthermore, the town's limited access to healthcare services, including mental health treatment, can make it difficult for individuals to receive the care they need. This can be particularly challenging for those experiencing trauma, abuse, or violence, who may require specialized support. The combination of these factors creates a perfect storm that can lead to increased suicide rates in Ekwulobia town. Addressing these underlying issues through community-based initiatives, mental health services, and support systems is crucial to preventing suicides and promoting overall well-being in the town.
- vii. particularly challenging for those experiencing trauma, abuse, or violence, who may require specialized support. The combination of these factors creates a perfect storm that can lead to increased suicide rates in Ekwulobia town. Addressing these underlying issues through community-based initiatives, mental health services, and support systems is crucial to preventing suicides and promoting overall well-being in the town.
- viii. Increase in Dollar exchange rate: The increase in the dollar rate has had a significant impact on Ekwulobia town, leading to economic hardship and affecting the lives of its residents. The rise in the dollar rate has led to higher prices for imported goods, making essential commodities like food, medicine, and fuel more expensive. This has reduced the purchasing power of the local currency, making it difficult for residents to afford basic necessities. As a result, businesses in Ekwulobia town have struggled to stay afloat, leading to: Reduced sales and revenue, Increased costs for imported raw materials, difficulty in paying debts and meeting financial obligations. Furthermore, the increase in the dollar rate has also affected the town's agricultural sector, which is a significant contributor to the local economy. Farmers have struggled to export their produce due to the unfavorable exchange rate( Tyler, 2018-2020).
- ix. Migration: Some residents have migrated to other areas in search of better economic opportunities, leading to a brain drain and reduced workforce. The impact of migration on Ekwulobia town is a multifaceted issue that affects various aspects of the community. One of the primary concerns is the brain drain that occurs when skilled and educated individuals leave in search of better opportunities. This not only deprives the town of their expertise but also hinders its ability to address its economic challenges. The town's potential for innovation and entrepreneurship is also severely impacted, leading to a lack of job creation and economic growth. Furthermore, the reduced workforce resulting from migration can lead to labor shortages in essential services like healthcare and education. This can compromise the town's ability to provide quality services, ultimately affecting the well-being of its residents. The demographic consequences of migration, such as an aging population and gender imbalance, can also lead to social and economic challenges. The economic consequences of migration are equally concerning. Reduced consumer spending and tax revenue can impact local businesses and public services, leading to a decline in the town's economic viability. The social consequences of migration, including disrupted community cohesion and cultural heritage, can also have a profound impact on the town's identity and sense of belonging. To address these challenges, it is essential for the town to develop strategies that foster a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, encourage community engagement and social cohesion, and provide support systems for migrants and their families. By doing so, Ekwulobia town can mitigate the negative impacts of migration and create a more sustainable future for its residents.
- x. Strain on family relationships and social structures: Economic hardship can lead to increased tension and conflict within families, causing emotional distress and potentially even physical violence. This can result in divorce, separation, or family breakdown, leading to



instability and insecurity for children. In addition, economic hardship can weaken community bonds, leading to reduced social interactions, community engagement, and collective activities. This can cause social cohesion to decline, resulting in increased social isolation, reduced trust, and decreased sense of community. Furthermore, economic hardship can lead to decreased support networks, making it harder for individuals and families to access help, resources, and emotional support during difficult times. To address this, it's essential to promote social support, community engagement, and economic stability. This can be achieved through initiatives such as: Community programs and services, Financial assistance and counseling, Support groups and counseling services, Education and job training programs. By addressing economic hardship and promoting social support, we can help strengthen family relationships and social structures, leading to a more cohesive and supportive community.

- xi. Dropping out of School or High rate of Illiteracy: When people can't read or write, it's hard for them to escape poverty. Education is the key to unlocking a better life. We need to encourage families to value education and help adults learn to read and write. If people have more education, they can get better jobs and earn more money. This can help their communities grow and prosper. In fact, for every extra year of education, the economy can grow by 3.7% and people's incomes can increase by 6%. If children in poor countries could just learn to read, 171 million people could escape poverty. Education is the answer to a brighter future (Anthony, Kay, & Steward, 2022).
- xii. Moral Decadence: The economic hardship in Ekwulobia has led to a situation where negative behaviors are now widely accepted in society. For example, Yahoo (a form of cybercrime) is now tolerated and even accepted in some families and communities. Prostitution is another manifestation of moral decadence. Unfortunately, some churches are also contributing to the high rate of moral decadence by accepting money from individuals engaged in cybercrime (known as "Yahoo boys") and failing to preach the true teachings of God's word, thereby inadvertently encouraging them to continue their criminal activities.

#### **The Responsibility of Catholic Church towards Amelioration (Improving) of Economic hardship in Ekwulobia.**

The Catholic Church plays a significant role in curbing economic hardship in Ekwulobia. Its teachings emphasize caring for the poor and vulnerable, as seen in Papal encyclicals and ecumenical councils (Pope John XXIII, 1961). The Church's approach is two-fold: teaching apostolate and pastoral care of the poor (Pope Paul VI, 1967). Through social teachings, the Church educates people about the true nature of poverty, rejecting notions that it's accidental or due to laziness (Nkechi, Okwuosa, & Uroko, 2018). Its teachings emphasize solidarity, social justice, and charity as essential for addressing poverty. The Church encourages everyone to support the poor, recognizing it as a matter of justice and restoring what's rightfully theirs. In Ekwulobia, the Church can draw on its social teachings to develop initiatives that address economic hardship. This can be achieved by providing education and skills training to equip individuals with employable skills, enhancing their chances of securing better-paying jobs or starting their own businesses (Kessler, 2007). Economic empowerment programs can also be initiated to support small-scale businesses and entrepreneurship development.

Financial assistance schemes and cooperative societies can provide access to capital, enabling individuals to start or expand their businesses.

Moreover, the Church can operate healthcare services, including hospitals, clinics, and healthcare facilities, to provide affordable medical care to the community (Pope Benedict XVI, 2009). This can help reduce the financial burden of healthcare expenses, allowing individuals to allocate resources to other essential needs. The Church can also offer social welfare services to support the vulnerable, including the poor, widows, and orphans (Achunike, 2004:131). Additionally, it can advocate for policies and programs that promote economic development and social justice, championing the cause of the poor and marginalized (Matthew 25:31-46). Community development projects can also be implemented to improve living standards. Initiatives like agriculture, water, and sanitation projects can enhance food security, health, and overall well-being. Spiritual support can also be provided through pastoral care, counseling, and spiritual guidance, helping individuals cope with the emotional and psychological impact of economic hardship.

The Catholic Church in Ekwulobia diocese also empowers women to escape poverty through education, self-reliance, and social inclusion, helping them become forces for positive change (Nkechi, Okwuosa, & Uroko, 2018). Under Peter Cardinal Okpaleke's leadership, the Church has denounced bribery and corruption, which perpetuate poverty and hinder progress. Through regular letters, the Catholic Bishop of Ekwulobia has cautioned the government and state about the dangers of bribery and corruption.

#### **Poverty Alleviation Activities in Ekwulobia Diocese**

The Catholic Church in Ekwulobia has made significant contributions to the community through various initiatives. In education, the Church has established numerous schools and scholarship programs to provide opportunities for the masses. Additionally, it has built hospitals, orphanages, old people's homes, and homes for motherless children, demonstrating its commitment to caring for the vulnerable. In the Ekwulobia diocese, a scholarship program supports needy students. Furthermore, the Church has empowered rural women through its loan program, offering loans at low interest rates. This initiative is available in all seven Catholic dioceses of the Onitsha ecclesiastical province. The Church's agricultural department shares farm produce with the poor, while women's cooperatives have been equipped with food processing machines and rice mills in various locations. These efforts have enabled many disadvantaged and physically challenged individuals to be rehabilitated and employed in Catholic establishments such as farms, hospitals, schools, and printing presses (Aniebonam, personal communication, September 4th, 2024). The Catholic Church has also addressed poverty through women's empowerment, recognizing that many women are victims of poverty. By providing education, skills training, and economic opportunities, the Church has helped women become forces for positive change in their communities.

Since, economic hardship is a global problem and is alarming in Ekwulobia, this research sought to explore practical ways in which the church have tried to ameliorate poverty in the town or is trying to make a difference. According to Ike (Personal communication, July 8, 2024) from Agba Ekwulobia, the Catholic Church in the town dislikes poverty and it provides a conducive framework for alleviation of poverty. This positive measure taken was distribution of money, cloth and food stuff to the people of Ekwulobia through their statutory bodies. Chukwuma from Eziagulu (personal communication, August 11, 2024), says that poverty put a lot of stress on families when parents can't provide for their children. It leads to

tension and conflict. The Catholic Church in Ekwulobia is putting up an economic development programs in order to alleviate them from hardship. Furthermore, according to Nze Omekannaya of Okpo in Agba village, the Catholic Church in Ekwulobia has contributed immensely towards alleviating poverty by reducing the cost of school fees at St Joseph's Primary School, Agba Ekwulobia, provision of water in the church compound and social protection. (personal communication, August 11, 2024). More so, the Church has developed programmes in order to tackle poverty in Ekwulobia. Nnebedum from Ula Ekwulobia confirmed this when he made mention of the inauguration of JDPC in Ekwulobia and their impact in the land. (personal communication, August 11, 2024).

According to Ezennajike, from Ula Ekwulobi Ia, poverty constitute a serious challenge to evangelization of Catholic Church towards Ekwulobia communities. The Church has tried in various ways to help the poor in their midst which they manifest in her various pastoral letters and communities. (Personal communication, August 11, 2024). Again, Ezekwe from Okpo village stated that Ekwulobia suffers high level of poverty. Evidences abound showing that many Ekwulobia people are languishing in poverty. Poverty has become a scourge that has devastated the community of Ekwulobia, and the Catholic Church has responded with compassion and action. They engaged in the establishment of Uzundu Microfinance Bank and with this, they give loan to people in order to boost their economy and thereby curb economic hardship in the land. (Personal communication, August 13, 2024).

The Catholic Church in Ekwulobia has contributed greatly to alleviating poverty by assisting those who cannot afford to pay their hospital bill at General Hospital, Ekwulobia and other private hospitals in Ekwulobia. Mr. Silas (personal communication, 11th August, 2024). Catholic Church in Ekwulobia remains one of the bedrock of poverty alleviation in Ekwulobia through youth empowerment programmes which provided their youths with farm tools, sewing equipment, baking materials and so on.

The Catholic Church in the town has a unique opportunity to address economic hardship in the area by leveraging its spiritual influence, community resources, and social teaching principles. According to Uche (personal communication, 24th August 2024), the Church can raise awareness and encourage people to speak openly about their struggles. They can also provide a safe and supportive environment for people to seek help. By providing spiritual support and guidance, the Church can help individuals find hope and strength in their faith, which can be a powerful catalyst for personal transformation and economic empowerment (Pope Francis, 2013). Moreover, the Church can establish economic empowerment programs that equip individuals with the skills and resources needed to improve their economic circumstances, such as vocational training, financial aid, and business guidance. Fostering a sense of community and solidarity among parishioners is also crucial in addressing economic hardship. As stated in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, the common good refers to the social conditions that enable individuals and groups to achieve their full potential and reach fulfillment (Compendium, 2004, paragraph 164). Advocating for policies and initiatives that promote economic development and social justice is another critical role the Church can play. The Church cannot take upon herself the political battle to bring about a just society, but it can use its moral authority to speak out on issues like access to education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

Finally, The Catholic Church in Ekwulobia has a unique opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals affected by economic hardship. Through spiritual support, economic

empowerment programs, community building, social justice advocacy, and collaboration with local organizations, the Church can help create a brighter future for all. By combining resources and expertise, the Church can ensure a comprehensive and effective response to economic hardship. In doing so, it can help create a better life for everyone, where all individuals have the opportunity to thrive.

### Recommendations

Economic hardship poses new challenges to Christianity all over the world including Ekwulobia. The Bishop of Ekwulobia diocese, priests and the religious have a great task of taking the necessary actions to curb economic hardship in Ekwulobia. The gospel messages imparted by these religious leaders are relevant in changing the attitude and the behaviour of their adherents about the economic hardship among the people of the town. The following recommendations are proposed based on the insights gained from this work.

- i. Conduct thorough research: Delve deeper into the root causes of economic hardship in Ekwulobia, exploring factors like unemployment, poverty, and lack of access to resources.
- ii. Engage with the community: Collaborate with local stakeholders, including Church leaders, community members, and experts, to gain a deeper insight into the challenges posed by economic hardship in Ekwulobia.
- iii. Analyze Church teachings and practices: Study the Catholic Church's teachings on poverty alleviation, social justice, and community development to identify relevant principles and practices.
- iv. Explore sustainable livelihood initiatives: Investigate successful livelihood programs, such as microfinance, vocational training, and agricultural projects, that can be replicated or adapted in Ekwulobia.
- v. Develop a comprehensive intervention strategy: Based on your research, create a multifaceted plan that addresses immediate needs, promotes sustainable livelihoods, and fosters community development.
- vi. Evaluate and monitor progress: Establish metrics to assess the effectiveness of the Church's intervention and make adjustments as needed.
- vii. Foster partnerships and collaborations: Encourage cooperation between the Church, local organizations, and government agencies to leverage resources and expertise.
- viii. Empower local leadership: Build capacity among local Church leaders and community members to ensure the sustainability of initiatives and ownership of solutions.
- ix. Youth engagement: Empowering young people is crucial in Ekwulobia. They should be involved in leadership development programs, mentorship initiatives, and economic empowerment opportunities. Additionally, emotional support should be made available to address the emotional and psychological effects of economic hardship.

### Conclusion

This paper discussed the vital role the Catholic Church played in alleviating economic hardship in Ekwulobia, Anambra state. Economic hardship is a significant problem that requires government attention. Many residents struggle to survive, lose their jobs, and become homeless. To address this, the government should create jobs and provide basic needs. The Catholic Church's initiatives and programs support the community's well-being, working alongside government efforts. Its approach engages the community and promotes sustainable development, making it a crucial partner. The Church's efforts address poverty, education, healthcare, and

community development. These efforts enhance employability and productivity by providing access to quality education, vocational training, and healthcare.

The Church's community projects and partnerships attract investments, promoting economic growth and development. Its efforts influence policies for economic growth. The Church empowers women and youth, improving their lives, and provides nutritious food, supporting the community's well-being. Overall, the Catholic Church's approach makes it a vital player in addressing economic hardship in Ekwulobia, Anambra State.

### Conflict interest

The author(s) declares that he/she has no personal, professional or financial interest that may have inappropriately influenced the outcome of this research.

### Ethical considerations

The author(s) declares that this article was conducted in accordance with ethical standards and principles for research.

### Funding

The author(s) declares that this research received no funding from any agency/organization.

### References

- Achunike, H. C. (2004). *Developing the Nigerian nation through Justice Development and peace commission of the Catholic Church*. In M. I. Okwueze (Ed.), *Religion and Societal Development* (pp. 131-141). Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press.
- Alanana, O. O. (2003). *Youth unemployment in Nigeria: Some implications*. *Global Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(1), 21-26.
- Anthony, A. K., & Steward, J. (2022). *The economic and social cost of illiteracy: A snapshot*. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 11(2), 34-45.
- Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. (2004).
- Eze, C. (2015). *The role of the Catholic Church in poverty alleviation in Nigeria*. *Journal of Religion and Social Welfare*, 44(2), 123-145.
- Fadayomi, T. O. (1992). *Migration and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Dakar, Senegal: Codesria Book Series.
- Feridum, M., & Akindele, S. T. (2006). *The crux of the matter*. In *Nigerian Economy: Essays on Economic Development* (pp. 1-13). Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press.
- Fwalina, F. (2012). *The causes of economic hardship in Nigeria and possible solutions*. *Journal of Economic Studies*, 39(1), 34-50.
- Ilechukwu, L. (2019). *Economic hardship and food insecurity in Ekwulobia, Anambra State*. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 12(1), 1-12.
- Kessler, F. (2007). *Doing Faith Justice: An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought*. Paulist Press.
- Mba, C. (2012). *Jesus Christ's teachings on poverty and wealth*. *Journal of Theology and Social Justice*, 2(1), 34-50.
- Morduch, J. (1999). *Microfinance handbook*. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 37(4), 1569-1614.
- Muhammad, S., Oye, N., & Inuwa, I. (2011). *Unemployment in Nigeria: Implications on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)*. *International Journal of Economic Research*, 2(1), 66-71.
- National Bureau of Statistics. (2012). *Labour Force Statistics*. Abuja, Nigeria: National Bureau of Statistics.
- Nkechi, G., Okwuosa, L. N., & Uroko, F. (2018). *The church and poverty alleviation in Nigeria*. *HTS Theological Studies*, 74(1), 1-9.

- Nwosu, B. (2017). *The impact of economic hardship on family livelihoods in Nigeria*. *Journal of Family Studies*, 23(1), 53-67.
- Oborji, F. (2012). *The church and practice of charity to the poor: A missiological approach*. In U. Just. Njoku & S. O. Anyanwu (Eds.), *In the Service of Charity and Truth: Essays in Honour of Lucius Ugorji* (pp. 169-202). Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press.
- Okechukwu, M. E. (2007). *How Christianity Shaped Culture: A Critical Analysis*. Lagos, Nigeria: Lagos Merit.
- Olubitan, A. A. (2014). *The impact of Christianity on poverty alleviation: A case study of the Roman Catholic Church in Nigeria*. PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan.
- Onwuliri, C. E. (2008). *The church as an agent of progress and development*. In I. M. Onyeocha (Ed.), *The Church as an Agent of Progress and Development: CIP Jubilee Essay* (pp. 70-83). Owerri: CIP Publications.
- Osinubi. (2006, July 19). *The political crisis and solution*. Vanguard, 3-5.
- Udabah, S. I. (1999). *Basic economic theory and practice*. Enugu: Linco Press Nigeria Limited, 2(1), 90-95.
- UNESCO. (2019). *Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)*. UNESCO.
- World Bank. (2019). *Gender Overview: Women Empowerment Programs*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

### List of Informants

Name	Age	Occupation	Location	Date
i. Eze Raphael	55	Farmer	Nkono	10 <sup>th</sup> September
ii. Ezekafor Ezegwu	67	Trader	Umuchi	10 <sup>th</sup> September
iii. Okafor K.E	65	Business man	Ekwulobia	5 <sup>th</sup> January
iv. Ike J.N	60	Trader	Aguata	8 <sup>th</sup> January, 2024
v. Chika Ike	46	Teacher	Ekwulobia	4 <sup>th</sup> February 2024
6. Raphael Onuora	55	Trader	Ekwulobia	10 <sup>th</sup> September, 2023
vi. Miracle Aniebonam	23	Student	Okpo	4 <sup>th</sup> August, 2024.
vii. Mr. Silas	40	Business man	Okono	11 <sup>th</sup> August, 2024.
viii. Mr Ezekwe	45	Uzundu microfinance bank	Agba	11 <sup>th</sup> August, 2024.
ix. Ezennayike Mmesoma	52	Trader	Ula	11 <sup>th</sup> August, 2024.
x. Nze Emmanuel Nnebedum	38	Trader	Okpo in Agba	11 <sup>th</sup> August, 2024.

xi. Ichie Joseph ike	53	Teacher	Okono	11th August, 2024.
xii. Ngozika Obi	21	Student	Aguata	10th August, 2024.
xiii. Chibuike Duru	26	Student	Ula	9th August, 2024.
xiv. Chinonye Mbakwe	45	Teacher	Agba	8th August, 2024.
xv. Mr. Chukwuma	55	Trader	Eziagulu	11th August, 2024.
xvi. Uche	39	Civil servant	Ihuokpal a	24th August, 2024.

### Author Biography

**Chika Nkiru Ike** is a Lecturer at Madonna University, Okija, where she is affiliated with (JUPEB) unit. Her academic background and expertise lie in the field of Religion and Human Relations, with a specific focus on Church History. Her research specialization and area of interest also center on Church History.

**Victor Chukwuebuka Omeke** is a postgraduate student specializing in Church History at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies. His research focuses on the Catholic Church's role in curbing economic hardship, with a particular emphasis on the Church's social teachings and community development initiatives.