

# Sustainable Development Goals and the Baptist Convention in Nigeria: A Critical Overview

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**Abstract:** The paper attempts an appraisal of the contributions of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) to the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). With the use of primary and secondary data and historico-descriptive designs the paper assesses the roles and contributions of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in the realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). The paper identified some factors inhibiting the influence of the NBC, in particular, and Faith-Based Organizations FBOs, in general, on making an impact in the drive towards actualizing the UNSDGs in Nigeria. Against the background of its findings the paper recommends measures for roadmapping contributions of the NBC to the actualization of the UNSDGs in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Faith-Based Organizations, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Nigerian Baptist Convention

## I. INTRODUCTION

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

Reverend Jefferson Thomas Bowen brought the Baptist Missions to Nigeria in 1850; and, in 1914 when Lord Lugard amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates, the Nigerian Baptist Convention was inaugurated in Ibadan at First Baptist Church, Idikan, Ibadan, Oyo State of Nigeria. As submitted by a scholar of Baptist History "the mustard seed of Baptist work was planted in this land in 1850 by Revd Thomas Jefferson Bowen, a Missionary of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, USA" (Ajayi, 2014:16). The church's headquarters is at Oke-Bola, Ibadan Nigeria and it has about 13000 branches around the whole country.

Similarly, it is worthy to note that in pursuit of its goals, the Baptist church in Nigeria maintains a cordial relationship with government in the country at all levels; federal, state and local. It should be noted however that Nigerian Baptist Convention places emphasis on religion as a personal relationship between the human soul and God. The personal relationship between the human soul and God,

according to the baptists, is a relationship with which no one, including the State, may interfere with or stop.

## II. CONCEPTUALIZATIONS: FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A faith-based organization is a mission oriented organization founded on a specified faith. The faith to which the organization is relating does not have to be academically classified to be a religion. The term "faith-based" organization is more inclusive than the term "religions organization" as it also refers to the non-congregation faith beliefs. Faith-Based Organizations are grassroots organizations that are locally and internationally active.

According to Vodo (2016) Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) are growing in importance in the provision of social services in Europe. In addition, Faith-Based organizations meet a wide range of needs in the community by filling in the gap between supply of and demand for welfare services. Additionally, they exert an increasing political and social output (Vodo, 2016). Meanwhile, Vodo (2016) further defines a Faith-Based Organization to be any Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that refers directly or indirectly to religion or religions values and functions as a welfare provider or as a political actor. Vodo likewise believes that Faith-Based Organizations operate through several services and activities and assist the socially excluded people. The socially excluded include people who are vulnerable, particularly those who cannot assess any form of assistance or facility. Vodo (2016) is also of the view that Faith-Based Organization provide social services to undocumented people. FBOs help the underserved and less privileged navigate complex governmental structures; and, among others, provide shelter for women and children who are under (or likely to come) under one form of threat or the other.

Furthermore, Olarinmoye (2019) lists the following as activities of Faith-Based Organizations in Nigeria: provision of basic needs and services, emergency food, clothing, shelter or financial aid; family support services (after school programs, childcare, domestic abuse programs, day care for older adults, counselling, program for prisoners); educational services (preschools, schools, training colleges, universities); health services (clinics, hospitals); advocacy and community organizing (living wage campaigns or welfare rights

advocacy); community development (employment training, business, recruitment, housing development).

### 2.1 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations

To start with, Amodu (2019:69) submits that man had always felt the need to develop. Amodu accordingly views development as a process which brings around something in the form of growth and progress. At the centre of every conceptualization of development is the idea of change. This means that every change or process that brings about progress constitutes what is generally development. Based on this note, the term “development” stands for positive change that brings about easier ways of doing things with better results. (Amodu: 2019).

The concept of sustainable development is often said to have originated from the 1987 Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development titled “Our Common Future”. As Amodu further notes, the report gives a definition of sustainable development which gained global acceptance among sustainability practitioners, researchers and activists among others. According to the Brundtland Report, sustainable development refers to “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Amodu: 2019). Sustainable development goals (SDGs) refers to a collection of seventeen goals that are designed to be “blueprints to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all (Global Goals/Policy and Advocacy: 2017).

The seventeen broad-based and interrelated sustainable development goals of the United Nation are:

- Goal 1: No Poverty (targets ending all forms of poverty everywhere)
- Goal 2: Zero Hunger (targets ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition through promotion of sustainable agriculture).
- Goal 3: Good health (targets ensuring good health and wellbeing for people).
- Goal 4: Quality Education (targets inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all people).
- Goal 5: Gender Equality (targets the assurance of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. This goal provides women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes among many others).
- Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation (targets availability of water and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all people).
- Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy (targets access to affordable, reliable, sustainable modern energy for all).

- Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth (targets promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all).
- Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (targets building resilient infrastructure, promotion of inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation).
- Goal 10: Reducing Inequalities (targets reduction in income inequality within and among countries. This is to eradicate extreme poverty, and to sustain income growth for the bottom 40% of the population at a rate higher than the national average).
- Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities (targets safety of cities and human settlements. It also seeks to guarantee accessibility to safe and affordable housing).
- Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production (targets sustainable consumption and production patterns).
- Goal 13: Climate Action (targets combating climate change and its impacts by regulating emissions and promoting developments in renewable energy).
- Goal 14: Life below Water (targets conservative and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development).
- Goal 15: Life on Land (targets protection, restoration and promotion of sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainable management of forests, combat deforestation, halt and reversal of land degradation and biodiversity loss).
- Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (targets promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provision of access to justice for all and building of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The goals is designed to reduce violent crime rate, sex trafficking, forced labour and child abuse as clear global goals in order to ensure peace and justice among people of all nations).
- Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals (targets increased international cooperation in achieving the previous 16 goals).

In summary, according to Amodu (2019), against the need for developing nations to overcome the challenges of underdevelopment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both the leadership and the followership must, as a matter of urgency, redouble efforts towards actualizing the objectives of sustainable development goals as outlined by the United Nations.

### III. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN OUTLINE OF THE IMPACTS OF THE ORGANS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST CONVENTION

The NBC has some major organs which carry out major functions. Some of the major organs are the Women’s Missionary Union (WMU), Men’s Missionary Union, Social

Ministries, Youths and Students Ministry, Baptist Mission Schools, Christian Education Department, Baptist Investment, Health Ministry, Global Mission Board, Bowen University, and Baptist Media among many others.

To start with, the WMU was created on March 14, 1919 purposely to evangelize. This organ of the NBC has made a mark in education through her Daycare Centre at her headquarters in Ibadan. The Daycare Centre was established to minister to the needs of children. It also provides job opportunities to women and men in the Nigerian society. The organ also has a water factory which is known as Sunbeam Shine Table Water. This way the NBC, through WMU contributes to Goal 5 of the SDGs, that is clean water and sanitation. With respect to the reduction of poverty and hunger, the WMU also involves herself in the distribution of food items and household materials to alleviate the suffering of the less privileged in the society.

The Men Missionary Union (MMU) equips men, young women and boys for missions. The MMU finances both home and foreign missionaries to educate natives purposely to be useful for their environment and also to be useful to God; that is to bring peace into the society. Likewise, the MMU does sponsor projects like provision of water to reduce the shortage of water. MMU also sponsors children of the less privileged in schools to reduce the rate of illiteracy.

The Christian Education Department of the NBC has contributed to the reduction of illiteracy in Nigeria through its Adult and Literacy Education Division. The initial objective is to make members become literate, and now the concern is to make all Nigerians to acquire western education.

Another major organ of the NBC is the Discipleship Training Ministry which focuses on equipping people to become self-reliant. This has a major influence in the eradication of inequality, poverty and hunger in the society. The division has contributed to the SDGs especially in the areas of poverty reduction, zero hunger, good health, quality education, decent work and economic growth.

The Social Ministries are known as Gospel in Action. It is proclaiming Christ not only in words but also in action. The ministry cares about, and bears with, members. The social ministries of the NBC enlighten believers on the need to empower the less privileged to become self-reliant. The social ministries have made impact on prisoners, the sick, orphanage homes (where there are many abandoned children, children with retarded growth, difficult children and children with special needs), restoration of harmony to crises-ridden homes, aged people, people addicted to drugs, relief materials to victims of natural disasters, rehabilitation of criminals and acilitation o vocational training to the unemployed.

The NBC Health Ministry through her various hospitals especially Bowen University Teaching Hospital, Ogbomosho makes contributions to the health sector in Nigeria. According to Akanji (2019) "our hospitals of great

reputation have contributed in no small way to the polity of our nation. Our major hospitals have included the Baptist Hospital, Baptist Hospital Eku, and Baptist Hospital, Kotangora, apart from smaller hospital services in the form of health centres and clinics. The Bowen University Teaching Hospital has increased in scope and influence. Not only is health and medical care provided there, it has become an arena of medical education. Doctors, Nurses, midwives and other health related experts are being trained in this institution for our nation. Products of that school are serving in both government and private hospitals across the nation and beyond thereby contributing to the overall polity of the nation".

The focus of the NBC Youth and Student Ministry is to give a platform for engendering total life for youths and students. The plan of the NBC Youth and Student Ministry is to create a commonwealth for the nation. The Ministry also focuses on reduction of social ills in the society especially within the Nigerian society. The ministry makes an attempt to maximize the creative potential in the society. In a nutshell, the Social Ministry of the NBC has influence on the reduction of inequality, poverty, hunger, gender inequality; and promotion of quality education, good health, decent work, peace, justice and strong institutions.

Meanwhile, the Baptist Mission schools have fifteen colleges that are located in different parts of Nigeria such as; Oyo, Lagos, Abeokuta, Jos, Makurdi, Port-Harcourt, Abuja, Benin City, Ore Okpe, Agbor, Obinze. The goal of the mission schools is to reduce the rate of illiteracy in Nigeria and to provide decent jobs for people. The mission schools impact on national efforts to attain the UNSDGs especially in the areas of provision of quality education and reduction of inequality in the Nigerian society.

Furthermore the NBC established Bowen University, Iwo purposely to promote Christian morality and provide vocational and apprenticeship orientation towards the full employment of its products. Bowen University seeks to instill work ethics and self-reliance in its products (Bowen 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Brochure: 2012:3). Since the University was established, one of the institution's greatest contributions to the larger society as far as her attempt at nation building is concerned is in the production of human resources. In addition, Bowen University has contributed to the expansion of the horizon of female education. Bowen University has also created employment opportunities to many Nigerians which comprise of academic and non-academic staff members as well as support staff of different nature. Furthermore, Bowen University's Solar Energy Resource and Applications Centre (BUSERAC) has been able to add value to the Nigerian society in the production of solar electricity systems for homes and offices in some locations in Nigeria. This way the university is helping individuals and communities to achieve independent sustainable energy. The center has also successfully designed and constructed solar water heaters, ovens, cookers, driers, chicken brooders, street lighting, and

refrigerators, among many others. Bowen University is also known for non-discriminatory admissions policy as the institution does not discriminate against any religion, tribe or geographic region. Bowen University has helped in natural integration. The Bowen University health centre has also contributed to the UNSDG especially in Osun state where it is located. The health centre has now grown to become a full-fledged hospital. Bowen University Hospital provides educational health talks and counseling to the society. Staff and students of Bowen University contribute to the economic growth of Iwo and its environs as majority of them live within the community. Staff and students of Bowen University redistribute a good percentage of their income to purchase goods and services that are produced in Iwo and its environs.

The Nigerian Baptist Convention also instituted several media outfits. Some of the media outfits are: Bowen Radio, NBC Frontier Television, and NBC Monthly Magazine among many others. These media establishments are created to enlighten people primarily about the activities of Nigerian Baptists in Nigeria and beyond. In addition the NBC media outfits enlighten Nigerians on the activities of governments in Nigeria. The media outfits educate the citizenry on the need for sustainable governance in Nigeria. NBC media outfits contribute to the pursuit of the UNSDGs in the areas of poverty reduction, zero hunger, quality education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reducing inequality, and promotion of peace, justice and strong institutions.

The Global Missions Board and Bowen University have contributed to food production in Nigeria through various agricultural farm settlements in Moniya, Iwo and Ijaye Orile in Ogun state. The Global Missions Board and Bowen University agricultural farm settlements contribute to poverty alleviation in the country while also providing jobs for several unemployed youths, among others.

Though a faith-based organization the NBC has diverse investment portfolios in Nigeria: in the hospitality industry (with Guest Houses in four locations namely Lagos, Ibadan, Jos and Abuja); in the print industry (with the printing press industry at Total Garden, Ibadan); in the book distribution sub-sector (with investments in Bookshops with the head office at convention building, Oke Bola, Ibadan and branches in many other parts of Nigeria); in the provision of clean water business (with the production of “Baptist Water” in Oyo town); in the finance sub-sector of the economy (with the establishment of Bowen Microfinance Bank situated in the premises of Shepherd Hill Baptist Church, Obanikoro Lagos). Bowen Microfinance Bank was established to collect deposits from customers as well as to provide capital for intending investors and loans for the working class and local Baptist churches for the finance of their various construction works and projects. The multidimensional investments of the NBC have impacted on the UNSDGs.

#### IV. INTERPLAY BETWEEN NIGERIAN BAPTIST ACTIVITIES AND UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

From the available records of activities of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, there exists an interplay between the programs and objectives of the NBC and the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. The contributions and influence of the NBC can be seen especially in the areas of Goal 1 (Poverty), Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 3 (Health and Wellbeing); Goal 4 (Education) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality especially in empowering all women and girls); Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation); Goal 8 (Decent work and Economic Growth, especially in full and productive employment and decent work for all).

The interplay between the NBC and the aforementioned sustainable development goals will be discussed below through the following tables and various organs and subunits of the Baptist Convention.

Table 1: NBC Contributions to UNSDG

Goals	The target to achieve	Contributors	Remarks
Goal 1 No poverty	To end poverty in all forms everywhere.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women missionary Union</li> <li>Social ministries</li> <li>Youth and student ministries</li> <li>Bowen University’s Investments in Human Resources</li> </ul>	Empowering women: creating employment opportunities; youth empowerment
Goal 2 Zero Hunger	To end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and to promote sustainable agriculture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bowen University</li> <li>Global Mission Board</li> </ul>	Farms at Bowen University in Iwo, Ijaye Orile, Ogun State and at Oyedeji, Moniya, Oyo State.
Goal 3 Good Health	To ensure good health and well-being for all at all ages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bowen Teaching Hospital and Baptist Hospital.</li> </ul>	Provision of professional health services to people irrespective of their religion, tribe or color.
Goal 4 Quality Education	To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bowen University, Theological Institution</li> <li>Baptist academics, various church educational institutions and literacy units.</li> </ul>	Provision of affordable education through NBC Schools.

Goal 5 Gender Equality	To achieve gender equality and empower women and girls through education, health, decent work and so on.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women Missionary Union</li> <li>• Social Ministries.</li> </ul>	Empowering women and widows for business. Educating women to own businesses. Admitting women as pastors.
Goal 6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bowen University,</li> <li>• Women Missionary Union</li> </ul>	Provision of clean water through water industries at Ibadan, Oyo, and Iwo. Provision of borehole by local churches to host communities.
Goal 7 Affordable and clean energy	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.	Bowen University, Iwo.	Provision of solar energy for homes and offices in some locations in Nigeria.
Goal 8 Decent work and economic growth.	To promote sustained inclusive and sustainable economic growth; full and productive employment and decent work for all.	Baptist schools, Bowen University, Local churches, NBC investments, Social ministries, Baptist Hospital and Bowen Microfinance.	Employment of people into various departments and agencies; hospitals and investment agencies; microfinance loans to SMEs
Goal 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.	To build infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.	Baptist press, Bowen Microfinance, Baptist Television, Bowen Radio, Local churches and Baptist Guest Houses.	Provision of social amenities. Building of structures, repairs of roads by the local churches within their communities.
Goal 10 Reducing inequalities	Reduce income inequality within and among countries.	Social ministries, Women Missionary Union and Youth and student ministries.	Empowering widows with capital to begin business; employment of women into various NBC departments and agencies (like prisons, aged and disable ministries)
Goal 12 Responsible consumption and production.	To ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.	Christian Education Department.	Educating people to prepare for the rainy days to avoid living in abject poverty in future.
Goal 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions.	Promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.	NBC Legal Department Pastors of the local churches.	Helping people to fight injustice, preaching against exploitation and all forms of vices in the society. Promotion of peaceful co-existence with Non-Baptists.

**V. NIGERIAN BAPTIST CONVENTION AND THE PURSUIT OF UNITED NATION SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

The Nigerian Baptist Convention of recent has been under several challenges which include but not limited to issues of maladministration, financial and economic misappropriation, dwindling income and internal crises. The myriad of problems confronting the NBC have by extension negatively impacted the ability of the NBC to continue to contribute its quota to the attainment of the UNSDGs in Nigeria.

First and foremost, within the level of the local churches, there are several crises that are going unabated for some years without solution. Meanwhile, the leadership of the Convention has not been up to the expected standard in effective and efficient crisis management. The various crises in NBC have led to the loss of funds and membership.

Secondly, the financial management pattern of the Convention needs to be restructured to provide more resources for the provision of basic infrastructure for the Convention staff generally. In the face of growing unemployment in Nigeria, the NBC needs to be financially repositioned to create employment opportunities. Furthermore, the NBC funds being allocated for the provision of security apparatus is worrisome. The funds allocated to the

provision of security apparatus is deflating the purse of the Convention and invariably reducing the NBC’s ability to contribute to the attainment of the SDGs in Nigeria. In addition, the economic hardship in Nigeria has contributed in no small measure to the reduction of income in the local churches which has invariably affected the ability of the local churches to make good remittances to the account of the Convention. This trend has continued to hamper the activities of the convention and the NBC influence on the attainment of the UNSDGs in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, the growing disaffection among the membership of the NBC and the increasing rate of unemployment among NBC youths contribute to the mass exodus of Baptist members to other Christian denominations. All of these continue to weaken the ability of the NBC to continue to deepen its contributions to the attainment of the SDGs in Nigeria.

**VI. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Deducing from the above, the NBC needs to be repositioned to focus on making sustainable impacts. The NBC needs to redouble its efforts in the pursuit of SDGs particularly with respect to the provision of basic amenities such as clean water and sanitation, good roads, affordable education and health facilities, among others.

Against the background of the growing unemployment in Nigeria, the NBC can do more in the area of job creation. New business frontiers need to be explored to deepen creation of employment opportunities. Given the nexus between gainful employment and peace enablement, the more Nigerians are employed the less likely the disruption of peace and order in the country. Sustainable development can only be attained in an atmosphere of peace and order.

Also against the background of the nexus between education and sustainable development, the school fees of Baptist educational institutions could be subsidized to make education available for the less privileged. The current school fees for a medical student in Bowen University per session is about three million and five hundred naira, while a law student pays more than two million naira per session. This is beyond the reach of an average Nigerian. Corruption, among other societal vices, is antithetical to sustainable development. In the light of the increasing prevalence of vices in the Nigerian society, a development that has not excluded christians of all denominations, there is the need to deepen christian ethics. The NBC should guide against falling into the socio-economic ills in contemporary society.

It is the aspiration of the UNSDGs to build a world fully inclusive, leaving no one behind, especially the marginalized, disabled, displaced, impoverished, victims of natural or man-made disasters, those in insecure areas, areas of famine and so on (Odejide: 2011). The focus of the SDGs, therefore, is to transform our modes of living for better and also secure quality lives for future inhabitants of planet earth. The SDGs aspires for the development that meets the needs of the present without jeopardizing the interests of the upcoming generations. The SDGs aim at reducing the gap between the rich and the poor, between advanced and developing countries of the world, and also advocate for peaceful coexistence.

Through their nationally spread presence in Nigeria - local assemblies, associations, conferences and convention, Nigerian baptists are strategically positioned to impact on sustainable livelihood in Nigeria. The NBC will be adding value to humanity, and in particular to the lives of average Nigerians, if she further leverages on the potentials of her organisational capacities to make a difference in the collective drive to achieve the SDGs in Nigeria.

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