Biblical Mandates as Framework for Stewardship and Youth Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Biblical mandates as essential frameworks for stewardship and the empowerment of youth. Biblical teachings emphasise stewardship as a vital responsibility, underscoring the need for individuals to manage resources wisely and make meaningful contributions to their communities. Through the examination of significant Biblical texts, the desk research rooted in Empowerment Theory and Stewardship Theory underscores the potential of faith-based frameworks to foster comprehensive youth development strategies. The study examines concrete examples of faith-based initiatives that integrate these principles into actionable programs, fostering self-sufficiency, community involvement, and sustainable development. The combination of theological insights and modern development theories creates a framework that highlights youth development aligned with Biblical principles, offering a model that can be adopted by faith-based organisations, policymakers, and community leaders. The findings underscore the important influence of Biblical mandates in shaping fair and efficient frameworks for stewardship and youth empowerment, thereby aiding sustainable and inclusive youth development.

Keywords: stewardship, empowerment, youth, sustainable, development
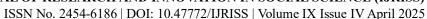
INTRODUCTION

Young individuals represent the most valuable resources that any society can possess. They are not merely seen as the future leaders; they represent, both in potential and actuality, the most significant investment for a nation's advancement. They serve as a good measure of the extent to which a country can reproduce as well as sustain itself. Their vitality, responsible conduct, and societal roles are intricately linked to the advancement of their nation. (Shishima, 2018)

Defining youth has consistently posed a challenge, and the international community, through its organisations, has recognised that this age group is a more fluid category rather than a rigidly defined age range. (Krishna and Sethuramalingam, 2017) To ensure statistical consistency across regions, the United Nations defines youth as individuals aged between 15 and 24 years while giving member states the liberty to set the boundaries based on the peculiarity of their socio-cultural realities (UN, 2013). In a similar vein, the Nigeria's National Youth Policy 2019-2023 defines youth as individuals aged 15 to 24 years (NYP, 2019), although commencement of functional responsibilities like participation in the electoral process reflected that youth typically commence at 18 years of age.

Notwithstanding the variability in the determination of this age group, age remains the most straightforward criterion for defining this group, especially concerning education and employment. Consequently, youth is typically defined as the period between the age at which an individual may exit compulsory education and the age at which they secure their first job. Youth is most accurately seen as a phase of change from the reliance of childhood to the autonomy of adulthood, along with an understanding of our interconnectedness as part of a community. (Anaeche, 2018)

Youth may be defined as the phase of life that occurs between childhood and maturity, during which time individuals experiment with many roles and identities. During the process of social integration, young people

are immersed in a complex social system that includes elements such as tradition, history, social demands, hopes, and individual prospects, all of which must be integrated into a coherent picture to lay a solid foundation for their personal lives. The transition from infancy to adulthood is driven by many socially determined norms and expectations, while economic and social integration circumstances provide the groundwork for future citizens' political socialisation. (Henze, 2015).

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the largest generation of youth in history is living in the world at present. The World Youth Report (2020) estimates that 1.2 billion people between the ages of 15 and 24 make up 16% of the world's population. The report claims that nearly 90% of young people worldwide reside in developing nations, where they make up a sizable section of the populace. Furthermore, it is estimated that 830 million young people are expected to live in Africa by 2050. Hence, youth empowerment has emerged as a crucial cross-cutting problem for achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals as the world's young population continues to increase. (UNESCO, 2023). The energy, innovation, talent, cutting-edge skills, creativity, and passion for positive change that young people bring to the global job market are invaluable assets. This combination is the catalyst that enables countries to grow, innovate, and prosper.

However, the social and economic integration of young people remains an ongoing challenge in many regions of the world. (UN, 2024). Depending on how the transition into maturity is handled, young people represent promise for better, more creative, and more successful answers to the problems facing the globe. In a sense, young people in both the developed and developing worlds are confronted with significant obstacles. Many emerging nations struggle to provide enough jobs to accommodate their demographic youth bulge, while many affluent nations have witnessed a decline in the prospects for younger generations. (UNESCO, 2023)
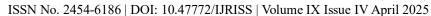
Youth empowerment refers to the process of equipping young people with the skills, resources, and opportunities needed to take control of their lives, contribute to their communities, and participate actively in national development. It includes initiatives in education, employment, entrepreneurship, and leadership, ensuring that youths are not merely beneficiaries but active contributors to societal progress (Ile et al., 2018; Heath and Moreau, 2024).

Youth empowerment in any development is essential not only for national progress but also due to the challenges faced during the transition from childhood to adulthood. (Shishima, 2018). The engagement of young individuals is essential for formulating strategies and policies that promote sustainable social, economic, and environmental development. The integration of traditional and indigenous knowledge with innovative ideas from youth fosters a holistic strategy for stewardship. Engaging young individuals in a sustainable manner enhances their connection and participation, cultivating a sense of responsibility for sustainable development. (UN, 2024)

Recognising the creativity, ingenuity, and potential of youth to effect change, young individuals are essential agents, leaders, and collaborators. Therefore, it is crucial for them to participate in forums that enable them to present their viewpoints and contribute to policymaking and support programs. Facilitating and fostering policy discussions on the significance of culture for sustainable development, with particular focus on the involvement of youth and young-oriented civil society organisations, also fosters youth empowerment and engagement. (UNESCO, 2023)

The essence of empowerment can be seen in Moses' words in Deuteronomy 4:9-10, "But be on guard and watch yourselves closely so that you don't forget the things your eyes saw and so they never leave your mind as long as you live. Teach them to your children and your grandchildren. Remember that day when you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to me: "Gather the people to me. I will declare my words to them so that they will learn to fear me every day of their lives on the fertile land and teach their children to do the same." (CEV) His instruction here, as well as Deuteronomy 6, underscores the need for continuous and intentional teaching of God's word to the next generation, ensuring that the teachings are an integral part of daily life and passed down through the family.

Jesus Christ reiterated the importance of the young ones and set an example of the essence of engagement with them when he said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14 NKJV) and Apostle Paul's admonition to young Timothy that "You

are young, but don't let anyone treat you as if you are not important…" (1 Timothy 4:12 ERV) was a confirmation of equipping the young ones and instilling a sense of responsibility and accountability in them.

The Bible establishes a robust framework for understanding the essence, nature, principles, and varieties of stewardship. This study will examine Biblical mandates as they function as foundational structures for stewardship and the empowerment of youth. The study will analyse the ways in which institutions that adhere to Biblical mandates have utilised these principles to empower young individuals and establish them as catalysts for sustainable development.

METHODOLOGY

The research, Biblical Mandates as Framework for Stewardship and Youth Empowerment, strives to analyse and investigate the substance of Biblical injunctions in the context of stewardship and youth empowerment. Therefore, a qualitative technique is adopted to examine the meanings, contexts, and applications of the Biblical instructions, encouragements and commandments. Thematic analysis of relevant Biblical passages will be incorporated with case study of typical empowerment initiatives of selected faith-based institutions to evaluate the ideas and ideals of stewardship and youth empowerment. Essential Biblical passages and doctrines are compiled and examined thematically while investigating selected initiatives by faith-based institutions replicating the concepts through a review of their project/program reports.

This method enhances comprehension of the theological and practical aspects of the subject, cultivating a comprehensive narrative on how Biblical directives motivate meaningful stewardship and youth empowerment strategies.
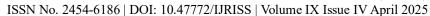
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Berñe et al (2023) examined the contextual and relational aspects that both promote and restrict the empowerment of young individuals, as perceived by specialists in the field of social education. The findings indicated that the local surroundings and the issues that have the greatest impact on young people are the most significant variables in empowering them. In order for these variables to have a positive impact, it is essential for young individuals to get guidance and assistance that is centered around fostering connections, promoting equality, and establishing secure environments and educational opportunities. Therefore, the study suggested the implementation of social and youth policies that are more integrative and less focused on welfare, aiming to foster empowerment rather than dependency.

Planas-Lladó and Úcar (2022) provided a comprehensive list of dimensions and indicators that can be used to assess the level of youth empowerment. These measures can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of empowerment programs and to guide socio-educational interventions. Empowerment has gained popularity as a concept in recent years, but there has been limited research on how to evaluate empowerment, especially in the context of young people. The study outlined the many stages involved in developing and verifying the inventory. It stated that a successful assessment of youth empowerment programs helps in designing and executing socio-educational procedures that aim to impact the empowerment of young individuals.

Boateng and Korankye (2022) in an academic article titled "A Christian View of Stewardship: A Study of Daniel 6:1-4," explored the concept of stewardship from a Christian perspective, using Daniel 6:1-4 as a case study. The authors argued that stewardship is central to Christian life and practice, and its neglect in contemporary society, has resulted in issues like corruption and negligence. They placed the discussion of stewardship within the broader biblical context, examining examples from both the Old and New Testaments. It emphasizes that stewardship begins and ends with God, who is the ultimate owner of all things, and humans are merely stewards entrusted with managing God's creation and concluded that Christians should express their faith in the public sphere to transform society both spiritually and socio-politically.

Poole (2018) defined biblical stewardship as the responsible management and sacrificial giving of all resources, including financial assets, time, passions, and knowledge. It reiterated that stewardship is not about hoarding resources but about multiplying them to imitate God's generosity. The author argued that true stewardship

requires Christians to pour themselves out for others, addressing the needs of the oppressed, hungry, homeless, poor, naked, or afflicted, both locally and internationally, and encompasses the responsible management and sacrificial giving of all resources, including time, passions, and knowledge.

Tutu (2017) explored the relationship between Christianity and politics, addressing whether Christians should participate in politics and how Christianity influences political life. It argued that politics itself is not inherently bad, but the attitudes and actions of some politicians can make it appear negative in the sight of God. The paper discussed the historical separation of Christianity from politics by early missionaries, particularly in African countries, and the resulting negative perception of politics among some Christians.

Abalogu and Nwokedi, (2024) explored the challenges and opportunities related to youth empowerment and employment in Nigeria. The study highlighted the alarming rate of youth unemployment and its adverse effects on socio-economic, political, and cultural aspects of the nation. The paper highlighted the importance of youth empowerment, which involves fostering cultural, attitudinal, and structural shifts to enable young people to take control of their lives, and examined the dangers of poor youth empowerment, such as increased crime rates, psychological issues, insecurity, political instability, and health implications. The study emphasized the role of the Church as a moral and social institution in advocating for justice, equity, and empowerment through various initiatives like skills development programs, entrepreneurship training, and policy advocacy.

Izungo and Muneja, (2021) investigated the impact of discipleship and stewardship on financial stability and spiritual growth in the church. The study reviewed 15 journal articles from America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, highlighting the importance of church members surrendering their lives to Jesus before their wealth. The study emphasized that church leaders should lead by example, encouraging members to be faithful stewards and disciples. Various studies from different continents are discussed, showing the effectiveness of discipleship programs and financial literacy in enhancing church stability. The study concluded that combining discipleship and stewardship is essential for the church's financial and spiritual well-being.

Sherley (2019) analysed Exodus 18:13-27, where Moses received advice from his father-in-law Jethro on delegating responsibilities to avoid burnout and improve community functioning. The analysis highlighted Moses' humility, willingness to learn, and the importance of empowering others. The study connected these biblical principles to modern servant leadership theories, emphasizing the need for leaders to delegate, foster inclusivity, and develop others' leadership capabilities. The paper concluded that effective servant leadership combines inner virtues with actionable behaviours to achieve optimal community and organizational outcomes.

Konstantinos (2023) explored the concept of shareholder stewardship beyond its traditional market-driven perspective. It introduced the idea of stewardship as a social norm, emphasizing its inherent sociality and autonomy. The paper argued that stewardship should be understood as a social construct that operates independently of legal frameworks, advocating for non-coercive, soft law approaches to regulation. It highlighted the evolving nature of stewardship, particularly in the context of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors, and calls for a holistic and inclusive approach to policy-making that recognizes the diverse actors and activities involved in stewardship. The article underscored the importance of social interactions and norms in shaping stewardship practices and recommended that legal reforms should support these dynamics rather than impose rigid constraints.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Empowerment Theory and Human Capital Theory.

Empowerment Theory was first promoted by Julis Rappaport, Douglas O. Perkins, and Mark A. Zimmerman. They believed empowerment linked individual capacities, skills, support systems, and proactive activities to social policy and societal change. (Rappaport 1981, 1984, Perkins et al., 1995). Empowerment theory links an individual's welfare to the broader social and political context, including processes and results to show that actions, activities, and structures can empower (Perkins et al., 1995).

Empowerment theory provides a framework for organising information to achieve goals and results which have shown that acts, activities, or structures can bring about empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment theory is unique for designing interventions and promoting social change though criticized for its theoretical flaws and power imbalances as well as over-reliance on individual responsibility with its tendency to breed dependency, inefficiency, and isolation (Mclaughlin, 2016).

Stewardship theory contrasts with agency theory by emphasising trust-oriented management over control-focused performance management. Stewardship theory asserts that managers and executives serve as accountable stewards of an organization's resources, emphasising collective objectives rather than individual interests. Stewardship theory contrasts with agency theory by positing that managers and shareholders are aligned rather than in conflict, with this alignment fostered by trust, intrinsic motivation, and organisational loyalty.

Stewardship theory is supported by scholars such as James H. Davis, Lex Donaldson, and F. David Schoorman (Torfing et al., 2020). The theory has its roots in earlier studies of management and organisational behaviour, notably Douglas McGregor's Theory Y, which highlighted the importance of employees' intrinsic motivation and self-direction in conducive environments. Stewardship theory has evolved over time, expanding its application to corporate governance, leadership, and public administration. Stewardship theory is increasingly pertinent in modern organisational contexts, especially within businesses that prioritise ethical leadership, corporate social responsibility, and sustainability. Nonetheless, it faces criticism for its idealistic assumptions and restricted applicability (Chrisman, 2019).

The combination of empowerment and stewardship theories provides a comprehensive and multifaceted framework for examining biblical directives concerning youth empowerment and stewardship. Stewardship theory, based on principles of accountability, leadership, and ethical resource management, closely aligns with biblical teachings regarding the responsible care of creation and the well-being of the community. Empowerment theory, on the other hand, focusses on the mechanisms that enable individuals and groups, especially those from excluded populations backgrounds like youth, to develop the capacity, agency, and autonomy necessary to bring about significant change in their environments.

The integration of these two theoretical perspectives facilitates a more detailed understanding of scriptural mandates, emphasising the duty to serve as responsible stewards and the necessity to foster transformative agency in young individuals. This integrated framework enhances comprehension of the intersections among spiritual, social, and ethical responsibilities in fostering holistic youth development within both faith-based and wider socio-political environments.

Case Study

This case study explores the initiatives and frameworks of three notable organisations within the Christian faith: the Justice, Development, and Peace Commission (JDPC) in Nigeria, the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA), and The Elevation Church (TEC) in Nigeria. Each of these organisations showcases a dedication to social justice and community development, embodying Biblical stewardship within unique socio-political and cultural contexts.

Catholic Church's Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC)

The Catholic Church has historically advocated for social justice and peace, functioning through multiple pontifical commissions and councils. The Commission for Justice and Peace, established in 1967 by Pope Paul VI, is a notable entity in promoting societal change. This Commission aims to advance justice and peace, enhance the Church's social teachings, and cultivate in the laity a deep awareness of their social responsibilities. The Commission collaborates with international organisations to address global challenges by collecting data on peace, human rights, and development. The Commission's hierarchical structure initiates at the grassroots level with small Christian communities and progresses upward to the Vatican. Each tier of this structure includes specific contact individuals and committees that report to superior authorities, culminating in the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace. This framework guarantees the localisation and global coordination of the

Church's mission for justice and peace. The Justice, Development, and Peace Commission represents the Catholic Church's dedication to social transformation. The JDPC exemplifies a structured approach, grassroots engagement, and a steadfast commitment to justice, positioning itself as a source of hope for communities in Nigeria and beyond. The JDPC exemplifies the transformative impact of faith in action by addressing critical social issues and promoting holistic development.

In Nigeria, the Justice, Development, and Peace Commission (JDPC) operates within a hierarchical framework, extending from the parish level to the national level. Pope John Paul II emphasised this alignment, which was further reinforced by the Nigerian Catholic Bishops Conference, illustrating the Church's commitment to integrating gospel values into national life. The mission of the JDPC is to integrate gospel values into societal frameworks, advance justice, and uphold human rights. The JDPC, functioning under the Department of Church and Society within the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, coordinates activities across nine ecclesiastical provinces to ensure a cohesive strategy for social transformation. The vision is founded on establishing a society that embodies the kingdom of God, freeing individuals from oppression and promoting dignity, regardless of race, creed, or gender.

The JDPC implements various programs focused on comprehensive human development. It prioritises programs aimed at improving literacy levels, particularly among children and youth, recognising education as essential for societal progress. The Commission aims to disrupt the cycle of poverty and establish a basis for sustainable development through the promotion of education. It enhances access to affordable healthcare through the establishment of partnerships with faith-based health facilities. The initiatives seek to enhance health outcomes, especially for marginalised populations. The JDPC emphasises capacity building and self-fulfilment through initiatives in agricultural development, skill acquisition, microfinance, and grassroots monitoring. The initiatives aim to empower individuals and communities, thereby ensuring sustainable development. (JDPC, 2024)

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA)

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) serves as a pivotal influence in post-apartheid South Africa, tackling essential socio-economic, environmental, and ethical challenges. With its inclusive approach, visionary leadership, and steadfast dedication to justice, ACSA remains a source of inspiration and a catalyst for significant change in society. The Church's mission has focused on providing quality, value-driven, and accessible education for everyone, especially those in the greatest need. The establishment of St. Joseph's Vuleka Archbishop Makgoba School for boys in Sophiatown stands out as a remarkable initiative, serving as a beacon of hope for quality education. In addition to its educational efforts, ACSA has persistently supported the plight of the underprivileged, representing their interests to both policymakers and corporate leaders.

ACSA's involvement with young people highlights the importance of ethical leadership and fosters a culture that values contentment rather than consumerism. Campaigns against corruption, advocacy for wage equality, and the encouragement of servant leadership are key themes in steering young individuals towards a future rooted in strong moral values. These initiatives correspond with the Church's overarching mission to cultivate values of integrity and social responsibility in upcoming leaders. The Church has adopted a proactive approach to combat gender-based violence, initiating programs that raise awareness and encourage dialogue. Through teaching campaigns like "Speak Out" and collaboration with organisations such as "We Will Speak Out" and Hope Africa's gender sensitisation ministry, ACSA has strengthened the battle against sexual abuse and harassment. Through the cultivation of an inclusive community, ACSA exemplifies the transformative influence of faith in tackling social inequalities.

Understanding the distinct challenges encountered by millennials, ACSA has established organised programs and activities through different councils and societies. Administering questionnaires to grasp their needs and viewpoints guarantees that the Church stays pertinent and attentive to this generation. Furthermore, the Church's stance on science and technology demonstrates a harmonious blend of ethical considerations and a willingness to embrace innovation. By affirming the rights of children born through in-vitro fertilisation, ACSA showcases its forward-thinking approach to bioethical issues while staying grounded in theological principles. (Mali, 2018))

The Elevation Church (TEC)

The Elevation Church (TEC) has established itself as a driving force for youth empowerment, utilising its creative Surge movement to meet the spiritual, social, and emotional needs of young individuals. Grounded in its mission of 'Making Greatness Common', the church aimed to cultivate well-rounded individuals through the Surge Movement. The movement fosters a solid basis of faith and offers practical life tools, inspiring young people to discover their individual expressions and make significant contributions to society.

The Surge movement reflects TEC's vision of empowering the next generation with essential tools to navigate life with purpose, faith, and resilience, structured around four foundational pillars that steer its programs and initiatives: The Surge movement centres around the importance of cultivating a personal relationship with God. The movement inspires young people to connect with the Person and Power of God, guiding them to live in the freedom and victory that is found in Christ Jesus. This spiritual foundation enables young individuals to journey through life with a clear sense of purpose and divine guidance.

The Surge movement diligently equips and inspires young individuals to explore and embrace God's purpose in all areas of their lives. In family, career, or governance, the movement empowers youths to recognise their roles as change agents capable of impacting their environments through faith-based principles. The Surge movement emphasises the significance of healthy relationships by empowering young individuals to cultivate strong families and communities that reflect Christ's mission. This pillar highlights the importance of relational intelligence in both personal and societal change.

The Surge movement aims to broaden its influence by creating both physical and virtual fellowship centres worldwide. This approach enhances its influence while guaranteeing that young individuals from various areas can access its empowering programs and teachings. The Surge movement functions through three distinct ministry expressions: Standalone Expression, Embedded Expression, and Satellite Expression, allowing for adaptability in its engagement with the target audience.

The Surge movement organises a variety of flagship events aimed at delivering meaningful and captivating experiences for youth. The Gravity Conference stands out as a premier event that attracts young individuals from diverse backgrounds, providing them with a chance to enrich their faith, engage with peers who share similar values, and learn from experienced speakers. Through the use of social media platforms, masterclasses, and small group integration, the movement guarantees that participants stay connected, supported, and actively involved in their faith journey. This method cultivates a feeling of belonging and responsibility, allowing for ongoing personal and spiritual development.

The Elevation Church, via its Surge movement, showcases an engaging strategy for empowering youth. By focussing on the spiritual, social, and emotional needs of young individuals, TEC empowers them to approach life with intention and strength. The Surge movement, through its innovative structures and impactful events, remains dedicated to global outreach, inspiring a generation of youth to live authentically, influence their environments, and fulfil God's purpose for their lives. (TEC, 2024)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Stewardship is grounded in the responsible management of resources and opportunities while youth empowerment refers to the process of equipping young people with the skills, resources, and opportunities needed to take control of their lives, contribute to their communities, and participate actively in national development. Youth empowerment entails initiatives in education, employment, entrepreneurship, and leadership to ensure that young people graduate from the level of mere merely beneficiaries to become active contributors to societal progress (Ile et al., 2018; Heath and Moreau, 2024).

Biblical Principles of Stewardship and Youth Empowerment

The study revealed diverse Biblical teachings that have served as frameworks for stewardship and youth empowerment. The concept of stewardship is deeply rooted in biblical mandates, emphasizing accountability, resource management, and service to others. Prominent figures such as Joseph, Josiah, Esther, Jeremiah, Mary, John Mark, and Timothy were used by God in significant ways.

The Old Testament emphasizes the importance of teaching young people the precepts of God, as seen in Deuteronomy 4:9-10 and Deuteronomy 6, which stress the need to pass on God's word to the next generation. Moreover, key scriptural references like Genesis 1:26-28 (dominion mandate) and Matthew 25:14-30 (parable of the talents) provide a theological foundation for encouraging youth to utilize their God-given talents responsibly.

In the New Testament, Jesus' ministry included young people, and He called children to come to Himself, highlighting their importance. Paul's admonition to young Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12 can also be seen as a framework encouraging youths to rise up to their situation and glorify God by their conduct. These foundations in the Bible underscores the importance of youth ministry as well as the responsibility of the church to foster their empowerment and development.

Biblical stewardship extends to addressing social injustices and creating equitable opportunities for marginalized groups, as highlighted in Micah 6:8 ("...to act justly and to love mercy..."). Moreover, the findings of Berñe et al. (2023) highlighted the significance of contextual and relational factors in youth empowerment, aligning with Biblical mandates that emphasize nurturing environments for youth. Additionally, Sherley's analysis of Exodus 18:13-27 underscores the importance of delegating responsibilities to foster inclusive participation and leadership development in young people. (Sherley, 2019)

Biblical Mandates for Leadership Development

Leadership development is a critical component of individual and collective growth, emphasizing the process of equipping individuals with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to influence, inspire, and guide others effectively. It is a transformative process that equips individuals to lead with vision, purpose, and integrity. Scriptures such as "Let no one despise your youth…" (1 Timothy 4:12) and "Train up a child in the way he should go..." (Proverbs 22:6) highlight the importance of equipping young people for leadership.

Biblical principles such as humility, stewardship, and service provide a strong foundation for nurturing ethical leaders. For example, the story of Moses and Jethro in Exodus 18:13-27, as analysed by Sherley (2019), underscores the importance of delegating responsibilities and empowering others to lead. There are also instances in the Bible where calls were made for the transformation of communities through collective action and personal responsibility. E.g. Nehemiah 2:17-18.

These shows that Biblical fundamentals play a pivotal role in leadership development by integrating spiritual and moral teachings into leadership training. In Nigeria, churches like the Foursquare, Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), the Elevation, Covenant Nations etc. create conducive environment for youths to develop leadership skills and replicate the Biblical standard of leadership.

For example, Covenant Nations organise a programme tagged The Platform where issues on national interests are discussed giving the young ones the opportunity to participate and engage. Similarly, the Catholic Church's Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) conducts leadership training grounded in biblical ethics, encouraging youth to engage in governance with integrity (Adigun, 2014) and in South Africa, the Anglican Church organizes mentorship programs aimed at equipping young leaders with skills for governance and advocacy. (Mali, 2018). These initiatives reflect a commitment to fostering leaders who can address societal challenges with integrity and purpose.

Stewardship as a Pillar of Youth Empowerment

Stewardship serves as a critical pillar for youth empowerment and emphasizes responsible management, accountability, and the ethical use of resources entrusted to individuals. Stewardship as a framework extends beyond material resources to include talents, relationships, and opportunities. Biblical teachings provide a robust framework for understanding stewardship. Scriptures such as Genesis 1:26-28 describe humanity's dominion over creation, emphasizing the responsibility to manage resources with care and wisdom. Similarly, Matthew 25:14-30, the parable of the talents, illustrates the importance of utilizing one's gifts effectively for growth and service. These teachings underscore that stewardship is not just about ownership but more about accountability to God and society.

Boateng and Korankye (2022) and Poole (2018) emphasized that stewardship is central to Christian life and underscores the responsible management of resources, talents, and opportunities. This perspective complements the findings of Berñe et al. (2023), which stress the importance of guiding youth to take ownership of their lives within secure and supportive settings. Likewise, Poole's (2018) perspective about sacrificial giving and the responsible use of time, talents, and treasures to address societal needs aligns with youth empowerment by encouraging young individuals to recognize their potential and actively use it for positive transformation.

Stewardship is a powerful pillar for youth empowerment, offering a framework that combines accountability, resource management, and service. Rooted in biblical teachings, stewardship equips young people to maximize their potential and contribute meaningfully to society. For young people, embracing stewardship fosters personal development, cultivates leadership, and equips them with the tools needed to contribute meaningfully to their communities. By fostering a sense of accountability and long-term planning, stewardship encourages young individuals to contribute to economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity. Programs that combine spiritual mentorship with practical training address the holistic needs of youth as seen in the integration of vocational training with spiritual guidance by the Watoto Church, Uganda, ensuring that young people are equipped both morally and practically to succeed (Boyle, 2020).

Empowerment is multi-dimensional including economic, social, political, psychological, educational, technological and cultural empowerment. The study revealed the essence of equipping young people with the skills, resources, and opportunities needed to achieve economic independence and improve their livelihoods while enhancing their capacity to engage and contribute to the development of their community.

The Biblical mandates of stewardship provide a comprehensive framework for youth empowerment, blending spiritual, moral, and practical dimensions. The study revealed the essence of stewardship and youth empowerment as ingrained in the Bible. Moreover, it highlighted the active role of faith-based institutions in Nigeria and across Africa to operationalize these principles by designing youth programs that align with Biblical stewardship, encouraging active participation in societal development. Programs like entrepreneurship training, leadership development initiatives, mentorship, community engagement and financial inclusiveness build capacities and encourage young people to maximize their potential while adhering to ethical and moral standards derived from Biblical teachings.
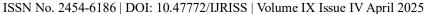
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Biblical stewardship is a profound concept that intertwines responsibility, accountability, and service in managing God's resources. It goes beyond merely managing financial assets and touches every aspect of life, including time, talents, and relationships. As a framework, it serves as an ideal basis for empowering youth, offering a paradigm that encourages responsible decision-making and leadership, fostering both individual growth and societal transformation when integrated into youth empowerment initiatives.

The concept of stewardship is deeply rooted in the Bible, showing that God is the ultimate owner of all resources, and humans are stewards entrusted with the task of managing these resources wisely. The creation narrative in Genesis 1:26-28 sets the tone by establishing humanity's role as caretakers of the earth. These verses emphasize dominion, which is not about exploitation but responsible management of creation.

Several scriptures further underscore stewardship, including the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30, where Jesus illustrates the importance of using one's abilities and resources to multiply and serve others. This concept of stewardship, which emphasizes accountability and growth, serves as an excellent framework for empowering youth. The parable teaches that individuals are not only responsible for themselves but also have a duty to serve others and multiply the resources at their disposal. Additionally, the injunction in 1 Peter 4:10 highlights that every gift is given for the benefit of others, emphasising that stewardship is not just about personal gain, but about using one's gifts to contribute to the collective good.

Biblical stewardship encourages young people to take responsibility for their lives and resources. Youth empowerment, from a biblical perspective, involves enabling young people to realize their potential and make meaningful contributions to society. Stewardship offers a unique framework for this empowerment by

emphasizing responsibility, service, and growth. It cultivates a mindset where youth see themselves not as passive recipients of opportunities but as active agents capable of creating change. Stewardship, therefore, empowers youth by instilling values of responsibility, leadership, and service—qualities essential for personal development and social contribution.

For instance, the story of David and his rise to kingship showcases how a young person can be entrusted with significant responsibility. David's stewardship over his flock, his faithfulness, and his eventual leadership reflects the potential of young individuals when they embrace responsibility. Similarly, young individuals today can take up leadership roles in their communities by practicing stewardship in their personal, academic, and social lives. Furthermore, biblical principles of stewardship can guide youth in handling their time, talents, and resources wisely. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, the notion that there is "a time for everything" reflects the essence of balance, prioritization, and responsibility. These principles, when applied, can help youth make better life choices, manage their resources efficiently, and participate responsibly and sustainably to the development of their community.

Societal pressures, economic hardships, and inadequate mentorship are some of the factors that can work against the effective application of Biblical stewardship for youth empowerment. Conflicting messages and societal imbalances that prioritises material success and individualism over communal well-being and ethical responsibility can undermine the core principles of biblical stewardship. Moreover, the dearth of responsive and responsible role models can limit youth's understanding of how to apply biblical stewardship in real-life contexts.

Nonetheless, youth empowerment is a critical process and adequate collaboration among critical stakeholders including government, religious bodies, community leaders, non-governmental organisations and the youths themselves will go a long way to ensure that young people are not passive recipients of opportunities but active participants in shaping their future by creating a sustainable framework to nurture their potential, foster leadership, and instil a sense of responsibility for their personal growth and the general well-being of their community.

CONCLUSION

Empowering youth necessitates a comprehensive and strategic approach that connects a variety of stakeholders—such as governments, civil society, the private sector, religious organisations, and local communities. These actors need to collaborate in order to foster environments that cultivate the potential of young individuals and encourage their significant involvement in every aspect of society. When young people are empowered, they serve as catalysts for positive change, fostering progress within their communities and aiding in the achievement of broader sustainable development goals.

Youth empowerment extends beyond mere economic or political involvement; it encompasses nurturing a sense of responsibility, developing leadership abilities, and encouraging a culture of service. These elements play a crucial role in developing ethical, purpose-driven individuals dedicated to creating just and thriving societies.

In this context, Biblical stewardship stands out as a robust and all-encompassing approach to empowering youth. Grounded in principles of accountability, service, and compassion for others, it offers a spiritual and ethical basis that enhances traditional development methods. Through intentional programs, mentorship, and a focus on serving God and humanity, Biblical stewardship prepares young individuals to be catalysts for positive change—empowered to lead with integrity, compassion, and a profound sense of purpose.

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