

The Role of Zakah and Waqf in Poverty Alleviation: A Strategy for West Africa

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Abstract : The level of poverty in our region (West Africa) is a severe problem. The statistics about it are scary and alarming. For example, Report on Economic and Social Conditions in West Africa by United Nations Economic Commission for Africa gives the following gloomy picture of social conditions in the region: In West Africa, approximately one person in three in the towns, and one in two in the rural areas, cannot afford the expenditure needed to cover their basic needs. The situation has reached emergency proportions and calls for urgent social action (Recent Economic and Social Developments in West Africa and Prospects for 2010). Many different policies and programs to combat the poverty in the region have been embarked upon by the government of various countries in West Africa, but yet the ugly face of poverty persists. However, to explore opportunities and avenues for making positive contributions to national and regional development, this paper sets out to examine the role of two Islamic institutions; Zakah and Waqf, in poverty alleviation and how Islam uses these two institutions among others to eradicate poverty. The paper suggests that the governments of various countries of West Africa should endeavor to integrate Zakah and Waqf into their poverty alleviation programs by borrowing a leaf from some countries in Africa and Asia that have integrated these Islamic institutions into their poverty reduction programs, and they have started to reap the positive result from the policy.

Keywords : waqf, poverty, zakah, Islamic economy, education

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