



Agriculture and Social Protection as a Theological Framework for Combating Poverty in Developing Nations

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Abstract

Agriculture and social protection are interwoven fields that contribute to economic, social, and political stability and promote human well-being. Shaped by theological frameworks, these domains ensure food security, reduce inequality, and uphold human dignity. Theological principles grounded in ethics, spirituality, and communal values guide societies and inform human morals. This study examines how integrating agriculture and social protection through a theological framework can alleviate poverty and protect vulnerable groups. It affirms that theological worldviews and contemporary systems of these two academic disciplines are instrumental in alleviating poverty. Two questions were addressed: i) What is the role of agriculture and social protection in alleviating poverty? ii) How does a theological framework integrate and shape contemporary agriculture and social protection to alleviate poverty? Data were derived from scriptural and scholarly sources obtained through Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Knowledge, ResearchGate, Academia, and institutional repositories. The study's main themes were integrating social protection into agricultural programs, protecting vulnerable groups, and foundational biblical perspectives on social protection. The findings validated that agriculture and social protection protect marginalized groups and reduce poverty. Modern technological systems help predict climate change and support appropriate agricultural inputs to increase food security. This integration can help inform policies and standards in state and faith-based development.

Introduction

The interaction between social protection and agriculture as tools for poverty alleviation is gaining significant attention among scholars (United Nations, 2015; Matthew et al., 2019; Farrington et al., 2013). Poverty and inequality persist despite efforts by states, NGOs, and faith-based organizations to combat them (Kgatle, 2017; Le Roux et al., 2018). These challenges have emerged as significant issues in modern societies, where inequalities and injustice continue to rise, particularly among marginalized groups. The rise in poverty requires deeper exploration and implementation of social protection initiatives (Pa'a, 2017). A recent World Bank report indicates that 8.5% of the world lives in extreme poverty, living on less than \$2.15 per person per day, and unemployment rates are high in developing nations (World Bank, 2024). Kpalam (2025) asserts that poverty is a major contributor to



inequality in societies and undermines human dignity. Poor and marginal groups face major challenges, including inadequate access to material possessions, restrictions on education, limited social development opportunities, food insecurity, limited social rights, and limited access to medical care (Ndzi, 2025). The causes of poverty vary, and include unemployment, disability, economic instability, political upheavals, and illness. According to Wouterse (2019), agriculture and social protection can be valuable frameworks for poverty alleviation, and they can contribute to food security. Poverty relates to a lack of sufficient basic means of survival,, such as food, clothing, shelter,, and access to health services (Shingange, 2013). While many studies explore poverty alleviation strategies and policies, few examine the interconnection between agriculture and social protection as frameworks for alleviating poverty, or their coherence with religion.

This study aims to bridge that gap by examining how integrating these domains through a theological framework can alleviate poverty and protect vulnerable groups. It argues that theological worldviews and contemporary systems in agriculture and social protection are relevant in upholding human dignity and promoting social rights. Consequently, the research questions for this study are: i) What is the role of agriculture and social protection in alleviating poverty? ii) How does a theological framework integrate and shape contemporary agriculture and social protection to alleviate poverty? The study approaches the phenomenon from a biblical context and draws on a range of interdisciplinary sources, including systematic reviews, economic models of inequality, agricultural systems, and environmental reviews. It contributes to the field by offering insights into their coherence. The theological framework differs from secular frameworks because it relies on biblical contextualization of agriculture and social protection. It is mainly grounded in faith – based values, religious principles, and divine scriptural commands (Pa'a, 2017).

According to Mandleni et al. (2018),, social protection is defined as public actions or tools used to ensure security, social justice, and the welfare of poor and vulnerable communities. They argue that rising unemployment contributes to poverty and strains social protection interventions. A study by Farrington et al. (2013) indicates that social protection frameworks such as labor market interventions, social insurance,, and social safety nets are used by Governments, NGOs,, and some faith – based organizations. The study further alludes to the World Bank's Social Risk Management Framework, which repositions traditional social protection into a holistic structure. In the context of the Risk Management Framework, social protection includes prevention, mitigation, and coping strategies (Farrington et al., 2013). Secular interpretations often relate social protection to assistance or programs mainly exerted by governments to vulnerable groups, such as social grants, social safety nets, social insurance schemes, and other financial and non – financial resources (Poe, 2002). A United Nations bulletin (2015) supports this notion by defining social protection as a set of tools for poverty alleviation and risk management strategies implemented by governments or informal community – based initiatives for the benefit of societies. The secular framework,, mainly rooted in human rights,, emphasizes protecting vulnerable groups. According to Erickson (2018), the exploitation of vulnerable groups through fraudulent means or force equates to evil. Erickson called for the enforcement of social justice policies to counteract such social ills like stealing from a widow, killings for ritualistic practices, and abusing children and women. While modern secular social protection policies may share similarities and

constructs with theological frameworks, modern social protection is portrayed as an extension of biblical social protection principles and ideas. Religious ideas are ingrained within the multifaceted modern social policies (Merchant, 2016; Opielka, 2008).

According to the World Bank's recent report, low – and medium – income countries increased social protection initiatives to cover 4.7 billion people (World Bank Group, 2025). This marks a compelling milestone in the drive to combat poverty. Studies show that developing nations remain heavily reliant on agricultural productivity,, which is also a key tool for alleviating poverty. This discipline remains critical for the sustainability of many developing nations mainly because it contributes directly and indirectly to economic growth. With the persistent increase in poverty and inequality, agriculture is expected to remain essential in the future (DIFD, 2014; Oluwatoyin et al., 2019). In this study, agriculture is defined as the production, processing, and distribution of crops and livestock. It is practiced at small –, medium, or large commercial scales (Farrington et al., 2013). Small – scale farming includes small household fields and backyard gardens. States and international humanitarian organizations such as UNESCO and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) strongly encourage establishing backyard gardens. Backyard gardens are seen as having the potential to contribute to biodiversity and reduce vulnerability (Galluzzi & Negri, 2010).

Studies indicate that the interaction between agriculture and social protection is grounded in their ability to eradicate extreme poverty (Matthew et al, 2019). The poor, marginalized groups, and food – insecure individuals rely mostly on agriculture and partly on state interventions. These interventions include cash transfers, agricultural inputs, and food provisions from NGOs and faith – based organizations (FBOs) to support livelihoods (FAO, 2016;; DFID, 2014;; Singh et al., 2024). ,Combined agriculture and social protection initiatives can greatly enhance the well – being of poor and marginalized groups by increasing agricultural productivity and implementing relevant social welfare policy instruments (Dan & Stănescu, 2023). Drawing from religious frameworks, agriculture and social protection have always been interrelated. The theological framework proposes a life of compassion, justice, and and human responsibility, affirming that the poor have the the right to use natural resources. It also advocates for equity, sustainability, and dignity for all human beings. It is, in essence, an expression of love, care, and faithfulness to God as the creator of all things (Deuteronomy 15:4; John 3:16; 10:10). Religious organizations such as Christianity portray scripture as authoritative and associate religious framings with being the founding basis for understanding social protection, agriculture, and poverty. While biblical narratives do not explicitly mention poverty, the concept is embedded in some other terms such as the meek, the poor, and the desolate (Deuteronomy 15; 11; 24:17; Galatians 2:10; Luke 4:18; Isa. 11:4; Matt. 5:5; 26:11; 1 Tim. 5: 5). The poor are mentioned in several scriptural texts. For example, Galatians 2:10 plainly invites all people to remember the poor of the land. Teklu (2024) relates the poor to those without sufficient means of survival.

Other scholars also support the notion that theological worldviews serve as the reference point for all social protection initiatives,, as social protection began with the dawn of the human race,, as highlighted in creation theory (Genesis 1:1; Kpalam, 2025; Stolleis, 2013). The creation narratives portray humans as stewards of the environment and, as such, required to care for both the earth and each other (Genesis 1:1 – 30). This may be what compelled Karger & Stoesz (2008) to argue that the Church first implemented social protection by following biblical directions

with Judeo – Christian roots,, inspired by Israelite tradition. Scriptural texts demonstrate how the Israelites implemented social protection and followed God's commands. For example,, the Israelites embraced a philosophy of care for others as a reflection of God's generous acts and commands toward them (Lev 25:36 – 38; Adasi – Bekoe & Asumang, 2019). An explicit command, as evident in the writings of Leviticus, states as follows: *'And if any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you'* (Leviticus 26:36 NIV). Scripturally, the people of Israel were the people of God and they had the responsibility to follow God's commands which included caring for the poor as highlighted in the Old Testament idioms (Exodus 22:21 – 25; Lev 25:35). Biblical inferences further propose that in creating the earth, God willed that all humanity be treated justly (Titus 3: 1 – 2; 1 Peter 3:8). Supporting the theological framework, Ette (2024) postulates that as the creator of humanity, God is the ultimate initiator of social protection and consequently, contemporary social protection structures and policies are shaped by values of religion. Core values and principles of social protection are biblically founded (Exodus 22:22; Psalms 68:5; Leviticus 23:22). Ette further argues that values inform ideologies and impact policies.

Biblically, the message of religion is centered on love, care and advocates for the prevention of lapses in moral (Matthew 5: 43). God is portrayed as love and He provided all resources for all humans to benefit from (John, 4: 16). According to scriptural texts all human beings were made in the image of God and ultimately equal in His eyes (Gen 1:27; Rom.2:11; Acts 10: 34). Adasi – Bekoe & Asumang (2019) assert that certain events in human social systems may have contributed in bringing the divide between the rich and the poor and influenced views on how to deal with the needs of the poor. Similarly, Bai et al. (2025) suggest that the rich gained their wealth through systems devised from theological concepts and resources freely given by God. Their study further proposes that people can use natural resources to develop tools, systems,, and innovations that enrich them, but they do not contribute to making these resources available. They conclude that the use of natural resources enriches some and esimpoverishes others for various reasons,, including as political and economic influences (Bai et al., 2025). Social protection then becomes an epitome for assisting the impoverished and vulnerable groups.

The coherence between agriculture and social protection as instruments of care for others is further enacted in biblical texts, with direct reference to Leviticus 19 and 23. The command in Leviticus instructs humanity not to glean from every corner of the field. According to this narrative, some of the harvest should be left for the poor (Leviticus 19:9 – 10; 23:22). Similarly, biblical texts narrate how Ruth gleaned from Boaz's fields. Boaz instructed his workers to leave some of the produce so this widow could gather it (Ruth 2:15 – 16). Ruth was without family support, a consequence of her husband's demise. Executing practical social justice requires modern societies to emulate Boaz's act. God's act of social justice is again demonstrated when God removed His people from Egypt, a place where they were enslaved (Exodus 14: 1 – 14). Biblical narratives reveal that through Moses, God saved His people from the firm grip of Pharaoh and enabled them to cross the Red Sea on dry ground (Exodus 14: 19). According to this narrative, God protected the people of Israel with a pillar of cloud by the day and a pillar of fire by night, shielding them from any prospective threat (Exodus 14: 21 – 22). Even in the wilderness, He was with them,, providing food and water to sustain them (Exodus 15:22 – 25; 16:1 – 36). These accounts validate the ancient roots of social protection

entrenched in theological framings. These accounts and others also clearly show how social protection and agriculture enhance human well-being and contribute to poverty alleviation (Kpalam, 2025). According to Wolfe (2023), some Christians critique modern social protection programs, suggesting that they bring more harm than good. They argue that modern welfare systems undermine human dignity, labeling them as anti-biblical. However, Wolfe's findings show that many people benefit far more from social welfare systems in modern societies than in past in the past.

ToMore broadly, social protection is viewed as a tool for social justice and primarily focuses on protecting vulnerable groups and societies. In the theological framework as narrated in Deuteronomy (43:4), God is the greatest implementer of justice. He is just in His character, and He sets and implements perfect justice in defense of the vulnerable (Psalms 89:14). The narratives of Abednego, Meshach, and Shadrach give a practical example of God's supernatural protection. These men were accused of praying to the living God, contrary to what King Nebuchadnezzar had issued judgment was issued for them to be put into a furnace of burning fire (Daniel 3: 20 – 21). Scripture paints a detailed portrait of how the fire was intensified three times to ensure that the men would not survive. According to biblical texts, these were men who revered God, and yet they found themselves sentenced to die an excruciating death (Daniel 3:8 – 19). However, God, being a fair judge, protected them from the fire. God displayed His social protection acumen,, proving that every man deserves redemption, particularly if he has done nothing wrong (Daniel 3:24 – 27). These accounts symbolize a solid theological social protection model. The literature suggests that policymakers integrate secular frameworks with theological framings when crafting social protection and agricultural policies.

Method

This interdisciplinary descriptive study used biblical texts and scholarly literature to examine the coherence between agriculture and social protection and their influence in combating poverty. The study adopted an interpretive theology-based approach from a Christian perspective to argue that integrating agriculture and social protection can alleviate poverty, protect vulnerable groups, and uphold their dignity. This study approached the topic from a theological context and drew on a range of interdisciplinary sources, including systematic reviews, economic models of inequality, and reviews of agricultural systems, and the environment. The theological framework was deemed appropriate for this study because of its transformative nature in engaging with people. It highlights key moral faith-based ethics and informs developmental patterns (Shingange, 2013). Data were sourced from the Bible, Google Scholar, Academia, Scopus, Web of Knowledge, ResearchGate, and through internet searches of institutional repositories. Relying on existing data allowed for an in-depth analysis of the framework and enabled the study to build on prior research.

Literature sources included academic articles, reports, dissertations, scriptural text, and policy documents. Sources were chosen based on their relevance to the subject researched. The study analyzed more than 30 articles and several scriptural texts to inform the findings. According to Rawat & Parihar (2024), literature review evaluation is an organized, reproducible approach for comparing, recognizing, and arranging outcomes and ideas. The descriptive,, interpretive,, and theological approach was chosen to gain deeper insights into the subject without using statistical data. Data were analyzed using a thematic inductive approach, which

led to the emergence of themes. These themes were grouped by similar codes to form three broader themes,, which are discussed in the results section of this study. The themes were then refined to ensure they accurately address the essence of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2023). The analysis focused on identifying themes related to human rights, social justice, moral obligation, compassion, and the protection of vulnerable groups. The study aimed to eliminate bias and assumptions. This was done through the use of multiple data sources, and reviews by peers were carried out to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. The limitation of this study is its lack of primary data. It only relied on secondary data and analyzed the subject only from a Christian perspective. All ethical standards for research were observed, and the study excluded the use of animals or human participants.

Integrating Social Protection into Agricultural Development Programs

Findings indicate that, from ancient historical narratives, agriculture has been used as a social protection instrument to protect the vulnerable against the risk of poverty and hunger – induced illnesses (Wouterse, 2019). Agriculture contributes not only to the well – being of humanity, but also contributes to economic development, food security, and equitable resource distribution (Tongwane & Moeletsi, 2018). This finding is substantiated by Oluwatoyin et al. (2019), who also posit that the agricultural sector occupies an essential position in developing nations, particularly in the West African sub – region. It is portrayed as a recognizable sector that contributes to poverty alleviation and economic growth. Similarly, agricultural interventions are perceived to have an impact on productivity growth. Current agricultural initiatives and policies consider and address certain hindrances that limit vulnerable households' access to water, land, inputs, finance, and markets. Access to these resources promotes food security and reduces vulnerability and the dependency factor (FAO, 2024). The FAO also reported a decline of 34% in agricultural productivity growth since 1961. This is attributed to climate change, which has shortened the growing season and, in some instances, caused shortages of water. Future warming is anticipated to escalate agricultural productivity challenges (IPCC, 2022). From a climate change perspective, one challenge observed by Norton et al. (2020) is that public works tend to focus more on infrastructure such as roads, schools, and clinics, and neglect environmental assets which have direct effects on agricultural productivity. Another perceived contributor to the decline in agricultural productivity is that it is unappealing to the populace, especially the youth. This lack of appeal is due to a number of factors such as access to land, time returns, and perceived labor intensity (Oluwatoyin et al., 2019).

Historically, agriculture is an old practice shaped by theocratic frameworks and continues to be a cornerstone of food security and poverty alleviation in modern times (Dewbre et al., 2011). The ancient attributes of agriculture are substantiated by the biblical narratives of Abel and Cain, who were farmers. Cain tilled the land, producing various crops, and Abel tended livestock, ensuring the availability of food for their household (Genesis 4: 1 – 16). The ways agriculture reduces poverty can be classified according to direct and indirect channels or linkages. The direct channels include the direct benefits impacting families such as income generation, food security, and resilience to environmental shocks. Indirect channels involve economic growth, employment creation, and social empowerment (Singh et al., 2024). A cycle of these networks is demonstrated in Figure 1, which details social protection linkages. It shows how they align with household consumption, production activities, and the local economy. While

there are notable benefits attained through these channels, Wouterse (2019) notes some challenges that hinder the implementation of some services through these links. He argues that political interference or influence tends to be a challenge in the implementation of agriculture–related social protection initiatives. It also affects agricultural practices, particularly in signing trading agreements with the global community, enacting input price hikes, market access & prices, interfering in farmers' investments, and imposing steep tax requirements for commercial farmers. Wouterse further highlights that the lack of implementation or meeting the demand for social protection results in political unrest. Agricultural productivity is also affected by the migration of farm workers from rural to urban settings where they get jobs in the manufacturing, construction, and mining sectors (Dewbre et al., 2011).

In a biblical perspective, social human systems such as agriculture and social protection are structured in ways that demonstrate transcendent moral principles. Such principles include justice, stewardship, and the care for the poor as highlighted in biblical texts (Proverbs 19:17; Psalms 41:1; 1 Peter 4:10). Consequently, agricultural systems should not only be comprehended in light of enhancing economic development, but as moral systems of humanity entrusted with the stewardship of the environment and all natural resources. Studies demonstrate a correlation between increased agricultural production and a decrease in poverty. Scholars argue that higher yields coupled with fair market access and prices result in increased income for farmers, enabling them to maintain the dignity and well–being of their families (Lowder, 2016; Singh et al., 2024).

The increase in food productivity also ensures food security, contributes to sustainability, and increases Gross Domestic Product (GDP), ensuring economic growth. This suggests that farmers play a pivotal role in social protection through providing food, income, and enhancing livelihoods for households and communities. Through selling their produce to markets and to non–producing communities, societies are strengthened (Dewbre et al., 2011). This has similarities to the narratives of Joseph in biblical narratives who sold food to the world during the famine period in ancient Egypt (Genesis 41: 57). This account is discussed further in a different section of this study. The emerging threat to agricultural production is the increase in climate change, access to markets, low market prices, water pollution, drought, and steep input prices. For example, drought lowers water reserves, poses challenges for irrigation of crops, and also affects livestock production. This resource plays a pivotal role in the success of agricultural practices and also influences farmers' spirituality (Marais, 2017; Mahlalela & Khumalo, 2025).

In a theological perspective, any form of provision, including agricultural productivity, is depicted as a gift from God, showing His care for His people (2 Corinthians 9:10; Philippians 4:19; Genesis 22:14). Religious leaders are called and/or mandated to bring spiritual nourishment and also ensure social protection of their members (Lephako, 2024; Ephesians 3:11; Khumalo, 2024). The religious mandate is negated by the rise in climate change and water pollution, which threatens agricultural sustainability. Studies have shown that human anthropogenic actions contribute to the surge in climate change on Earth (Izidor & Igwe, 2022; Van den Berg, 2022). These human–induced environmental pollutants, such as the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs), are a challenge for the agricultural sector. This necessitates strong policy instruments to safeguard against human anthropogenic actions (Kabongo & Stock, 2022).

The introduction of technologies in agriculture has enhanced agricultural production. For example, greenhouse production helps in shielding crops from severe storms and drought conditions, as they are controlled environments. Wouterse (2019) also affirms that modern agricultural systems such as precision agriculture and computer-driven irrigation systems, made possible by technological advancements like artificial intelligence and data analytics, enhance the optimization of resource allocation. This optimization in resource use paves the way for environmental protection, increases adaptive management to climate change, and promotes social protection implementation (Osabohien, 2020; Latour, 2018).

The use of artificial intelligence frameworks and data analytics in agriculture also increases food availability, informs sustainable fertilization, informs planting strategies, and helps predict greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) amidst the climate change uncertainties (Frota et al., 2025). A strong theocratic perspective on the coherence of agriculture and social protection is demonstrated in the book of Genesis 41, whereby King Pharaoh had a dream. He had no interpretation for the dream. Consequently, he sent for Joseph, who was a prisoner, and Joseph interpreted the dream. The narratives in Genesis reveal that Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream, and it was revealed that the dream was a warning of a famine to last 7 years. Based on the interpretation of the dream, Joseph was inaugurated as a governor to oversee all of Egypt and manage operations (Genesis 41: 39 – 45; 2:6). The God-given warning of the drought that was predicted strongly highlights the care He has for His people and his involvement in people's social affairs. Through heeding the warning, Joseph gathered food and stored it in preparation for the envisioned famine. When the drought was realized, Joseph managed the distribution of food to the people in Egypt and across the world (Genesis 41: 46 – 56). The distribution of food to those who were lacking is construed as an act of social protection. Biblical narratives further state that people came from different locations to procure food from Egypt (Genesis 41: 57). While most of the food was sold, the element of protection is entrenched in the protection of the people and the world from hunger and death through access to food, which is a basic human right (Byrnes, 2018; Burchi et al, 2022).

Figure 1 Social protection linkages to household consumption and production activities and the local economy

Source: FAO, 2015

In ensuring the protection of all human beings, governments and humanitarian organizations should develop and implement policies that integrate agriculture, religious framings, and social protection. This will ensure a holistic approach to the eradication of poverty and also promote sustainable development. However, some scholars are skeptical about whether religious groups can be instrumental in promoting social welfare. In spite of that skepticism, findings by Dan & Stănescu (2023) reported success in partnerships between states and religious groups. This validates that the integration of religion in social protection initiatives has the potential to inform policies which promote equality, solidarity, justice, and compassion.

Social Protection instruments and the protection of vulnerable groups

All human beings have a right to be protected against abuse or any harm of any sort, as proclaimed by the Human Rights Commission and scriptural texts (HRC, 2024; Leviticus 23:22; Exodus 22:19 – 27). Human beings have a right to shelter, water, food, education, religion, health, and access to resources (Kalra & Modi, 2025; HRC, 2024). Literature indicates that vulnerable groups, especially

women, children, and people with disabilities, require global protection instruments to ensure they are protected against harm (Le Roux et al, 2018). Vulnerability can be propelled by a number of factors such as unemployment, the death of bread winners/ guardians, disability, poverty, homelessness, migration, and health issues (Wilke et al., 2022; Kalra & Modi, 2025). Vulnerability results in a number of challenges such as lack of access to resources, loss of dignity, oppression, poverty, stress, discrimination, abandonment, and health issues. For example, children and people living with disabilities can be abandoned by their parents or guardians for various reasons such as unemployment, poverty, or fear of discrimination, social stigma, and other attitudinal barriers (Domańska, 2018; Izzan & Haecal, 2024). Studies have shown that human trafficking, especially for the purposes of sexual exploitation, is on the rise in developing nations. Similarly, the trend of women, children, and people with disabilities being abused psychologically and verbally is on the rise (Munawarah et al., 2025). According to the FAO (2013), there is sufficient evidence that protection helps protect vulnerable groups. For example, practical evidence has shown that social protection helped reduce child labor in the Sub – Saharan nations of Africa (FAO, 2013). This milestone is an indicator that states should continue to implement social protection initiatives. The human rights commission continues to emphasize the importance of human rights such as the right to education, the right to religion, the right to food and water, and the right to live where they please (UNHR, 2025). The infringement of these rights goes against the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 (UN, 2025).

In developing countries, both secular and theological frameworks are used to eradicate extreme poverty. The dualistic approach also incorporates agriculture as a form of ensuring households have access to food, employment, and income, thus upholding their dignity and reducing discrimination among vulnerable groups (Oluwatoyin et al., 2019). Both approaches have yielded substantial benefits. During the COVID – 19 pandemic, households, including vulnerable groups, were supported in numerous ways, such as cash transfers, food supplies, and home delivery of essential provisions (Breitbarth et al., 2021). Mobile health facilities were made available to ensure free access to health care to minimize the risk of the spread of the virus (Farmy, 2020). As noted earlier, while there are some similarities in the secular and the theological framework, there are some notable differences observed by scholars. For example, the secular framework is mostly reliant on human rights and state laws. In contrast, the theological framework is rooted in scriptural text and religious teachings. The theological framework operates through faith – based initiatives, charity, moral obligations, and promoting community – based initiatives. The secular framework takes a human rights – based approach, implementing state – led initiatives informed by public policies (COMCEC, 2016; Ndzi, 2025). However, both frameworks have a common goal of protecting the dignity and availing justice for all human beings. An example of a typical secular public framework is presented in Figure 2, which shows the main types of social protection programs. These programs are meant to reduce inequality, vulnerability, and poverty (European Union, 2017).

The degree of vulnerability is portrayed as dependent on, or determined by, the availability, access, and distribution of resources, whether they are social, economic, or environmental. Hence, imbalanced resource allocation leads to exposure to poverty and vulnerability (European Union, 2017).

According to the FAO (2017), poverty is perceived to increase vulnerability and also increases physical and psychological health risks. States and faith – based initiatives then become instrumental in addressing these risks through implementing social protection policies (Allen & Balfour, 2014). The integration of social protection and agriculture can address the ever – increasing needs of vulnerable groups and reduce poverty (Singh et al., 2024). While a number of studies view social protection as helpful in the eradication of poverty, Kgatle (2017) posits that it leads to passivity and reliance among vulnerable groups. As a result of this overdependence on social welfare, poverty is propagated rather than eradicated. Mandleni et al. (2018) also warned against overreliance on social protection, asserting that it can lead to laziness or people not making efforts to make a living through seeking employment and exploring entrepreneurial opportunities. All these issues raise the implication that there is a need for agreements between religious bodies, NGOs, and states in the developing countries on ways to incorporate religious framings in policies. Joint interventions can be planned and agreed upon in order to sufficiently implement effective social protection with the prospect of future considerations and human sustainability.

Figure 2: Overall framework of social protection and the main types of programs
Source: COMCEC, 2016

Biblical Perspective and theology-driven social policy

The theological perspective is the notion that God has revealed His supremacy through biblical truths which are relevant both in history and in the modern world. Biblical dogmas are scripturally grounded (Pa'a, 2017). Consequently, in the theological perspective, social protection and justice are demonstrated in alignment with biblical truths.

Kpalam (2025) affirms that social protection has its roots embedded in theological framings. In a theological perspective, God created all things and placed structures and systems to be followed by humanity. Such systems are documented when He gave laws, sacraments, and the constitution to the people of Israel (Genesis 1:1 – 30; Exodus 22:19 – 27). According to the creation theory, all other systems are an extension of these original God – given instruments (Ndzi, 2025). In creating humanity and giving authority to man to be stewards, Bruun posits that this was not a green light to exploit natural resources (Bruun, 2020; Genesis 2:4 – 25). Bruun further argues that the special role of multiplication and stewardship acumen was a divine will entrusted to humanity to take care of creation in reverence for God as the creator of all things. Biblical narratives begin with the creation story and later dwell on laws of how humanity should operate on earth (Genesis 1:1 – 29; Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5). After Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, due to their evil – induced curiosity for forbidden knowledge, firm guidelines and commands were laid down for them, preparing them for life outside the sacred Garden (Genesis 3: 1 – 20). This led to the need to support and care for each other. Consequently, the concept of social protection was arguably instigated. The provision of resources makes it easier for the practice of caring to be executed (Nakayama et al., 2019). In itself, the provision of all these resources was a divine way of social protection or caring for humanity. They were protected from hunger, diseases, and untimely death. A practical example of God's acts of divine care is documented in the narratives of the Israelites. Scripture divulges that while the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, God was with them and he constantly protected them. This protection is solidified by the text in Exodus 1:12, which states that the more the people of Israel were oppressed, the more they grew or multiplied in number. This multiplication of the

people of Israel angered the Egyptians in such a way that they intensified the work and made the lives of the Israelites even harder. God eventually instituted social justice on behalf of the Israelites by orchestrating a way to free them from slavery. God's protection is divine and does not involve physical fighting, but His acts are spiritual and highly effective (Proverbs 2:8). His pursuit of justice began with His appearance to Moses, assigning him to lead the people (Exodus 3:1 – 21). He performed numerous miracles through Moses' hands as a sign that He was in control. These miraculous acts also warned Pharaoh, and forced him to release God's people. Pharaoh's hardened heart led to the death of the Egyptians, as portrayed in Exodus 7:12 – 14. Scripture portrays God's social justice as unequalled by any world systems or programs. When He fights for His people, He shows his attributes of mercy and grace.

In the Christian tradition, members believe God instituted caring for others (Orobator, 2019). This is propelled by their strong belief in God, who created all things and knows all things. Consequently, Christians believe that God shall supply their needs according to His riches in glory. They base their belief in the Bible which is an authoritative Word of God (Philippians 4:19; 2 Timothy 3:16). The biblical portrayal of God being able to see all things suggests that He sees the suffering of His people and renders help as a caring Father (Isaiah 41:10; 1 Peter 5:7). Additionally, the Bible suggests that lack and conflicts are as a result of not asking God for help as He is portrayed as rich and a caring Father of all people (Philippians 4:19). Nevertheless, the Bible links provision by God to individuals' belief and supports requesting in faith. According to the Bible, it is impossible to please God without faith. Consequently, if He is not pleased, it is highly unlikely that He can render help. In a theological framework, Jesus Christ also demonstrated care by protecting His disciples from the raging storm. Records in the book of Matthew suggest that Jesus' disciples encountered a storm at sea while sailing. The Bible states that Jesus was seen walking on the water, and He instantly calmed the storm, protecting His disciples from potential harm (Matthew 14:22 – 33). Similarly, biblical narratives show that Jesus Christ fed 5000 people with two fish and two loaves of bread before serving His disciples at sea (Matthew 14:13 – 21). These acts of care from ancient history serve as symbols to be emulated in modern societies to uphold the dignity of people and their communities. Therefore, it, policymakers must reconsider the link between religion and social protection as essential to alleviating poverty (Dan & Stănescu, 2023). While some scholars advocate infusing the theological approach with secular frameworks, others argue that the church should focus only on religious matters and not interfere in politics or other social issues. They argue that states can handle social welfare affairs without religious support (Božek et al., 2022; Hunt, 2014). However, Ndzi (2025) affirms that religious tenets align with secular frameworks and are relevant in addressing social issues. Theological frameworks address care and justice for others, suggesting that secular and theological frameworks share the same goals but may pursue them through different approaches.

Conclusion

This study examined how integrating agriculture and social protection through a theocratic framework can alleviate poverty and protect vulnerable groups. It highlighted key principles and values of the coherence between agriculture and social protection. These domains are ethical principles shaped by the obligations of stewardship, rights, and justice, and are important in alleviating poverty. The protection of vulnerable groups, the integration of agriculture into social protection programs, and the influence of theological framings emerged as

key themes of the study. The findings demonstrated that both agriculture and social protection are shaped by theocratic principles documented in biblical narratives. Through a theocratic lens, agriculture and social protection influence economic, political, and social solidarity outcomes. Overall, the findings confirm a strong correlation between agriculture, social protection, and poverty alleviation. Guided by theocratic ethical principles, agriculture and social protection can reduce poverty, ensure sustainability and food security, and reinforce human dignity. The study recommends that governments align modern systems with theological principles and technological systems to uphold human dignity. Governments, NGOs, faith-based organizations (FBOs) and the private sector should continue to explore policies which integrate agriculture and social protection. Consequently, agricultural policies, technologies and knowledge systems should align with robust social protection instruments to ensure food security and human sustainability.

Additionally, agricultural productivity gains should not come at the expense of poor and marginalized people or the environment. Policies should also promote inclusive development and equality, guided by principles of justice and the common good. Ultimately, integrating agriculture and social protection, informed by a theological framework, promotes sustainability, justice, and compassion for all human beings. States and religious institutions should strengthen community and individual empowerment processes in integrating agriculture and social protection. The lack of field data partly limited this study. Consequently, broader theoretical, empirical, and systemic studies that include primary data or participants are recommended.

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