

AT –RISK CHILDREN PROJECT

**REPORT ON A 2-DAY SCOPING MISSION TO
BORNO STATE**



DATE: 11TH -12TH FEBRUARY 2021



1.0 INTRODUCTION

The At-Risk Children (ARC) project is designed to provide a multi-dimensional, broad spectrum approach to the crisis of vulnerable children, including the Almajiri children in the Northern States. Even though there are diverse individuals and groups working to address these issues, the need for coordination with minimum standards, learning and sharing, thereby ensuring impact at scale, appears to be lacking. The ARC Project seeks to provide central coordination of resources, strategies and monitoring to drive a targeted, efficient and cost-effective solution to the distressing phenomenon. The Goal of the ARC is to reduce the vulnerability of children, providing them with a life of dignity, thereby boosting individual and National productivity, as well as security.



The At-Risk Children (ARC) team was in Maiduguri, Borno State as part of its scoping mission and stakeholder engagement strategy. This initial visit seeks to mainly engage with the key stakeholders in the State to understudy the current status of the youth and other vulnerable children that are considered to be at-risk, as well as facilities and initiatives that can be leveraged on, in the State. Findings would then provide the team a broad view of the situation on ground and allow the team to identify critical aspects of the existing programmes and initiatives to complement and add value to.

Borno Trip Activities:

- Engagement with the Borno State SUBEB Chairman.

- Engagement with the Borno State High-Powered Committee on the Reform of the Almajiri system.
- Engagement with other relevant stakeholders including existing proprietors and Tsangaya Schools.
- Identify existing gaps and challenges.

2.0 DAY ONE

Activity one:

The ARC-P team commenced their mission in Borno State with an engagement with the Borno State Chairman of SUBEB Dr Shettima Kullima and his team.

The State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) is a critical institution and partner for the ARC-P because of its mandate to oversee the activities of children within the basic education age group; a demography that is key to ARC-P. In addition, SUBEB coordinates the activities of BESDA, a World Bank-funded project supported by UBEC whose structure ARC-P seeks leverage on, in relation to the almajiri children currently within 'tsangaya' schools. According to the SUBEB Chairman, they take pride in working towards revitalizing of the 'tsangaya' system to accommodate new ways of learning. He particularly expressed keen interest in engaging with the skill acquisition aspect of the ARC-P.

According to the Borno BESDA project advisor, Mr. Abba Kura Maliru, there are about 3500 tsangaya schools mapped in 15 out of the 27 Local Government Areas of the State, consisting of about 199,000 pupils. According to Barrister Mustapha Mafi who is the Director result area 1 BESDA, they have captured the data of 883 out of 3500 tsangaya schools in the first phase with a total number of 62, 540 pupils enrolled. They intend to capture the remaining number in the 2nd phase of data collation.



The SUBEB Chairman said the pupils are being taught literacy and numeracy twice a week between 9-11 every Thursday and Friday. They provide them with one meal a day, uniforms, slates, texts and mats.

To encourage the ulamas, BESDA pays the ulama N5000 a month and they have been given the liberty to recommend local facilitators (for the purpose of teaching literacy and numeracy) that they are comfortable with, to be engaged by SUBEB; this is an additional incentive to the ulamas.

Activity Two:

Meeting with Borno State High-Powered Committee on the Reform of the Almajiri System. The Meeting was anchored by Dr Mairo Mandara and Chaired by the Borno State SUBEB Chairman.



The meeting started with the ARC-P team lead, Mrs Maryam Uwais (Special Adviser to the President on Social Investments), giving an overview of the ARC-P and how it intends to leverage on, and add value to existing structures in implementation. The Committee, led by the Vice Chairman, Professor Ibrahim Umar, informed the team that they are willing to work with ARC-P but stated that at this point they are at the point of ascertaining the status of 'tsangaya' in Borno State, before coming up with a definite stand or approach.

He, however, expressed their interest in vocational training for the category of children and youth at risk in the tsangaya system, especially in relation to the huge numbers of 'muhajiroon' within the State, whom he defined as having graduated from the tsangaya schools but have no skills to enable them earn a decent income in a productive venture. This was supported by other members of the Committee, including the Permanent Secretary Borno State Ministry of Education Alhaji Ali Kaka who doubles as the Secretary of the Committee. Other participants at the meeting includes representatives from Ministry of Women Affairs led by the Hon. Commissioner Mrs Zuwaira Gambo, a representative each from the Ministries of Health, Youth & Sports and Religious Affairs. Others were proprietors of tsangaya schools led by Goni Kolo founder of a Model Tsangaya School, Baba Buji.

In her submission, the Hon Commissioner Women Affairs & Social Development, stressed the need to expand the scope to other vulnerable categories. The categories she listed as:

- a) Survivors of Gender-based violence
- b) e;
- c) Children of Boko Haram members who have been abandoned;
- d) Children from the IDP camps who do not have any surviving relations or carers.

Following the deliberations, it was agreed that the ARC-P team will review the submissions and align the identified needs with the thrust of the ARC-P strategy document, in seeking to enhance the dignity of, and deepen the productivity of youth and children in Borno State.

Activity Three:

Engagement with Relevant Stakeholders.

Participants then proceeded on a stakeholder engagement with some key stakeholders.



The team first visited the Borno State Chief Imam led by the Vice Chairman of the High-Powered Committee. The Imam in his response expressed his willingness to support the initiative. He called on the team to add certification of existing informal efforts and achievements to the ARC-P focus, to facilitate morale-boosting and entry into more formal ventures. In his view, certification would equip the beneficiaries with some form of documented evidence that could be used to secure employment or further training.

The team then visited an existing Tsangaya, the first of such schools in Borno State (existing for over 100 years) and for which construction the Sardauna of Sokoto had provided the funds, at inception. It was observed that both female and male children were enrolled both as day and boarding students. In addition to Islamic scholarship and knowledge, the school was also providing limited vocational learning for the females in embroidery. The ulama took the members around the facility, including a library that had a Qur'an that was over 122 years old, and to the matriarch of the school, a 97-year-old lady (Hajiya Fatima GoniRam) residing within the premises who had memorised the Qur'an. As a former teacher in the school herself, she prayed fervently for the success of the ARC-P in Borno State.



The next point of call was a visit to the Baba Buji Model Tsangaya School. At this tsangaya school that is both boarding and day, that has graduated over 600 pupils some of whom have gone on to acquire University degrees. Some of the teachers were introduced and confirmed they were part of the alma mater, having proceeded to acquire University degrees thereafter. After a brief meeting, the head teacher, a female, took us round the facilities where some students were in session, while others were engaged in sports. She confirmed that they currently have 525 boarders and 217 active day students. There are about 312 others who enrolled in part time studies as well.



The day ended with a visit to the Bulumkutu Intervention Centre, run by the Ministry of Women Affairs. The Centre has both male and female vulnerable children and children from IDPs who have no immediate family or carer, as well as women who have been victims of gender-based violence and others with mental health challenges. The Centre has the capacity for 1000 but currently houses 96 residents as most of their internees were either persons with special needs, found wandering on the streets, or aimlessly within the camps, without any links to others. The Centre carries out a rigorous contact tracing activity in which they re-integrate the children or the women with parents and family after a rehabilitative period of not less than 9 months to 2 years, depending on the severity of the cases and the peculiar needs. Indeed, there was a point at which they harboured over 1000 residents. Some cases related to mental health challenges in youth and especially females, child abuse cases as well as gender-based violence.

The Centre is a full boarding facility with structured classes where they are taught literacy and numeracy skills, as well as vocations such as hair dressing, tailoring and agricultural skills and sports. The facility comprises a large field and a garden run by the children supervised by the social workers, some of whom are instructors in the school; a poultry farm also exists within the facility. The Centre also has a fully equipped medical centre and kitchen. The Centre had received a lot of support from UN Agencies, particularly UNICEF.



3.0 Day Two

The 2nd day began with a visit to another all-female tsangaya school run by Sayyida Hafsah Sheikh Sharif Ibrahim Sale where the team inspected the school premises and

heard from the proprietor. The school currently has a total number of 1470 female students with only 4 classrooms, some of whom were observed to be as young as 5 years in age. Most of them were orphans or found wandering in IDP camps, with no apparent caregivers or guardians to cater for their welfare. Asked about accommodation, the team was informed that members of the community typically housed the students in nearby compounds and classes began at 6am in shifts of 3 hours each, with a typical day ending at 10pm. The proprietor confirmed that they prioritise Islamic memorisation and faith-based curricula, while subjects that included English, Maths and Science, are taught by volunteers (some of whom were her students when they were younger) from the University of Maiduguri. They also had a supervisor and facilitator, who also volunteered from the University. It was observed that the facilities were much to tight; there was no running water or electricity, no furniture and availability for expansion. She confirmed that several girls were interested in joining her school but she was unable to admit them due to the many constraints and limited space. As to feeding, the proprietor mentioned that her father and members of the community sometimes sent food for the students, but this was not regular. She also informed the team that a good Samaritan, a Commissioner in the State, had recently painted their classrooms, given them floor mats and upgraded the toilets, for which effort they were grateful.





The Team then proceeded to the Girls Child Concerns (GCC) Academy where they interacted with the officials and students. There 300 girls in this academy are all boarders. Majority of them are orphans selected from the IDP camps. They are also being engaged in craft and vocational training with a structured curriculum as obtains in formal schools. Members of the team interacted with the girls on the importance of education and encouraged them to see themselves as the lucky ones among other survivors of the insurgency.



The ARC-P team together with the Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development visited The Learning Centre Maiduguri, also known as North East Children's Trust (NECT), strictly consisting of orphans from the IDP camps. The Vice President was very instrumental in raising of funds for this centre. The premises comprised of boarding facility for both boys and girls with modern facilities, including primary sections, hostels (even for live in caregivers), an auditorium, a clinic, and other supporting facilities such as the innovation hub, a farm and poultry section and the vocational training centre. The NECT also has 2 sister schools where children can graduate to formal secondary school learning.



The breakdown of the students is given as:

Total number of boys 339

Total number of girls 188

Total number of Children 527



The team ended the day with a visit to BESDA-run facility, the Muhammadu Buhari Academy where the modern facilities were also inspected. The Institution is all-female with an existing 300 population. The team was informed that even though the Academy has the capacity to accommodate 2,400 students, they are in the process of enrolling the students, in phases. The next batch was expected the following week as enrolment was on for a further 1000 from nine Local Government Areas in Northern Borno State, with 150 from the IDP camps in each LGA and 300 from Monguno LGA, being the worst hit. The inspection included the boarding hostels and some students in classes. They mentioned that they had a garden and poultry sections but no vocations, as of yet.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It was an eye-opening trip that exposed the ARC-P team to the peculiarities of Borno State as it relates to the issue of Tsangaya and other vulnerable children. It was evident that there were many in need of the ARC-P intervention, beyond the almajiri children in the tsangaya schools, as identified in the BESDA data. The Team and all the relevant stakeholders engaged had a consensus on some key areas of intervention and challenges to address, including health challenges. The areas of interventions focused mainly on skills needs. Amongst the most sustainable skills identified for the females was cap making and embroidery.

Challenges identified, include:

- 1) Space: Some of the existing Tsangaya schools visited do not have adequate space to accommodate the wide range of activities ARC-P is proposing.

Currently there is limited space for classrooms and toilet facilities. There is also problem of water and sanitation as observed in some of the locations visited.

- 2) Curriculum: The Almajiri Committee seems to be very apprehensive on the issue of curriculum, with the misconception that the learning introduced might disrupt the existing system in place. It was clarified that what was being proposed by ARC-P was to enhance value to the existing system and it was up to the State to determine what curricula they desired. Some of the Professors however confirmed that they would embrace curricula that related to vocation and skill acquisition.
- 3) 18 and above category of the Almajiris: The 'muhajiroon' as they referred to them, are in urgent need some form of intervention. There are about 8,612 of them currently registered under their Association. The Committee emphasised on the need for ARC-P to consider them in some form of vocational training and empowerment.
- 4) Needs: The visit evidenced the fact that there were needs far beyond the almajiri children as they were so many other vulnerable children on the streets and in the camps, who required ARC-P intervention. The engagement with the Almajiri Committee, the SUBEB Chair and the Commissioner for Women's Affairs also revealed that being a predominantly patriarchal society, the female gender was likely to be overlooked in the scheme of things, unless the ARC-P team insisted on gender inclusion.
- 5) Coordination: The ARC-P team would need a strong and hands-on State Coordinator that could manage the diverse and complex relevant stakeholders in the State, preferably female to ensure gender equity. This is key in realising the ARC-P goals.

Recommendations:

- a. Based on the forgoing, it would be safer to use the following facilities as a pilot camps for ARC-P initiative. They include:
 - The Muhammadu Buhari Academy (BESDA Facility)
 - The NECT centre
 - The Girls Child Concerns Academy
 - Baba Buji Model Tsangaya School.

These facilities have space and structures already working that the ARC-P can leverage on for impact.

- b. The female tsangaya school owned and run by Sayyida Hafsat Saleh would require several interventions to ensure that it transforms into a conducive learning environment for the girls. Sayyida Hafsat would require financial and in-kind support to enable her continue the commendable work for the girls who were in her custody, based on the trust she enjoys in the community in which she resides. The State should be encouraged to engage with the sheer needs, given the fact that 1,470 girls is a substantial number whose fate should not be left to one individual to manage.
- c. The Almajiri Committee for the Reform of the Almajiri system had commenced their assignment and being so territorial about their assignment and role, it might be expedient for the ARC-P team to proffer ideas of how the challenges in that sector can be addressed to that Committee, before they conclude and submit their report to the State Government.
- d. The Commissioner had confirmed that the State could organise the street children also into Transition Nurturing Centres of learning, in addition to the BESDA spaces. This could be done as pilot studies.
- e. The team would await a meeting with the Governor of the State, possibly in Abuja, to engage on how to proceed with Borno State, given that he was out of town on the occasion of the scoping mission.