

AT –RISK CHILDREN PROJECT

REPORT ON THE 2-DAY SCOPING MISSION TO EKITI STATE



DATE: 18TH -19TH OF JANUARY 2021

1. INTRODUCTION

The At Risk Children (ARC) project is designed to provide a multi-dimensional, broad spectrum approach to the crisis of vulnerable children, starting with the Almajiri children in the Northern States. Even though there are diverse individuals and groups working to address these issues, coordination with minimum standards, learning and sharing, thereby ensuring impact at scale, appears to be required. The ARC-P 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 Ekiti State At Risk Children (ARC) project seeks to complement and expand on the wide range of actors working in the space of child development, engaging them to not only be implementers, but active participants in the design and development of interaction and engagement with the ARC-P project office in the Office of the Special Adviser on Social Investments at Federal level. The project's design phase factors in broad-based consultations to ensure engagements are informed by situation analysis, lessons learnt and context.

The Objectives:

- provide stability in the lives of at risk children through nurturing, care and Enhancing their wellbeing;
- rehabilitate & reintegrate them into their communities through meaningful empowerment strategies and;
- empower the gate keepers (if any) to support governments' efforts to systemically and effectively and permanently address the problem.

2.0 SIGNING OF MOU

The Governor of Ekiti State, His Excellency Governor Kayode Fayemi alongside the State executive team and the ARC –P team and Her Excellency, the wife of the Governor, led the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding. This activity took place in the Governors' office by 9am on the 18th of January 2021.

After introductions, the wife of the Governor, Erelu Bisi Fayemi, introduced the ARC-P team to His Excellency. His Excellency lauded the timeliness of the ARC-P in the State at a time the State had ramped up efforts to ensure the eradication of poverty

and long-term economic development in the rural communities, thereby improving standards of living. He confirmed that the State, in a bid to ensure children return to school, had made education free with no fees for uniforms or books at the primary school level.

The Attorney General of the State, Barr. Olawale Fapohunda, thereafter signed of the MOU in the presence of the Permanent Secretary, Ekiti State Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Development, Mrs Adeyemo Ibironke. Mrs Maryam Uwais signed off on for the ARC-P as the representative of ARC-P, witnessed by Barr. Sani Ahmad, the Head of Legal, ARC-P.

In attendance were the Governor, the wife of the Governor, the Secretary to the State Government, the Attorney General, Commissioners of Women Affairs, Health, Education and Information ministries as well as Permanent Secretaries of the Ministry of Women Affairs and the Project Lead of the Ekiti state ARC – P.



3.0 TECHNICAL SESSION WITH EKITI ARC –P TEAM

ATTENDANCE

The technical session held in the office of the wife of the Governor and in attendance where:

1. Commissioners for Women Affairs, and Education
2. Permanent Secretaries of TETCOM, SUBEB, ADULT EDUCATION
3. Special Assistants to the Wife of the Governor
4. Directors/ Deputy Directors from the Ministries of Health, Sports, Education, SUBEB, Women Affairs & Agriculture)
5. Doctors from the Primary Healthcare Department

The technical session commenced at 11am with Erelu Bisi Fayemi giving brief opening remarks. She explained the excitement of Ekiti State in collaborating with the ARC-P as it would support the State's drive towards achieving the 'no child is left behind' mantra of the Government. Mrs Uwais gave an overview of the ARC- P, the purpose, objectives and proposed design of the project, which would leverage on and incorporate State-specific context and thus was the basis of the instant scoping mission to the State. The Federal team was visiting to understand the context in which Ekiti State perceived children and youth that were at risk, what initiatives and facilities were already available, and what support they would need to address this menace.

Mr. Biodun Oyeleye, the Ekiti Project lead, gave an overview of those considered at risk in Ekiti State and the situation analysis carried out to define their needs.

During the discussions the State defined children (and youth) at risk as:

- i. Orphans
- ii. Children on substance use
- iii. Street children

The meeting closed with some follow up steps, which include –

- A. The submission of a State work plan and budget to the ARC-P team, to commence streamlining work for the ARC – P to commence in Ekiti State. The Timeline for this was two weeks.
- B. The provision of centres where the children may be assessed was also requested for which the State provided immediately, with a tour of the facilities after.

4.0 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Stakeholder Roundtable was held subsequently, and consisted of representatives of different opinion groups in the State, including:

1. Traditional rulers
2. Religious leaders
3. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
4. Civil Society Organisations (CBOs)
5. Media

After the initial briefing of why the meeting was called and presentation of overview by both the State and Federal teams, the stakeholders were encouraged to contribute to what the ARC-P project could be designed as in Ekiti State. Some of the suggestions include:

1. Focusing on addressing the realities of children who are not supervised after school but before their parents return home from work— apparently, they were increasingly becoming a bother for the community as children are generally idle from the hours of 2pm to 6pm and at that time they are prone to be lured into many vices.
2. The NGOs suggested a mentoring system where the State provides key focal points in each community to mentor children of certain age groups.
3. The religious community was willing to add to the activities already being carried out by them in churches and in mosques to support child welfare.
4. The State was keen on developing more of vocational skills that equip children and youth to cultivate productive livelihoods rather than just educational advancement, although they commended the State Government for the giant strides made in the educational sphere.



5.0 TOUR OF FACILITIES

The State provided details of 6 Skill Acquisition Centres, and 4 Transition Home and Vocation Centres managed by the State Ministry of Women Affairs, which would be available for the ARC- P. They also provided 16 facilities for the training of stakeholders on the ARC-P based on the status of vulnerable children in the State, using the child status index.

Of the 10 centres provided, two were visited; one skills acquisition centre and one transition home. **The Women and Youth Development Skills Acquisition Centre for Persons with Disability, Ado – Ekiti** – a centre built to accommodate the beneficiaries to be trained in skills like the use of ICT, shoe making, hair dressing and catering. It has a 400-seater auditorium and a well-equipped sick bay. The training halls where PLWD-compliant and were well equipped to enhance teaching and learning.

The second facility visited was the **Transition Home And Vocational Centre Afao Road , Ado Ekiti** , which was built as a transit home for displaced persons, especially women and girls. It is equipped with a 208-bed space and boarding facility. It has a vocational skill centre for training on hairdressing, photography, cloth weaving etc.



PERCIEVED CHALLENGES

The Ekiti State team identified that at least 20,000 children have been targeted for the ARC-P across all the LGAs in the State and they include children who meet one or more of the following criteria:

1. Orphans (Children who have lost either mother, father or both parents),
2. Children from poor family,
3. Children in conflict with law,
4. Children in child-headed households,
5. Children living with HIV,
6. Children with terminally or chronically ill parents, and
7. Children living with old/frail grandparent(s).

For majority of the children, they are actually integrated into other families as a result of the existing communal living, but the resultant effect is that such households get overstretched on resources because they have to cope with reducing food

consumption, removing the children from school to contribute to household labour as well as selling off productive assets such as land. The challenge however is the low-income levels of the caregiver, where majority live below the poverty line.

While the ARC-P may not be able to cater for all the categories of children, there will be the need to organise the children in spaces – and this may be logistically challenging because of the daily transportation, providing a meal for the children during the hours that they learn on the ARC-P is also a cause for concern. The insufficiency of medical doctors and/or social workers to provide medical and psychosocial support may also be a challenge.

PROPOSED SCOPE OF INTERVENTION

Following the two-day scoping mission to Ekiti State and in view of the identified needs and proposed challenges, the ARC-P intends to work with the State to ensure youth and children at risk are organised into spaces during after school hours where they would be engaged. In these spaces the children will benefit from enhanced classes on literacy and numeracy, vocation and skill acquisition training, sports and creativity as well as agricultural skills.

Furthermore, children under substance abuse or any other abuse would be provided with psychosocial support, alongside medical and health support to improve their livelihoods.

Ekiti State had proposed a community process of rehabilitation and reintegration of the children, whereby caregivers and gatekeepers would be engaged as volunteers to attend to this children within the spaces. It is proposed that each LGA provides a space for engaging children after school, but also that the State makes available Transition Nurturing Centres where the children can be accommodated to learn, particularly for orphans, children living with HIV, children living within child-headed households or those who have frail caregivers.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Ekiti State ARC-P team are ready to collaborate effectively with the FGN in the actualization of the project in the State. It was agreed that with the submission of the

work plan the FGN can commence discussions on how to engage the State team to commence the 9-month activity to benefit the children and their gatekeepers.