

**AT –RISK CHILDREN PROJECT**

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



**DATE: 12<sup>TH</sup> - 14<sup>TH</sup> OF SEPTEMBER 2020**

## 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 due to the sheer numbers of children in that category. Even though there are diverse individuals and groups working to address these issues, there is hardly any coordination for minimum standards, learning and sharing, thereby ensuring impact at scale. The ARC Project seeks to leverage on 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 Gombe State At Risk Children Project (ARC-P), like other States, 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 the engagements with the coordination of the ARC-P project office in the Social Investment Office, Abuja. The project's design phase factors in broad-based consultations to ensure engagements are informed by



situation analysis, lessons learnt and context.



The Objectives include to:

- provide stability in the lives of at-risk youth and 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 address the problem systemically and effectively and permanently.

## 2.0 SCOPING MISSION

The ARC-P Team sought the buy-in of the State Government, to collaborate with and support the existing State & private-led initiatives with a view to assuring sustainability, towards rehabilitation and reintegration of children and youth at risk. The BESDA spaces certainly provide fertile ground for the added value that the ARC-P effort to engage with. The Special Adviser to the President on Social Investments (S.Ad) and her team (who have been working under the auspices of the office of the Vice President with the support of the Federal Ministry of Education), were warmly received by the State, after which a seamless interaction followed with the sharing of very encouraging and invaluable information during the visit to Gombe, even in the absence His Excellency and his dear wife.



The keen interest of the State was demonstrated during a return visit by the Gombe State First Lady, to ARC-P Office at the Presidential Villa Abuja, where she was received by the ARC-P Team, led by the SAd to the President. The team took time to brief Her Excellency Hajiya Asma'u Inuwa Yahaya on the entire project, sharing the work plan with the first lady, who thanked the ARC-P team and Haj. Maryam Uwais (SAd) for their visit to Gombe. The First Lady commended the timeliness of the ARC-P in the State, at a time when efforts were being made to ramp up efforts to ensure the eradication of street children, poverty and long-term economic development in the

rural communities. Her Excellency also seized the opportunity to introduce her roll out plans for the children and a new programme for the girl-child to be commissioned soon by the State, explaining her vision for improving standards of living of the citizenry in Gombe State.

### 3.0 SIGNING OF MOU

A letter was sent to His Excellency Governor Muhammadu Inuwa Yahaya, alongside a copy of the ARC-P work Plan and the MoU, to be signed at the next meeting. The date remains at the discretion of His Excellency, the Governor.

Meanwhile, the State Government, as lead executor and implementor of the ARC-P, is expected to provide the following for the commencement of ARC-P:

- a) A State Government team, led by a Project lead (designated by the Governor), comprising experts and requisite public servants from the Ministries of Education, Health, Budget and Planning, Commerce, Youth and Empowerment, Agriculture, Rural Development, Sports, Environment, Arts & Culture, the Local Government Councils as well as such other staff and support from the State Ministries, Departments and Agencies as may be necessary, being the team to directly engage and work with the Office of the Special Adviser on Social Investments (OSASI) team for the duration of the ARC-P;
- b) Critical stakeholders within the State, including the religious & community leaders, social workers, teachers, health workers, extension workers as well as monitors with the passion, experience, and a track record for addressing the challenges of children at risk, for the purpose of inclusivity and sustainability in addressing the phenomenon.
- c) Available data of the mapped at-risk children in Gombe State; this should comprise children and 'alaramma' data collated through the BESDA, including the geo-locations of the 'tsangaya' schools and Girl Centres.
- d) Agricultural land, training centres and Master Trainers, whose support can be garnered and utilised for the benefit of the target audience. Furthermore, vocations and skills that are peculiar to Gombe would be of immense interest to ARC-P.

#### 4.0 VISIT TO HIS HIGHNESS THE EMIR OF AND GOMBE STATE

The SAd, Hajiya Maryam Uwais, introduced her team and briefed the Emir on the



approach intended for the project, which is to complement the State efforts through a central coordination of resources, strategies and monitoring to drive a targeted, efficient and cost-effective solution to the distressing phenomenon of At-Risk Children.

The Emir of Gombe- described the project as timely narrating the COVID-19 incidence leading to violation of children rights and putting the lives of more children at risk. It was a long evening as the Emir subsequently took the team round some of his personal projects geared towards safeguarding the rights of the vulnerable children. He later pledged his support for ARC-P in Gombe State.

#### 5.0 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Technical Session held at the Central Hall of the Gombe State University had the following in attendance:

1. Head of BESDA team, Gombe
2. Representatives of SUBEB, Women Affairs, State Sports Commission and Education
3. Special Assistant and Aides to the Wife of the Governor
4. Representatives of the Gombe State Traditional Council
5. Directors from the Primary Healthcare Department
6. Traditional rulers across the 11 LGA's headed by Yeriman Gombe
  - a. Traditional rulers (masu Unguwa, Dakatai and Hakimai)
  - b. Religious leaders (Alaramma and Gardaye)
7. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
8. Civil Society Organisations (CBOs)
9. Media

The Technical Session commenced at 10am with the SAd to the President giving an overview of the ARC- P, the purpose, objectives and proposed implementation design of the project all aimed at supporting and incorporating State-specific peculiarities. She confirmed the general objectives of enhancing the livelihoods and dignifying the lives of the most vulnerable in the State as the basis for the scoping mission to the State. There were several goodwill messages from many stakeholders across the high table, followed by comments from the Ulama's and civil society, evidencing an outpour of goodwill in expectation of enhanced livelihoods for the target audience.

The Emir of Gombe, represented by the Yeriman Gombe, conveyed the excitement of Gombe people on the ARC-P and urged the State Government to collaborate with the Federal team in achieving the 'no child is left behind' mantra of the Government. The meeting closed with some follow up actions which include –

- A. The designation of a Focal Person/Project Lead for Gombe State on ARC-P, to liaise henceforth with the Federal team.
- B. Arrange a follow up visit with the Government and the relevant stakeholders across the relevant Ministries and Parastatals of Governments in the State for a technical session.
- C. A State workplan and budget to be sent to the Coordinating office to commence streamlining the design for the ARC – P in Gombe State.
- D. Tours to available, functional vocational centres in the State for assessment as to readiness and suitability for engagement.
- E. A seamless collaboration with, and the sharing of data and relevant information with BESDA.

## **6.0 ENGAGEMENT WITH BESDA**

The BESDA meeting was held the same evening with the Stakeholder Roundtable, and was attended by:

1. BESDA Lead Gombe State
2. BESDA Technical Team
3. BESDA field workers
4. BESDA officials from Bauchi State
5. Civil Society Organisations (CBOs) working with BESDA in Gombe.
6. Media



After the initial briefing and presentation of overview by both the State and Federal Government teams, stakeholders were encouraged to engage and share ideas on the strategy of ARC-P as would best work for Gombe State. Some of the suggestions include:

1. Sensitization and outreach
2. Strategy for negotiating extra hours in the BESDA space
3. Needs assessment amongst the Ulama's
4. Additional learning centres for the girl-child
5. Classification and grading of Ulama's



## 7.0 TOUR OF SOME TSANGAYA SCHOOLS

The team visited some 'tsangaya' schools and BESDA girl-learning centers. The team also engaged some traditional Jauros in the communities and religious leaders (Ulama's) who had shown interest, having already demonstrated their support for



empowering youth and children in their communities. The project, as reiterated, would rely on the Sub-National Government for sustainability through LGA support, all towards rehabilitation and community reintegration.



## PERCIEVED CHALLENGES

The Gombe State stakeholder engagement identified some problems associated with the Almajiri system and girl-child, being the target beneficiaries of the ARC-P across 11 the LGAs in the State. These include:

1. Children in Tsangaya Schools
2. Children from poor families
3. Children hawking, mostly girls
4. Children migrating from other States, mostly from Borno & Yobe
5. Children on substance abuse
6. Children on the streets

Amongst the immediate challenges would be the need to negotiate additional hours for learning vocations, entrepreneurship, farming and engaging in sports for both the Almajiri and the Girls in the BESDA learning centres. Other children, outside the BESDA spaces may also require ARC-P support although they reside in host communities with other families. The resultant effect is that such households get overstretched on resources because they have to cope with reducing food consumption, often resorting to removing the children from school to contribute to household labour as well as selling off productive assets such as land. The challenge is highest with the low-income levels of the caregivers, 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 for Gombe State to organise the youth and children they identify as 'at risk' in spaces and in phases, to cover as many youth and children as may be in need. This may, however, be logistically challenging because of the daily transportation, the provision of meals and other training or support that may be provided. The insufficiency of medical doctors, psychologists and/or social workers to provide medical and psychosocial support may also be a challenge so it would be advantageous if Gombe State could share their needs for the purpose.

## **PROPOSED SCOPE OF INTERVENTION**

Following the two-day scoping mission to Gombe State and in view of the identified needs and proposed challenges, the ARC-P intends to work within the BESDA spaces across the State, in addition to other additional facilities to be created by the State Government, to ensure youth and children at risk are reached and impacted.

In these spaces the children will benefit from enhanced classes on literacy and numeracy, vocation and skill acquisition training, entrepreneurship & financial literacy, sports and creativity as well as agricultural skills. Furthermore, children would be provided with psychosocial support, alongside examinations of sight and hearing as well as special needs, to address their health concerns.

## **CONCLUSION**

It was evident that the State team is ready to collaborate with the FGN on the actualization of the ARC-P in Gombe State. An MOU is to be signed between the Federal team and the State Government on a later date, to be decided by the Governor. The workplan had already been forwarded for discussions on the entry point for Gombe State to kickstart activities towards the commencement of ARC-P for the benefit of the youth, children and their gatekeepers.