

AT –RISK CHILDREN PROJECT

REPORT ON A 1-DAY SCOPING MISSION TO KADUNA STATE



DATE: 16TH -17TH 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 Kaduna 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 status of the youth and other vulnerable children that are at-risk, as well as facilities and initiatives that can be leveraged on, in that jurisdiction. 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.



Trip Activities:

- Engagement with the His Excellency the Executive Governor, and the Kaduna State Executive Council
- Engagement with the Kaduna State Hon. Commissioner for Education and SUBEB Chairman to discuss the Almajiri system and other at-risk children in the State.
- Engagement with other relevant stakeholders including Kaduna Polytechnic and Vocational Centre
- Identify existing gaps and challenges.

2.0 ENGAGEMENT WITH THE STATE GOVERNOR & TEAM

The ARC-P team commenced their mission in Kaduna State with an interactive meeting with the office of His Excellency Malam Nasir El-Rufai, Governor of Kaduna State.

The meeting commenced with the ARC-P team lead, Mrs Maryam Uwais (SAd; 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 at Sub-National level. The Governor thanked the team for their passion and commitment, expressing his own single-minded focus on education knowing, from experience, the difference it had made to his trajectory in life, having been orphaned a very young age with hardly any means of sustenance. He pledged the cooperation and support of the State Government on ARC-P, since it was aimed at enhancing the initiatives on ground, some of which were sorely needed.

The Hon. Commissioner for Human Resources briefed the meeting on the Kaduna State approach to the challenges being faced by almajiri children. She confirmed the State's progress in the reform of the 'almajiri' system, and how far they had gone with documenting the children brought in from other States, as well as transferring those that were from other States. She mentioned how the health concerns of the children (including those found to be positive with Covid-19) had been addressed, documented and returned to their communities and homes, as well as the plans for ensuring all the 'tsangaya' schools adopt an integrated curriculum, for registration with the Kaduna State Ministry of Education. Tsangaya schools were also inspected and partnerships encouraged with the private sector to upgrade many of them, to address the diverse needs in the sector. Although there were challenges and resistance in a few parts, the Kaduna State Government was resolved to bring to an

end to the deprivations and suffering these children and youth had endured in the past, informing the team of incentives, communication material, enforcement measures and laws enacted (and in the pipeline) for the purpose.

The Hon Commissioner Human Services then stressed the need to expand the scope of the focus of ARC-P to other vulnerable categories. These categories she listed as:

- a) Children from broken homes
- b) Children neglected (and the need for parenting skills)
- c) Children suffering from abuse
- d) Children separated from their homes and who had no recollection of their parents' abode or who were foreigners

The Commissioner for Education began with summarizing the operations of the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), as a critical institution 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. It is important to NOTE here that BESDA is not a good bargain entry point in Kaduna as they are still struggling with the buy in of the State.

The Commissioner, however, mentioned how far the State had gone in reforming the challenges in the almajiri system (as well as other children at risk) through advocacy (especially at community level), the registration of schools that had complied with integrating the formal school curricula as directed by the State Government, and enforcement measures already being undertaken to stop begging. The State Government had made evident progress in this space and had written the Northern State Governors to share the learnings at a Summit, bearing in mind the fact that there needs to be uniformity in the approach adopted across the Northern States, to be able to curb this distressing phenomenon in a more permanent manner. He suggested that the team also meet with the Business Innovation Centre, as plans were underway to ensure that the youth and children also engage with vocations and other opportunities, through that Unit.

The UNODC expert who accompanied the team briefed the State of the 'Line Up Live Up' (LULU) programme that would be introduced through the ARC-P, by the UNODC, leveraging on the existing trained 'UNPLUGGED' teachers across the Federal

Government Unity Schools and some State schools. LULU is essentially a programme targeted at out-of-school children, that utilises sports and subsequent debriefing methods to imbibe life skills, such as empathy, tolerance, self-restraint, discipline and teamwork in the target audience. It had recorded remarkable successes in reducing violence, extremism and substance abuse in at least 10 countries, such as Brazil and South Africa.



The State Commissioners for Sports, Communication and the Permanent Secretary Health expressed their interest in engaging with the ARC-P, for the benefit of the young people.

Her Excellency, the Deputy Governor Kaduna State, then gave a briefing on the activities of the Human Capital Development Council (HCDC). As Chair of the high-powered Committee on the Reform of the Almajiri system, she shared the activities of the HCDC, to include:

- a. Almajiri relocation 3,091 had already been relocated and re-united with their families out of the 1,118 received from other States (out of which 80% were covid positive & between ages of 5-17);
- b. Engagement with the Business Apprentice Training Centre (BATC) & Business Innovation Unit to develop a strategic plan for the benefit of the children;
- c. Review of the Education law 1947 to amongst other things incorporate virtual learning.



Following the deliberations, it was agreed that the ARC-P team would review the information on the existing initiatives and plans (including from documentation that would be sent subsequently), then align the identified needs with the thrust of the ARC-P strategy, in seeking to enhance the dignity of, and deepen the productivity of youth and children in Kaduna State.



3.0 VISIT TO KADUNA POLYTECHNIC

The team proceeded on a visit to the Kaduna Polytechnic and were received by the Rector, Prof Idris Bugaje who briefed the team on their activities, which included a pilot project with 30 almajiri children being trained in vocations and then sent on as apprentices to trained informal assessors at 'Panteka'. The Kaduna Polytechnic had recorded successes in the vocational space; training informal assessors, verifiers and external verifiers, so was available to 'formalise' the informal sector, thereby assuring of quality and quantity in the vocational space. He expressed his eagerness to support the ARC-P initiative, calling on the team to key into the existing informal efforts and

focus on facilitating morale-boosting and the needed entry into more formal ventures.



He also mentioned the emergence of the Polytechnic as the winner of a TETFUND competition, which had a cash prize that was being expected. Having been granted land for expansion by the State Government, plans were far gone to construct a Skills Village that would accommodate more numbers and vocations, thereby also serving as a Hub for training in diverse capacities.



Areas of possible collaboration were extensively discussed, including assistance in facilitating funding from NEPAD and the training of assessors/verifiers who he described as grossly inadequate in the country, even though there are no express formal educational qualifications required. The Rector lamented the dearth of funding and recognition of the importance of vocational training in the country, even as he offered the Kaduna Polytechnic as a partner to provide guidance, expertise and training in the space. He further discussed their initiative of RPL, Recognition of Prior Learning – for the certification of non-formal experiences.

In response, the SAd, commended the activities and foresight of KadPoly, having positioned and carved a niche for itself as a pioneer in this sector. She also seized the opportunity to emphasize on the need for the inclusion of females in the vocational training offered by the institution, as well as at the Skills Village. It was also necessary for the Polytechnic to monitor the progress of the first cohort of 30 youth that had been trained and interned by the informal sector at Panteka. Finally, while thanking the Rector, and his team she requested for a close partnership in the areas of certification of vocational skills for the identified youth and children at risk.



4.0 NATIONAL EYE CENTRE KADUNA

The Team then proceeded to a meeting with Dr. Amina Hassan of the National Eye Centre (NEC) Kaduna joined the team for a brief discussion. Dr Amina briefed the team on the activities of the National Eye Centre, along with supportive partnerships. She mentioned the collaboration with an NGO, SightSavers, (also available in Sokoto & Zamfara States) over the past four years, with the assurance that any child identified with vision impairments brought to the attention of the Centre would be treated for free, as SightSavers would bear the costs. Dr Amina also discussed the Community Vision screening project, which is school based, using a 2-letter test that could be utilised easily by trained teachers in the ARC-P space.



While thanking Dr. Amina for her presentation, the team was advised as to how best to engage the National Eye Centre as well as the National Ear Care Centre (also situated in Kaduna), for the purposes of improving the sight and hearing of the beneficiaries identified by the State officials as being at risk and in need of treatment. She, however, added that treatment would be free in Kaduna, Sokoto or Zamfara, but costs for logistics would likely be expected for children in other States that were not covered by the SightSavers programme. The programme was coming to an end in December 2021.

5.0 CONCLUSION

It was an eye-opening trip that exposed the ARC-P team to the peculiarities of Kaduna State as it relates to progress, available facilities, initiatives & feasible entry points as

they relate to the issue of the almajiri, as well as other vulnerable children. The State was, however, enthusiastic to engage with certain aspects of ARC-P and officials pledged to send reports to the ARC-P team, for a more wholistic assessment of where the needs are. A Kaduna State project lead on ARC-P would also be nominated and conveyed, probably from the HCDC.

Challenges identified, include:

- 1) Needs: The visit evidenced the fact that there were needs far beyond the almajiri children as they were so many other vulnerable children who may require ARC-P intervention.
- 2) 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. This is key in realising the ARC-P goals.
- 3) There are specific initiatives and reforms on ground that need to be identified and factored into the ARC-P strategy in Kaduna State, to secure the buy-in of the State.

Recommendations:

- a. Based on the forgoing, it would be expedient to further engage the following entities of interest to the ARC-P, while the State engages with the immediate requests of a project lead, the signing of an MoU and organising the children in spaces that they can be engaged in. They include:
 - The Human Capital Development Council (HCDC)
 - The Business Apprentice Training Centre (BATC)
- b. Given the commendable focus on, and enforcement of education across all spheres and categories of learning in Kaduna State, it would appear that ARC-P should best focus on agriculture, sports, health, creativity, financial literacy, entrepreneurship and the empowerment aspects of the Plan as the entry point. Subsequent conversations should hover around these issues, with the assurance that the literacy and numeracy, as well as other subjects would be offered, as of course, to the children and youth within the spaces identified. ARC-P can serve as a back-up for the target audience, who do not remain in the formal educational sector.

- c. The KAD-POLY Vocational Training Centre model, for improving on the numbers of assessors, verifiers and external verifiers, thereby formalising the training and rapidly increasing the numbers of youth and children in the technical and vocational space.