

Almajiri Education in Sokoto State: Rethinking Strategy for Productive and Sustainable Peace and National Development

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Abstract

The paper highlights some issues that need to be rethinking in an attempt to see to the proper Almajiri Education in the state and Nigeria as a whole after clarifying the concepts of productive, sustainable peace and national development. The issues of misconception of the Almajiri child, regular census of Almajiri schools, mobilization and sensitization of general public as well as improving the condition of our formal public schools were discussed. It is recommended that the government at all levels should enforce laws related to child right act to prevent the parent from sending their children out for Almajirci.

Introduction

Historically the *Almajiri* school system in Nigeria is as old as the history of Islam in the country. The system pre-dated the modern system of Education that was introduced by the Missionaries and the Colonial administrators. Over the years, the system witnessed remarkable modifications and transition at different stages of its development (Nafisatu, 2004) as cited by (Umar, 2013). For instance, when modern education was introduced in Nigeria, the Muslims sensed the motive of the Christian Missionaries (conversion to Christianity), and they opposed the system of education brought by Christians for their children and thereby established schools that teach both Islamic and modern education. This was the first effort of integration (Fafunwa, 2004). The effort was later supported by the then colonial government as a result of growing agitation from Muslim side by introducing a scheme by which untrained junior primary school teachers attended course at the school of Arabic studies, the establishment of post elementary integrated school in Kano, Sokoto, Badagry and Epe areas in 1889 and 1899 respectively Colleges for both men and women separately in their respective

states and more importantly, in 1977, the Federal Government recognized Quranic schools when in its first edition of National Policy on Education stated that the Quranic schools were to be integrated and this position has been maintained till date and it is based on this recognition that all other Quranic schools were to be integrated and this position has been maintained till date and it is based on this recognition all other later programmes and reforms on *Almajiri* schools were built.

The recent efforts by the Federal Government to reform *Almajiri* system of education might not be unconnected with two insinuations in the government quarters. Firstly, statistics have shown that ten million children of school going age who are out of the formal school, out of this number, more than nine million are *Almajiri* (ETF, 2012). Since the *Almajirai* are among Nigerian children and by law, each Nigerian child has the fundamental right to education *Almajiri* child inclusive. They are potential human resources which should be harnessed and tapped for national development and for the country to meet the challenge for Education for All and Sustainable Development Goals; the reform on *Almajiri* becomes imperative. Another issue, there is growing instruction from some quarters that the *Almajirai* are one of the sources of insecurity in the country who have always been tools in the hands of mischief makers (Umar, 2013).

This is not minding the fact that the fallen standard of the modern education in the country partly due to corruption among our leaders and absolute poverty and unemployment have also contributed to the production of an army of un employed school leavers and drop outs many of whom are youths from the poor family who are also more vulnerable to be used as political thugs, touts, kidnappers, rubbers and gang stars.

The institution of *Almajirai* has undergone a very radical transformation as a result of socio-economic and demographic changes. In those days, the migration was from the cities and towns to the villages or a settlement away from the cities and towns. It was a seasonal affair; it was then believed that in the villages, there was nothing that would distract the attention of children. They would devote their time to reading and recitation of the Holy Quran. The children would be seen under trees, on the farm, concentrating on their studies. Nowadays, the children are taken out of their villages and brought into the cities where, in addition to attractions, they spend most of their time begging for alms. They can be seen all over the places, in the markets, motor parks, restaurants, bear parlors and even around churches in pathetic conditions begin g for food and money. Little time is given to Quranic studies for which they have been taken out of their villages.

Almajirci is no more the seasonal affair as it's used to be, it is more of child abuse. The practice provides a recruiting ground for criminals and other shady behavior such as, Area boys, theft pickpocket, drug abuse, narcotics and homosexuality. In the present day *Almajirci*, the children (*Almajirai*) are used by mallams to acquire wealth, their daily and even nightly routine involve street and house to house begging for food, cloth and money, as well as doing menial jobs such as washing plates, sweeping and washing clothes, Quranic learning is an insignificant secondary pre-occupation (Ibrahim, 2011).

In Sokoto state, the categories of the educationally disadvantaged are those migrant Quranic school children (*Almajirai*) and youths who do not benefit from the existing formal and non-formal education. There are many children enrolled in *Almajiri* schools in different parts of Sokoto State. Traditional Quranic Schools remain the only form of education accessible to them. Their lack of formal education is seriously affected the productivity of these children and attainment of needed sustainable peace and development in their community, state and Nigeria at a large (Ibrahim, 2011). The Sokoto State according to the census has that population of one million one hundred and forty five thousand one hundred and forty five (1,145,145). The pupils were enrolled into nine thousand five hundred and fifty one (9,551) with the total number of twenty five thousand and four (25,004) teachers. The state is the second state with the highest population of *Almajirai* in the Northwest states (Education Trust Fund, 2012). Despite the laudable efforts of integration of *Almajiri* Quranic School into formal education by Sokoto State, Federal Government and nongovernmental organizations in the provision of *Almajiri* integrated education the state is still having huge number of these children everywhere in the states. Hence, this paper aimed at rethinking strategies for *Almajiri* integrated education in Sokoto State for productivity and sustainable peace and national development.

Misconception of *Almajiri* child

There are general misconceptions of who the *Almajiri* really is and these misconceptions cut across the government, the elites, security agencies and even the mallams themselves as well as people in southern part of the country. Government and its security agents see *Almajiri* as a threat to the security of the country especially in the northern part of the country. Some people see them as the children rejected by or unable to benefit from formal schools (Umar, 2013). Some linked them to the street children found in Southern part of the country who usually metamorphosed to "area boys". But, *Almajiri* child is not the same with street children because they are into the system with the full consent of their parents and they are enrolled for a purpose of Quranic/Islamic Education. Similarly, they go back from time to time on vacation, they are also under the

tutelage of a school proprietor among others. While the street children are in most cases out as a result of broken home, death etc. they are mostly boys and few girls. They normally have nowhere to go as such they live on water ways, flyovers, garage and also work as scavengers, conductors they also engage in almost act of social vices. Some of these children never had the benefit of formal schooling or drop out (Ibrahim 2012). Even among the Malams, there is this belief that for one to learn the Quran and excel in its sciences, one has to live a life of abject poverty that beg for food as well as live in dirty and rags. Any Mallam or person even among the parents of the *Almajirai* cannot see any blameworthy for children who live in this condition and any *Almajiri* (pupil/student) who tries to live contrary, will be condemned by such Mallams as not being serious with his *Almajirai*. Similarly, some people judge *Almajiri* by looking at the appearance and practices of urban *Almajiri* who as a member of the urban community, is being affected by the social vices of the urban life.

Consequently, for a programme of *Almajiri* education to be a success, there is the need to clear the air on who is *Almajiri* child. The *Almajiri* child have to be seen in his natural sense who is innocent, focused, learning chap, who grow to be humble, responsible adult who is self dependent and part of that long chain carriers of the Quran who is free from the garbage of arrogance, redundancy and unemployment (Tilde, 2011). In Sokoto State apart from *Almajiri* Quranic schools established in 2008 in Tudun Dandogo in Dange Shuni Local Government, the Federal Government integrated schools is full with the enrollees that are not *Almajiri* child and some of these schools are not yet functioning. They are locked with keys. The real *Almajirai* are still seen on the street.

Productive and Sustainable Peace and National Development

Productivity is central to the social and economic life of every society or nation. It has been argued that continued improvement in productivity is the surest way to dismantling the vicious circle of endemic nature of poverty in developing countries of the world like Nigeria and Sokoto State in particular. Ibrahim (2015) asserted that, growth and productivity provide a significant basis for adequate supply of goods and services thereby improving the welfare of people and enhances social progress. Any nation with productivity rate is often characterized by higher capacity utilization, higher standard of living and indeed low rate of unemployment. Unemployment on the other hand has been characterized as one of the serious impediment to social and economic progress of the people. Unemployment appears to be a very serious issue in Nigeria even among the formal school leavers and graduates talk less of out of formal school children. Hence the need for integrating *Almajiri* Quranic school children and equipped

them with necessary skill acquisition in addition to literacy and numeracy among their curriculum.

Education through formal schooling sets parameters for determining the society or terms of its survival, sustainable peace and development. The survival and advancement of any society is critically predicated on its state of independence and self-sufficiency, the state of a society's independent and self sufficiency is based on the individual members are self reliant or independent, hence, the need for *Almajiri* child to be educated and be independent so as to be free of begging for alms and food for living.

Peace

Peace entails a state of calmness within individual in the societies, communities and between nations. It involves a condition where there is harmony among individuals and within various facets of society paving way for growth, progress and development. Rummel (1981) as cited by Mayanchi.(2013) sees peace as 'positive and negative', but uses positive in an affective, desirable sense, while treating its opposite as affectively neutral. In this light we in Nigeria are presently experiencing negative peace. Peace with soldiers and policemen around us, the responsibility of building a peaceful and enlightened society rests on educations. Definitely a country at war cannot achieve development. It is important to remind Nigerians that despite the unrest happening in the country, peace is still possible, but it is up to us to choose our destiny by ensuring that all the children in the country are properly taken care of or to suffer from the consequences of our collective misdeed.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development could be described as the art of supporting, maintaining or keeping the progress or advancement being achieved in educational pursuit for meaningful goals. Thus the education of *Almajiri* child should be the kind of education that would sustain a meaningful development in both the children and their family and for nation building. Sustainable development could be viewed from various angles. For instance, Mshelbila (2013) defined sustainable development as that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability could be described as the act of supporting or bearing the weight of some responsibility for long period of time. Sustainability is to encouraged, support or keep a sound effort or progress while development on the other hand, means the stage of advancement in different areas of endeavor e.g. business, education and other

profession. Thus for sustainability and development to be a reality then, there is the need for the relevant authorities to provide and sustain *Almajiri* education to the fullest by ensuring effective and efficient strategies as well as ensuring the accountability, admission, retention and progress of the *Almajiri* child and also adhered to the goals of establishing the schools.

Objectives of the *Almajiri* Education Programme in Nigeria

The overall objective of the Nigerian government is to ensure that the more than 9 million *Almajirai* are integrated into the Universal Basic Education programme. Specially, the objectives include the following:

- (i) Ensuring the institutional development of Quranic school system and the provision of requisite infrastructural and welfare facilities such that it functions as a true *Almajiri* education system;
- (ii) Addressing effectively and on a long-term basis the challenges facing the traditional Quranic school sector, especially as they relate to itinerancy and begging.
- (iii) Providing viable educational platform and model *Almajiri* schools that could steadily and effectively integrate conventional disciplines into the Quranic school system;
- (iv) Supporting the emergence of an enabling environment that could facilitate the effective integration of Islamic disciplines into the Basic Education programme;
- (v) Producing quality products that are imbued with the disciplines character, knowledge and skills to take full advantage of available opportunities and participate effectively and meaningfully in the socio-economic and political life of nation; and
- (vi) Providing basic education access to all children of school age throughout the country (Ibrahim, 2011).

Initiatives to Reform the *Almajiri* School System in Nigeria

Almajiri Education undergoes various reforms at various levels of government. Among these efforts made by government to address the issue of *Almajiri* include: At the federal or national level, government has sponsored and passed into law, the *Almajiri* bill to cater for the needs of the *Almajiri* in 2009. The presidency approved the construction of four hundred (400) *Almajiri* model schools in eighteen states (18) in northern Nigeria, while Universal Basic Commission (UBEC) is to construct fifty one (51) *Almajiri* schools under UBEC intervention projects and hand over to State Universal Basic Education Boards to manage. To this effect, the Federal Government on April 10, 2012, commissioned the first

Federal Government *Almajiri* model school in Gagi Area of Sokoto South Local Government Area of Sokoto State. The Federal Government under the leadership of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan inaugurated National *Almajiri* integrated commission with chairman and executive coordinator charged with the responsibility of integrating the *Almajiri* schools with the formal modern schools in the country (Umar, 2013).

Sokoto State Government

Sokoto State government has since had many integrated schools for both government and individuals and non-governmental organizations. It is effort to improve and promote the quality of *Almajirai* in the state; the state government renovated the buildings of some *Almajiri* schools. Modern buildings were constructed in place of mud ones. A Religious Affair Ministry has been established in 2008 to take care of Islamic institution and Religious matters in the state (Ibrahim, 2011).

The ministry has already taken over the affairs of the former Department for Religious Affairs. The ministry has designed some Islamic religious related projects among the projects conducting census on the number of Quranic schools and population of pupils/students, incorporating Adult literacy in the Quranic schools especially the boarding type and establishing *Almajiri* Quranic School Tudun Dandogo in Dange/Shuni Local Government Area (Ibrahim, 2012).

Some states in the north have also continued to initiate various programmes for the *Almajiri* education in their respective states. Among such initiative are those of Kano State government launching its action plan on Quranic, Islamiyyah and ilmi schools in 2003 which clearly spelt out government commitment towards the reform strategy of *Almajiri* throughout the state. According to Ibrahim (2011) through this strategy, the state gave support to Tsangaya system, upgraded many Quranic schools, trained more than four hundred (400) Islamiyyah head masters, twenty five (25) Alaramma's (memorizers of the Quran) benefited from the state sponsored trips to Gambia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan among others, in order to equip them with the best knowledge of Tsangaya. The government also introduced pilot feeding for *Almajirai*.

In Kaduna State, an ultra-modern school was built in Zaria city for *Almajirai* called Bi-lingual Boarding primary school for *Almajiri* under the auspices of UBEC. The state selected about forty (40) *Almajiri* schools as pilot schools and sent them teachers to teach formal education and skill acquisition training. Also in Niger State, the government set up a committee under the leadership of Emir of

Suleja to advise the government on integration. The white paper established a department on integration in the ministry for basic education, in which each local government was directed to establish a pilot school.

Similarly, in Jigawa State, government set up committee the committee to see to the possibility of integrating the Quranic schools in all the 27 Local Governments. For Adamawa the strategy is almost the same with other states, through UBEC, it began to integrate *Almajiri* schools with its nomadic education programmes even before the Federal Government started its own (Umar, 2013).

Looking at the above laudable initiatives, one will commend those states, Sokoto State inclusive and government in their efforts to look into the learning needs of the *Almajiri* population who are in their formative stage of development and future leaders of this great nation that are left to begging pathetic condition in the name of searching for Quranic Education. However, any reform efforts on *Almajiri* schools to be of success, it is not just to lunch a programme or fund it, there are certain issues that need to be considered otherwise, the schools constructed for the *Almajirai* will be hijacked by others while they continue to remain in the street begging which in turn militate against their productivity, self-reliance, peaceful co-existence and national development some of these issues that need to be taken into consideration include:

Rethinking Strategies for *Almajiri* Education

The *Almajiri* education is a collective responsibility of all the stakeholders in the state. This includes the parents of *Almajiri*, the teachers, the members of the community and finally, the government. The following strategies are hereby suggested for the success of *Almajiri* education in the state.

Regular Census of *Almajiri* Schools

There is need for regular census of *Almajiri* schools. This can be done to find out the number of new student enrolled into traditional school with a view of identifying the nature and type of *Almajiri* School relevant to his type in terms of getting them needed facilities for their up keep.

Mobilization and Sensitization of General public

The parents of the pupils who in most cases were ex-*Almajirai* who feel that their children have to pass through the system of education they passed through without due consideration of the societal changes and ignorance of the dangers involved in enrolling their children to the cities in search for Quranic education. They are also

need to be aware of the responsibility shoulder open them by their creator, of taking care of their wards in terms of feeding and character molding. Another thing is that, there is the need to understand the position of begging in Islam and its implications to the life of the children as future leaders. They should also realize that the *Almajiri* schools they used to passed through has changed and many of the proprietors are now old to the extent they could no longer take care of the *Almajirai* in their domains. Most of the *Almajirai* use the school as accommodation whereby in the morning they left for their menial jobs and the like. The teachers should also be conscious on the implication of admitting children they cannot provide adequate care as well as the need for them to have another job or vocation as used to be in those days as means of livelihood rather than relying on charity and what their pupils begged. This could be eradicated gradually since the essence is behavioral change. The campaign should be done through the use of Mallams and other Muslims elites who have been stakeholders in *Almajiri* schools for the fact that their words carry more weight than that of civil servant most of whom lose their dignity due to pervasive corruption.

Improving the Condition of Formal Schools and Quality Instruction

Public schools in Sokoto State as they are today, most of them are in deteriorating condition with over populated classes couple with inadequate teaching learning facilities which resulted to poor quality of tuition at all levels of education. The graduate from primary school carry over what they are supposed to be taught to secondary at this level they carry over to tertiary institution the result is half baked graduate, unemployable, in addition to being jobless after completion of their studies. This and many other reasons could deter the parents from enrolling their children in the *Almajiri* integrated schools. The scenario is that the *Almajiri* schools will end up been hijacked by greedy elites and public offices holders which will make such schools in accessible to the beneficiaries.

Enrolment into *Almajiri* Integrated Schools

The managers of *Almajiri* schools should liaise with all the stakeholders to see that only the real *Almajirai* are enrolled into the *Almajiri* schools and to ensure proper monitoring of children to maintain their health hygiene, dairly cleanliness and their general conduct. The managers should also ensure the separation of small children and grown up in order to curtail the incidence of homosexuality among the children of integrated *Almajiri* school in the state.

Assistance to Almajiri School

There is the need to complement government efforts by sourcing assistant to the children of Tsangaya model of *Almajiri* integration. The *Almajiri* and the Malam will feel a sense of belonging and in turn build strong acceptance of any programme meant to improve their well being. The assistance should in turn of building structure, provision of health care facilities. There should also need for vocational training opportunities especially for the senior *Almajirai* who about to graduate so as to become self-reliance after graduation.

Feeding Almajiri Child

There is the need also for the members of the *Almajiri* community and general public to see to the feeding of these Children. Umar,(2013) asserted that, one child per house initiative is another strategy for *Almajiri* education that need to be emphasized in the state whereby the community is encouraged to take care of the needs of *Almajiri* through what he called each one feed one. Traditionally, feeding *Almajiri* is the sole responsibility of *Almajiri* host community. Nowadays, it is the practice in most towns that a household will employ the assistance of an *Almajiri* for its domestic works who in turn gives him food as his pay. This practice should be improved to include other needs of the *Almajiri* like clothing, medication, shelter, hygiene and it should be part of his allowance for philanthropic reasons. This will reduce the number of *Almajirai* on the streets begging since most of them are out for these necessities.

Conclusion

The overall objective of the government is to ensure that the more than nine million (9m) *Almajirai* are integrated into the UBE programme. The government at Federal and state level efforts of integration is timely and all stakeholders should put hand on desk to see to sustenance of *Almajiri* education in the state through the three approved models by federal government. It is also our hope that the one million one hundred and forty five thousand one hundred and forty five (1,145,145) *Almajirai* are successfully integrated and enrolled into yet commission building Amajiri integrated schools across the state. Though it is our final prayer that the enrolment into integrated schools is carried out with diligent and sincerity or else, like all other educational programmes it will be abandoned.

Recommendation

For aforementioned strategies to be effective in the implementation of *Almajiri* education programme in Sokoto State for productive and sustainable peace and national development the following recommendations are suggested:

- (i) The government at all levels should enforce laws relate to child right act that prevent the parents from sending their children for *Almajirai* especially those of school going age. There is also need in the law to make provision for penalties of *Almajiri* abuse, this can be done by arresting and prosecuting those involved the act of admitting such under age into *Almajiri* system. The children should abduct by law enforcement agencies and return to their parents and if rearrested both the parents and teachers should be prosecuted in a court of law.
- (ii) The government should ensure the provision of *Almajiri* data bank in the states this can be done by identifying the *Almajiri* schools (Boarding) or Tsangaya (Birru) system (day), Islamiyya and Ma'ahad. The data should comprise the number of pupils by age and sex facilities in place and physical structures as well as other social-amenities.
- (iii) The managers and teachers of the *Almajiri* education should be appointed base on merit who know the plights and characteristics of *Almajiri* child as well as being competent and dedicated.
- (iv) The government should ensure that only the real *Almajirai* enroll into the *Almajiri* Integrated Schools.
- (v) Government should improve the provision of basic social amenities in the rural areas; this can reduce the migration of both the pupils and *Almajiri* to the cities. Another thing is seeing the improvement of the condition of public schools by providing adequate infrastructures and trained adequate qualified Teachers as well as generating job opportunities for graduates of formal Schools, this will entice many and serve as role model to *Almajiri* Quranic School Children.
- (vi) Individual and nongovernmental organizations as well as community members, faith base organizations should assist in seeing to the proper education of the *Almajiri* child as well as character development. This can be achieved through the use of *Zakkat* and endowment committee in the state.

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