

Becoming a Street Child in Poverty Ridden Society: A Descriptive Case of Kaduna Metropolis, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT Poverty has been identified as one of the major problems in the developing countries, including Nigeria. Its effect on development is multifaceted, especially on human development and formation. Due to the present economic and social situation, the family institution is in great difficulty of coping with its function of child rearing and upbringing of its young members. The inability of the family to perform its function in this regard has led to the uncoordinated activities of children, leading to fleeing homes to fend for themselves, an act, which has generated several armies of children and youth on the streets. This problem appears to be increasing daily, which requires immediate attention towards addressing the issue. Against this background, this paper focuses on a scholarly examination and description of the street children phenomenon in Kaduna metropolis, one of the major cities in Nigeria. The paper specifically describes the scenario and classification of street children, their social, psychological and physical dispositions. It also points out the social/structural factors closely associated with the etiology of street children in the metropolis, and its impeding dangers on the society and the children in particular. However, this discourse strongly revealed that the root cause of street children phenomenon is embedded in the nature of the societal functioning, rather than in the children themselves. Following this, the author suggests some pragmatic approaches towards alleviating the problem, among which the religious and society based remedies are recommended.

INTRODUCTION

Nigerian society is faced with multifaceted problems, among which the social aspects are most pronounced. These problems take their root in the structural foundation and setting of the society, which take definite patterns through generations. Based on the above position, it is evident that social problems are inherent in most known human societies, and develop through human interaction and generations. What makes the various types of social problems different from one another is the dimension of their occurrence (Space, Time) and the impact on the society. While some social problems have limited impact on the society, others generate great magnitude of impact. However, irrespective of their classifications and strength of impact on the society, all social problems are negative to the overall functioning and healthy development of the society. They are regarded as social rather than personal problems because all the considerations of these problems extend beyond the individuals. Social problems in a generic term therefore applies to the range of conditions and aberrant behaviours, which are held to be manifestations of social disorganization and to warrant changing via some means of social engineering (Marshall

1994). Typically, social problems include specially categorized social phenomena including deviant behaviour (Crime, Juvenile delinquency, prostitution, mental illness, drug addiction, etc) and also social conflict situations (ethnic tension, domestic violence, etc).

Presently, in the complex social structures of Nigerian society, individuals and groups are differently exposed to these hazards, and people occupying different statuses and roles tend to differ in their conception of social situation and also as to what constitutes a social problem requiring a solution to this end. The range of possible social problems is almost infinite, and can undoubtedly include phenomena as diverse as child abuse, child labour and street children issues. Having known the critical importance of socialization process in the development of human personality in the society, discussing the apparent neglect of this process by the institutions concerned (family, school, and religious group) becomes an interesting issue of academic and scholarly debate. Against this background, this paper focuses on describing the phenomenon of street children as an aspect of social problem existing in Kaduna metropolis in Nigeria. The paper delves into presenting the scenario of street children case in Kaduna

metropolis (including their various classifications), background characteristics, economic perception and experiences in life, psychological disposition, physical overview and the general factors encouraging the problem. Data for this paper was derived from anthropological methodology of non-participant observation of the processes in the city, and archival records.

THE LOCATION OF THE STUDY

Kaduna metropolis, the capital city of present Kaduna state of Nigeria occupies important political, economic and cultural position among other cities in Northern part of Nigeria. With an estimated population of 6,066,562 (National Population Commission 2006), the metropolis is regarded as the “power house” and “nerve centre” of the Northern political class in Nigeria. Its political importance dates back to the colonial era and thereafter as the capital of the defunct Northern Region of Nigeria, North Central State and Kaduna state, under various state structures (Composition) in the Nigeria federation. Economically, the city occupies an important position as one of the industrialized centres in the country with notable industrial layouts (Kakuri, Barnawa and Zaria Road/Mando axis). Beside the industrial establishments, Kaduna metropolis has prominent markets *Geri kasua*, which makes the city an important centre of commerce especially in Northern Nigeria. In addition to the political and economic importance of the city, its cultural relevance in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. Religiously, both the Christian and Islamic religious groups have strong root and presence in the metropolis. The unique feature of these religious bodies especially the Islamic religious has been a debatable as well as a central bone of contention in some social issues in the metropolis. The practice of Islam coupled with the predominant migrant population of the city creates avenue for a group of children that rely mostly on what they receive from charity. This position however does not suggest that all the street children in Kaduna metropolis share Islamic background. Rather, the emphasis has been on a special group known as the ‘*almajirinci*’, who form majority of the street children in the metropolis. Apart from other characteristics, the ‘*almajiri*’ feature makes street children phenomenon in Kaduna a unique and different one from other parts of Nigeria, especially the southern cities.

FINDINGS

The Scenario of Street Children in Kaduna Metropolis

However, similar to what is obtained about street children in other Nigeria major cities, Kaduna metropolis’ own case is with little or no difference in description. Various researchers, scholars and professionals in the field, stressing their points of view, have defined “Street children”. In order to suit our purpose, “Street Children is defined from our perspective as those kids who live on the “Street” and make their living from the street. What eventually astonishes one who visits Kaduna metropolis is the extensive factors or the pull factors responsible for the daily accumulation of these classes of kids in the city. Even a casual visitor to Kaduna will attest to the fact that there is severe incidence of street children, which may be as a result of high magnitude of child abuse and neglect in the area. From a general case on Nigeria with particular reference to child labour Oloko (1999) estimates the population of child labourers within the lower limit of 8 million people, in the recent study conducted.

Classification of Street Children in Kaduna Metropolis

On arrival to Kaduna metropolis, especially the famous Ahmadu Bello Way towards the central market and Kano road axis, the nucleus of the town, one is immediately treated to the multitude of aimless kids tattered dressed and unkempt streams of child beggars, bus conductors, hawkers, prostitutes, (load carriers) *Yandako*, *Almajiris* parading the ever busy high way and street that gives a clear classification of the types of street children in Kaduna metropolis. The general observation from the study informed that the following categories of street children found along the streets of Kaduna Metropolis.

“*Yandakos*”: These are the children load carriers or child labourers found mostly in market areas, garages and bus-stops where economic activities thrive. They live by carrying loads for fee; hence they are always seen carrying heavy loads in baskets and wheelbarrows. They are mostly uneducated (formally) and are usually from rural communities in search of a better living” in the town. Many of them are homeless and sleep in the market square, garages and streets. These

children are mostly involved in haulage activities in and around market centers and beyond, where they either use wheelbarrows or their heads to carry loads for few tokens. This category is obviously, one of the many types of work that children do, mostly in the informal sector throughout the country, particularly in the cities. The type of works they do are into three, namely – work in public places such as markets and streets, work in cottage industries and mechanical workshops, and domestic service in private households. Those who work in public settings include street vendors, shops and market stall minds, beggars, shoeshine boys, car washers/watchers, scavengers and head loaders in markets. On the other hand, those who work in cottage industries and mechanical workshops include apprentices, mechanics, vulcanizers, bus conductors, iron and metal workers, carpenters, tailors, weavers, hairdressers, barbers and workers in the catering industry.

Children of Beggars: Mostly constitute of children whose parents are themselves beggars. These children with their parents engage in begging and quickly metamorphose into being “branded” beggars. Their street begging involves open solicitation for assistance of money for food or clothing from anonymous people, through pleas, deceit or exposure of deformity. Other concepts used to denote street begging strategies include, “alms-solicitation” “alms – expedition” “alms – trade”, “alms – collection” “sinecurism” and “baranci” (Adewuyi 1999).

Almajirinci: This group of people derive their identity from the concept of “*almajirana*”, which is an Arabic word that describes Koranic/ Islamic education. Thus, the Koranic pupil is the “*almahajiru*” or “*almajiri*”. Relatively as Adewuyi (1999) enunciated, *almajirinci* denotes seeking knowledge from coast to coast. The concept of *almajirinci* in the present sociological and anthropological usage is understood in the context of, or in relationship to street begging. The *Almajiris* are children sent away from their homes and entrusted into the care of Islamic teachers to learn the Islamic studies. Statistically they are mostly from other states apart from Kaduna and neighbouring countries. The dilemma of these children is that of being taken from home to an “unknown” person to them. Although there are claims that the children are exposed to Koranic studies, but the price they have to pay is the fact that they must by all means ensure the up-keeps

of themselves, hence they beg for alms. But one keeps on wondering why these kids should be exposed to the kind of hard life facing them and whether the practice is strongly backed by Islamic belief system? Opinions vary in this respect from different school of thoughts and Islamic scholars. As a matter of fact, one cannot help thinking that begging by these *Almajiris*” is entrenched in Islamic ethics and morals. Malami Laddan, an Islamic scholar had in *Sunday New Nigeria* of May 13, 1992 under the caption “Islamic concept of charity and begging” evinced that Holy Prophet Mohammed did not in any way teach his followers to conditions themselves as beggars. He cited the Quran (53:39) to back up his point: “the Quran has stated without mincing words that man is created on “struggle” and will have nothing except what he strives for”.

Hawkers: They are children found with wares of various characteristics along streets and within market arena. They are door-to-door sellers, mostly sent by their parents/guardians to go out selling petty articles and only return home in the night. In this process they come in contact with different people, hence imbibe different habits mostly unhealthy ones. The female ones stand the danger of being raped by some unscrupulous men in the society.

Child Prostitutes: They are seen in the evening around major streets in Kaduna. Found in pairs around hotels soliciting for sexual patronage from their target groups. These kids are below the age of eighteen, which is the classified age for the definition of a “child”. Their targets are people of the opposite sex (men), whom they often approach for a token of money in exchange for their natural endowment.

Touts and Bus Conductors: This group of children are found around the motor parks and railway stations. Though they earn money, they are not far removed from stealing travelers’ luggage or pick pocketing.

Among all these groups, the “*Almajiri*” system makes the incidence of street children in Kaduna metropolis unique from the occurrence in other parts of the country, notably the eastern and western parts. This stems from the fact that the “*Almajiri*” system is interconnected with some religious cum-cultural affiliation of the Islamic religion, which is the belief system of the involved. It is of conventional knowledge that most of the children have no better residence and extreme cases sleep beside street shops. Their

dietary habit is below that of ordinary child irrespective of their high intensity of begging along the streets daily. From our study, the issue of street children in Kaduna metropolis has been a problematic one, hence the need for an urgent attention to tackle the problem towards the realization of an enduring solution.

Background Dispositions of Street Children in Kaduna Metropolis

As a matter of fact, this paper further enunciates the issue of street children from our own themes and perspective which include looking at the socio cultural background; economic perception and experience in life, their psychological disposition, physical over view and the general factors encouraging their situation/problem and solution.

Socio culturally, most of the street children are citizens of Nigeria with varied ethnic and cultural leanings. The street children in Kaduna metropolis are mainly the stock of the Gwaris, Hausa – Fulani, Nupes and in rare cases from surrounding ethnic groups around Kaduna, coupled with a handful of them from neighbouring countries such as Niger republic, Tchad and Cameroon(Source: from interview). They fled their various villages, towns and local government for Kaduna. An appraisal of their belief system suggests that they are people from various belief systems with the exception of the *Almajiris* system being a group of Islamic kids. Categorically, one can say that the issue of street children has some cultural backing and compromise from the general public in Kaduna metropolis. Hence, it is not seen as a dysfunction and a maladjustment in the society, much encouragement is given to them, stressing the reason for the much described “extensive factor” and societal response” in the street, with particular reference to the *Almajiri* system in Kaduna.

Economically, the street children are wasted potential labour resource for Nigerian economic system. Those that are engaged in some kind of labour are overused, over stressed and over burden, such as the “*Yandakos*”. They do jobs above their natural capacity and bearing. The child prostitutes, motor park touts, and the beggars are settled for wastage.

Child Rights Monitoring Centre in Kaduna (1993) pointed out that a closer look at street children reveals some of their physical characteristics, psychological disposition and their general

perception in life, attitudes and life experiences. All these factors put together sums up the complex characteristics of the personalities of street children.

Due to the physical environmental factors, the Kaduna street children are prone to the danger of physical accidents and sustenance of injuries. Fighting is a common place among them, coupled with some other dangerous activities such as mob action, rioting, vandalism, to mention but a few. Their physical appearance as a result of their exposure is very untidy, mode of dressing, non-descriptive of human habit and their body structure is replica of malnourishment and hard-life. These account for their retard growth and underdevelopment as emphasized by scientists (Oloko 1986, 1990, 1992, 1997). Their physical environment as such determines their growth, progress and prosperity in future, Thus an urgent attention is needed to address the issue now.

The psychological disposition of the street children is invariably a response built into the children as they absorb various life shocks, and experiences, which shape their perceptions and worldview. Consequently, there is no class of street children with a normal human perception in life, they tend to be hostile and aggressive all of which are as a result of their exposure to their physical and socio-cultural environment. The common understanding of the street children is that towards violence, mob action and public destruction. Their various life experiences suggest very hard make up and behaviour indeed. They are enveloped in a sort of hard societal structure, strong and striving sub-culture. Intellectually, the ability of street kids is low, most of them never attempted formal education; hence they cannot read and write. Most social scientists and scholars of human society believe that this way of life has some negative implication on the children’s education. According to them, such works tend to disrupt school attendance, especially during periods of intense agricultural activity, such as planting and harvesting. The prostitutes in some cases are half-baked literate who left school for the nasty job they have occupied themselves with. As the social scientists would say, the psychological make up is what makes up a human, which is transmitted through behavioural vehicles.

Social/Structural Factors associated with Street Children Phenomenon in Kaduna Metropolis

Social structure is an analytical tool, designed

to serve in understanding how members of human society behave. It involves also the nature of recurring pattern of social behaviours, especially to the ordered interrelationship between the different elements of the social system or society in general. Implying social and structural factors as related to street children phenomenon in Nigeria, it opens up a whole version of debate and investigation on how the street children problem takes its root on the recurring patterns of social behaviours, and ordered interrelationships in the society. In other words, it is strongly assumed that the street children problem exists and persists in Nigeria, particularly in Kaduna metropolis because of presence of some factors that sustain that way of life.

Theoretically, street children phenomenon is one of the social problems in Kaduna metropolis that needs to be explained within the structure of Kaduna society, and social structure. This position emerges from Levi Strauss's classical understanding of how what happens in any society can be explained. Social structure for him is an explanatory construct meant to provide the key to the observed facts of social existence, hence the explanation of the social phenomenon in a society should be sought in the way in which that society is organized as a whole, in its principles of organization. The major components of the society within which the problem of street children could be sought include, family, the economic structure and function, religious factor, etc.

Family Background: This factor has been a sole determinant in the discussion of street children and the origin of their problems. In most cases, the family of orientation of the children allows for little or no response to growth. Families that cannot function as a centripetal factor in child rearing give room to flee of homes by little kids. This may be traced down to the brutal attitude of fathers, mothers and guardians alike in the upbringing of their children. Where emotional gratification is lacking children feel unprotected, neglected and unwanted which leads them to seeking an avenue to avoid home. From studies in Asuncion, Brazil, Cochabambo and Lima, there were unanimous conclusion that children who stay on the street, especially the beggars, in many part of the world are partly alienated from their families and live without family support or contact (Adewuyi 1999).

Economy: Coupled with the family

background is the factor of economic hardship prevalent in our society today, which the family forms the mini theater where all odds are played out. It is a conventional wisdom believe that the down turn in the economy is a causal factor for the upsurge of the social ill and fallout. One believes that the reasons for widespread of child prostitution, hawking, begging and touting are embedded to some extent on the economic realities of our time. Studies have shown that activities of street children are propelled by the adverse economic situation, as most street children come from low socio-economic background, and poor health environments. For instance, various explanations have been given to the increasing child labour problem. Very often, children work because they and their families are poor, which is not the only precondition or cause of child labour. There are also situations of cultural pressure, particularly for girls. Child labour also thrives because employers recruit children as the cheapest form of labour in the market. There are extreme cases of child forced labour (conscription), particularly children from ethnic minority, low income and low class groups who are vulnerable to exploitation (Obioha 2004).

Socio Cultural Basis: This has been identified as one of the factors encouraging and sustaining the presence of street children in Kaduna metropolis. Understanding the dominant cultural practice in Kaduna metropolis could assist us in unraveling and understanding what sustains street children in Kaduna metropolis. In the city, Hausa is both the dominant linguistic leaning and cultural practice, even though some oral traditions and legend prove that Kaduna metropolis is a Gwari land. That notwithstanding the "*Hausawa*" way of life to some extent has become the dominant pattern and acceptable way of life in the city. Prominent among these ways of life is "alms giving" and "receiving (begging)" Members of Hausa communities as the case may be see nothing wrong with street children phenomenon, especially the "*almajirinci*" and "other child beggars" (Adewuyi 1999).

Religious Factor: Even though there are divergent views among members of Islamic community on the issue of street children (*Almajirinci*) and begging, the mainstream Islamic fundamental thought supports the institutions of "*almajiricin*" in the society. As evinced in a script by the Kano State Government, the nature of Koranic education does not attract public

funding, parents, particularly the rural illiterates and urban poor ones contribute little or nothing to the day-to-day maintenance of their children in these schools (Kano state Government 1985). The harsh economic condition, under which both the Koranic teachers and students live, preconditions them to begging through sending the "*almajiris*" to the street. Bello (1981) reinforces the validity of this believe, where he enunciated the "*almajiri*" system as an age long tradition which is deep-rooted in Islamic injunction that enjoins the faithful to seek for knowledge from their destination to all parts of the world. And in their wanderings, both Islamic teachers and scholars depend on the "*Ummah*"¹ for their livelihood and thereby live at the mercy of the society. This position that seems supported and natural by Bello, according to Islamic philosophy does not convince, Abba (1981), who believed that in spite of the Islamic injunction, which enjoins all Muslim communities to support the *almajiris*, most part of the problems of finding the children (*almajiris*) on the street owes to the fact the their parents abandon them. The parents do not give their children anything to live one, and abandoned to the Muslim society or society in general to look after.

Philosophically, the reasons advanced by parents who send their children to Koranic school without financial assistance reflect the knowledge of being armed by and obedience to enabling *Koranic/Hadith* injunctions, such as "*Karattu sai da bakunta*"² "*Karattu sai da karacin abinci*"³ as noted in Last (1967) and Adewuyi (1999).

This has been remarkably responsible to the origin, development and continuity of "*Almajiri*" system. Religion in this regard makes *Almajiri* system an accepted way of life among some sections without putting into consideration the actual harm being done to the children concerned.

Peer Factor: In addition to the above factors, cultural and peer groups have been identified as the functioning instruments for recruitment (voluntary) of street children (Obioha 2004). A close look at the child prostitution shows that initiates are influenced by their peers to join them. Similarly other forms of street children also see their participating mates as sources of inspiration and pull factors.

Societal Response/Factors: All children are born "*tabula rasa*"⁴ and can only know when they are taught. Society acts as a vibration factor

in shaping a child's perception and worldview. It will be reasonable to question what has been the societal attitude towards these odds of street children. Again have the members of a given society scolded or questioned the activities of street children? And what is the general attitude of people towards the street children such as *Almajiris*, prostitutes, hawkers, etc.? Appropriate answer to these questions suggests the extent to which the society is begging to encourage or retard the menace of street children and neglect. In the case of Kaduna, the society does nothing or less to minimize the number of street children on the street. The entire society and its different relevant components are the major agents of socialization. Therefore, the type of children in the society and what they are involved in are determined by the nature and context of the society where they exist.

Similar study on one of the sub-categories, (*almajirinci*) by Adewuyi (1999) showed that 73% of *almajiris*, and their koranic teachers did not perceive their way of wandering and begging as bad. The study also revealed that members of the public are unanimous that the class of beggars including the *almajiricin* should be accommodated. As Islamic religion prescribes that the "*ummah*" should protect and sustain the poor, the teacher and the *almajiricin* at individual and institutional levels, this prescription is enforced and treasured. This however translates to the fact that almsgiving and alms solicitation are complementary, and facilitated by common expectation arising from participation in a common social and cultural milieu. The society therefore is culpable if the phenomenon of street children; especially the "*almajiri*".

Dangers and Implication of Street Children on the Children and the Society

Inferring the dangers and hazards of street children phenomenon on the children from the child labour perspective, one may conclude that the hazards are better imagined than observed. These hazards include those that may cause total deformity or at the extreme, loss of life. The findings of studies (Oloko 1986, 1990, 1992, 1997) carried out between the time 1986-1997 in the cities of Lagos, Osogbo, Calabar, Kaduna and Bauchi indicated that the degree of hazard in child labour depends on the age and gender of the child, as well as the condition and characteristics of

different types of work. The children suffer great deprivation and work in violence prone, brutish, nasty and unprotected environment, that are not good for their development. Child development psychologists believed that the environment and circumstances where children grow up exert significant influence on their personality and later development in life. Precisely, their work environment would have influenced their physical, immediate health, safety, and emotional, social and other developmental aspects, which some attempts have been made by ILO to correct.

The implication of exposing children to begging is very clear. Most sociologists and social scientists agree that infancy and childhood experiences are the foundation of adulthood. Psychoanalysts even seek explanations of adult antisocial behaviour in fixation during the critical transitional phases at infancy and childhood. They suggest that a child who is not successfully chaperoned through the critical stages of *Id Ego* and *Superego* is likely to grow up to be maladjusted, deficient in several ways as propounded by Sigmund Freud (*c.f.* Adewuyi 1999). However, the dangers of street children in Kaduna metropolis of Nigeria cannot be less than what obtains in other societies. One is supposed to understand and know the dangers, which street children in Kaduna can constitute now and in future.

The whole Kaduna population is a living witness of what the street children have been doing on the various streets, especially Ahmadu Bello Way and attest to the fact that further lapses can lead to a bleak future. If the growth of recruitment into street job by children is not arrested now, the Kaduna metropolis and Nigeria in general stand to lose a lot by the destructive activities of these kids. While they pass their present teenage, they evolved into being very hardened and as such the cornerstones of confusions and problems such as vandalism of public property, rioting and mob actions that may ponder the economy into a heavy stagnation. Secondly, the flocks of today street children are economic and social waste if they are to continue being on the streets. Their position in the society is dysfunctional and as such pose a problem or obstacle to the responsible population. Thirdly, if care is not taken, the number of children joining the existing multitude of the street children will be on the increase if the issue is not led to rest now or minimized for good. This might continue from generation to generation involving the

wastage considerable potentials of national labour resource.

CONCLUSIONS

From experiences in Kaduna metropolis in Nigeria, the problem of street children is a fast growing and dangerous one. Observation shows that there are different forms of this phenomenon, which include, child prostitutes, child load carriers (*Yandakos*), the *almajiricin*, touts (*Yantouris*), etc. However, among all these categories, the incidence of *almajiricin* is greater than any other group in Kaduna metropolis. Sometimes in the recent past, these categories of children have been indicated in series of violent clashes and uprising in Kaduna, especially those that have religious configuration. The "idleness" of these children in terms of effective occupation may explain their indictment in the various crises situations. Some self-seeking individuals and organizations in the society, against public good and interest, could easily mobilize these lads.

Leaning on a major anchor of religiosity in explaining the street children phenomenon, there have been debates and contentions in this respect. It is clear that alluding, to the support of Islamic religion as one of the factors that has kept children on the street, especially the *almajiris* is erroneous. There is a misconception that Islam legalizes begging, but Ladan (1992) under the caption, "Islamic concept of charity and begging" affirmed that the Holy Prophet Mohammed did not in any way teach his followers to condition themselves as beggars. Citing the Holy Quran, 53:39, he maintained, "the Quran has stated it without mincing word that man is created on "struggle" and will have nothing except that which he strives for", he further queried the ground on which many students of Islam and Nigerian Muslims should make begging their hobbies or even occupations. Similarly, the Christian Holy Book (The Bible) did not approve of any indulgence in such habits, rather it warned against idleness, unnecessary begging, prostitution, and such other vices as perpetuated by the street children.

Against, the above observation, one can conclude that the problem of street children in Kaduna metropolis is as a result of whole breakdown of the function of the society. It is therefore erroneous to push the blame to either a particular section or ethnic group in the country,

or even a particular religion as the case may be. What is required of the problem at the present time in the history of our society is to find pragmatic solutions to it, to avoid further societal decadence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to stem the problem of street children and its attributes in Nigeria and Kaduna metropolis in particular, the following are recommended.

Personality re-adjustment of the children should be the point of entry towards solving the identified social problem. This will be aimed at creating self-directed personalities out of the abused, neglected, and confused children. To achieve this, appropriate personality instruments and appraisal shall be adopted, using qualified psychologists/child development psychologists.

Secondly, there should be teaching of basic need skills. This will involve inculcating basic business ethics and good social adaptation skills in the children. In this case, in addition to the counseling series to be provided in groups and on individual basis for social and emotional skills development as indicated above, lessons on basic skills in communication (oral and written), arithmetic, Health Education and business ethics would be provided. This is to ensure healthy function of the participants in and out of business.

Thirdly, similar to the above, there should be an apprenticeship scheme for the children. The objective is to impart saleable vocational skills on the children. Each participant shall on the basis of his/her interest, needs, talents, abilities, and other personality variables (traits) be placed in a trade commensurate with his/her most attainable potentials.

The implementation of the above suggested practices could be possible if there are organized modalities by the government and non-governmental organizations in mobilizing the street children in the city. Hence, this discourse poses a challenge to the government and other concerned groups and individuals to set up "drop in houses" for street children in Nigerian cities so that their needs could be met. However, in as much as some of the problems of the street children had with them, most of the roots of the problem or their etiology lie with the society in general. Thus in this paper some society broad based alternatives are suggested.

First, there is an urgent need to deal with the poverty situation in the country, which has rendered many families economically poor. When the poverty situation of the general public in Nigeria is improved, each family and household would then have enough resources to take care of their children. Besides, the economic situation of families, moral responsibilities of household heads need to be re-addressed. Many household heads do not have the sense of responsibility towards their children, as nothing is done to them in form of punishment to deter them from such actions.

From the religions point of view, the Islamic clergies should ensure that what is written in the Holy Quran is what is put into practice. To ensure the abolishing of street children phenomenon for instance, the whole Islamic community should be made to contribute towards the training of the younger scholars in an organized manner, rather than leaving the children to wander about the streets to beg for what they eat. Also, the Islamic practice of "*Zakat*" should be encouraged and promoted as a means of sustaining the "have nots".

NOTES

- 1 *Ummah* is an Arabic word that means Muslim communities.
- 2 *Karattu sai da bakunta* is Hausa word, which means that one has to leave his village or town, to become a stranger to learn, one has to keep away from kindness of love, loving and therefore distracting relations and friends.
- 3 *Karattu sai da karacin abinci* is Hausa word, which means that learning can only be effective on an empty belly; or learning will be hampered when one has enough to eat.
- 4 *Tabula rasa* - Sociological language - i.e in a clean slate
- 5 In an attempt to correct the ills of child labour, it has been observed that the ILO conventions have had significant influence nationally and internationally, and most have been incorporated in national legislation, including that of Nigeria. But as so often happens, the gap between principle and practice can become a chasm. Millions of children currently fall victim to this failure to implement minimum age legislation. Unfortunately, these children work in the informal sector of the economy where the activities of the abuse are not monitored

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