

*A Study of Migrant Street Children in Nigeria*



## **From City to City: A Study of Migrant Street Children in Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper examined the plights of street children who relocated from Lagos to neighbouring cities in Ogun and Oyo States of Southwestern Nigeria. In all, 180 in-depth interviews and 18 focus group discussions were conducted among street children between ages of 10 and 16 years. The reasons why they found solace in the street include difficulties in surviving in poor households, maltreatment and lack of parents. Majority of them identified police harassment, robbery, accident and kidnapping as major problems facing them. Their coping strategies include hawking, scavenging and bus conducting. The policy implication of the study is also discussed

**Key word:** Migrant street children, Menial jobs, Cities, Southwestern, Nigeria

### **INTRODUCTION**

They appear unkempt and totally hopeless of what the future holds. In their tattered clothes, they find homes in the most filthy and awkward places like abandoned buildings, under overhead bridges and school premises. Usually, they retire to these “abodes” at dusk and dash out in the morning before the prying eyes of security agents or the rightful owners of the structures turn out for business. (Anyagafu and Iwenjora, 2006).

For any nation, the real wealth is its children. Apart from being the country’s human resources, they also represent its future leaders whose future should be properly secured. Salami and van Beers (2003) have however observed that these resources cannot yield the dividends without appropriate investment to convert them into resourceful adults. Although Nigeria is endowed with rich natural and extensive human resources, it has not developed the necessary technological, industrial, managerial and political expertise to pull its resources together in a sound economy to take care of the basic needs of its population (Ebigbo, 2003). As a result, poverty and

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difficult living conditions are rife impinging on the poor particularly, the children who have to find alternate of survival in the street.

In the past, it was rare to see parents/guardians abandoning their children/wards to fend for themselves on the street. It was the joint responsibility of the extended family to take care of its children as it was shameful for the entire extended family members to allow any of her children to be in street to eke out a living for himself or herself. The extended family system was therefore, a social security system, which provide protection for its vulnerable members and serve as shield against severe socio-economic circumstances. It was not surprising then that a distressed child could stay with extended family member with or without notice (Owasanoye and Wernham, 2004). This arrangement was useful as a genuine source of socialization for all children within the family.

However, the extended family system as described briefly above has almost broken down if not totally crumbled. The mechanism of communal support characteristic of the extended family system has been undermined considerably in contemporary Nigerian society. Owasanoye and Wernham (2004) identify factors such as urbanization and physical separation of family members as well as substitution of extended family economy with capitalism and globalization as responsible for the disintegration of extended family system which promoted the philosophy of "I am my brother's keeper" in the traditional Nigerian society. However, in spite of the fact that the extended family has waned in influence along with the social security it provided for the children, especially the poor, people continue to rear large family and children who will not enjoy the protection of a multitude of relatives. However, Ebigbo (2003) notes that consumerism, an attitude of "get rich quick" and westernization has led to rural-urban migration and the emergence of urban poor in the city and these migrants take menial jobs and form the bulk of the street and market traders. It is no longer surprising to walk past a market place, religious centres, or any major road or street in Nigeria without noticing these children begging or doing menial jobs. Majority of them have run the gauntlet of several thousands of delinquent youth who roam the streets without purpose or mission begging, scavenging, or moving from one place to another.

Oloko (1992) identifies the following as push factors: marital problems in the home, poverty, hunger, insecurity, instability in the home, abuse and violence from parents, displacement caused by communal clashes and lack of parental care or insufficient parental care. Others include death of a parent or both parents, need for income in the family, inability to continue in school, willful deviance in a few children, unemployment of one or both parents, lack of, or limited opportunities in education, abandonment by parents, housing challenges, drug use by children and peer group influence. Poverty is also forcing an increasing number of children on the streets. In some instance, it is the parents or guardians who send the children to work on the streets to support their families and others are forced on the streets to find food and shelter, which is not forthcoming from their families.

As far back as 1984, it was estimated that over 10 million children live without families mostly in towns as street children (UNICEF, 1984:39). This number was expected to double by the year 2000 (ibid). The increase in the number of migrant street children to the neighbouring states which already have their own share of street children is therefore, becoming a key social problem and a source of worry in the receiving states. Recently, both the governors of Oyo and Ogun States accused their Lagos State counterpart of sending “criminals” to their States.

One main characteristic of the “street children” is that they live alone in streets, without proper or reliable shelter. Some of them have lost contact with their parents and as such, they do not enjoy parental protection, love and care (Lugalla and Mbwambo, 1995, Kopoka, 2000). The families from which street children originate have been found to be deficient either because of excessive poverty, deviance or because of disintegration (Oloko, 2001). Kopoka (2000) describes street children as:

The ones stopping cars and people to beg or to ask for work. They are the ones shining shoes, selling sundry articles of uncertain origin or washing the windscreen of cars stopped at traffic signals while others roam around or gathered in a small group looking for something to do. They are the ones that their clothes are ragged and dirty. They appear hungry suffering from ill health and malnutrition. There is something mature beyond their years in their haunted expressions. At night, they are seen huddled along street corners, in doorways, or in any dry and secluded corner. They are the representatives of a growing multitude of children who have become known as the “street children”.

For Oloko (2001), they are the heterogeneous groups of children who spend varying amount of their sleeping and waking hours on the street. Several studies have indicated that a large number of children work on the streets either as hawkers, shoe shiners, head loaders, car watchers/washers, beggars, vendors, scavengers, beggars, prostitutes, or as bus conductors (Oloko, 2001; Ebigbo, 2003). Some sing for money to aid their survival while others appeal for aid in the daytime and become aggressive and violent in the cover of night (Ebigbo, 2003). The Sunday Tribune (22, November 2009) also gives picture of street children as follows:

They can be seen in the very early hours of the morning from different points where they sleep, rubbing sleep from their eyes in an effort to get ready for a new day. They come out in twos, threes, looking so unkempt and smelly that it is obvious they do not have their baths regularly. Their clothing’s contact with water and soap is rare, going by their looks. They walk aimlessly for some time before sitting on nearby benches, some chewing sticks to wash their mouths while others chat excitedly with their foul smelling mouths. Their ages range from nine to seventeen years. They address themselves as ‘omo oku’ (children of the dead).

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The popular images of street children portray them as vulnerable to abusive attack and at risk of poor health. They are exploited by other older street children or adults who use them for cheap labour. In some cases, they are at risk of vigilantes, kidnappers and money ritualists. On the roads, they are the first to be knocked down by hit and run vehicle drivers. They are usually wounded or killed by police stray bullets (Sunday Tribune, 22 November, 2009). They lack food, clean water and adequate healthcare. They are often preys to environmental hazards (both physical and moral). Many of them sleep close to filthy areas such as gutters, refuge dump or industrial waste which constitutes health hazards. As they grow older, they often become danger to the entire society (Ebigbo, 2004).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were posed to guide the research:

1. What are the socio-demographic characteristics of the street children who migrated from to other cities?
2. Why did they relocate instead of going back home?
3. What are the problems and challenges facing street children in the new cities?
4. In what ways do they sustain themselves?
5. What can be done to reduce the identified problems in Nigeria?

### **Methods**

The study was conducted in six cities in southwestern Nigeria. They include Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode and Shagamu (Ogun State) and Sango-Mokola, Ojoo-Iwo road and Molete (Oyo State). All the cities were selected due of their proximity to Lagos, which by 1995 had over 100,000 street children (Database of NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, October 1995).

Fieldwork for this study was carried out in September 2008, with another round of interviews in May 2009. In all, 180 street children were interviewed across the six cities of the selected states. Twenty males and 10 females aged between 10 and 16 years were interviewed in each city. The breakdown is as follows: hawkers (42 - 30 females and 12 males); bus conductors (33 males); shoe shiners (20: 15 males and 5 females); scavengers (20 males); load carriers (25: 10 males, 15 female); beggars (15: 5 males and 15 females); those who assist the NURTW in calling passengers into their buses (25 males). There was no rigid sampling process. In-depth interviews were conducted as the interviewees were found and agreed to partake in the study. To facilitate rapport the assistance of six street children were enlisted. With these boys, we had lasting research relationship. In this respect, in-depth interviews with street children were easier and uniform. Due to low level of literacy among the interviewees, all interviews were conducted in Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo languages and Pidgin English. Pidgin English is an

adulterated form of English language extensively spoken in both the formal and non-formal settings in Nigeria. The researchers also employed the services of the enlisted boys as interpreters. They are also very versed in Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo languages. At the end of the fieldwork, all the IDIs were tape-recorded and translated from Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Pidgin English to English language. They were later edited to ensure that all the interview schedules were completed and contained accurate information. The data were presented and analyzed in “context” by grouping and sorting out comments and responses derived from these qualitative data. Verbatim quotations of relevant statements were done. At the end of the interview, a relationship was developed with the children in such away that we could recognize one another and exchange pleasantries.

### **Focus Group Discussions**

A total number of eighteen Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) consisting of six groups of male and female street children were conducted in each of the selected cities. Each group consists of between 6-10 participants all of whom possessed similar socio-demographic characteristics. Participants in each group were of the same age category: 10-12; 13-14; and 15-16 years, sex (males and females); educational background (literate and non-literate) those in similar profession (for instance, conductors, scavengers, hawkers, beggars, car washers, shoe shiners and load carriers). Each discussion lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. All information was tape recorded and later transcribed for further analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The research team obtained official approval for the study from the selected Local Government Headquarters and the research objectives were explained to the participants who gave their consent before the commencement of the study. For the sake of ethical considerations, the names of the interviewees reported in the paper are not their actual names.

### **Results**

#### **Socio-demographic Characteristics of Interviewees**

Participants are street children (boys and girls) aged between 10 and 16 years of age. Of the 180 street children interviewed, 120 (60%) are males while the female children constitute 60(40%). Occupations of the interviewees indicates that 42 were hawkers (30 females and 12 males); bus conductors (33 males); shoe shiners (20: 15 males and 5 females); scavengers (20 males); load carriers (25: 10 males, 15 female); beggars (15: 5 males and 15 females); those who assist the NURTW in calling passengers into their buses (25 males). The study shows that there are lesser female children in the street.

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This finding corroborates Owasanoye and Okusanya (2004) Situational Analysis of Street Children in Lagos State where they found that majority of street children in Lagos are males. This is linked to the fact that more children are likely to be in the street than female children.

The study shows that the majority of the street children who migrated from Lagos to these new cities came from different states of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Majority 45 (25.0%) of them are from the Southwest, North East 31(17.5%), North West 31(17.5%), South-South 23 (21.6%) while 27 (15.0%) of them are from South East and Middle Belt respectively. The study also indicates that Northern part of the country contributes 89 (49.4%) of street children who migrated from Lagos to these new cities.

#### **Why Children are on the Streets**

There is no single reason why children are on the streets. While most of them said they have no “home” or parents to return to, others said they prefer living independently from their relatives. Some of them stated that survival in a harsh Nigerian’s socio-economic environment as their reasons for relocating to other cities. Yet, for others, it was the difficulty to survive in poor households. For example, John Balogun is 16 years old. He has been on the street at a tender age of six. He explained:

Life on the street is not a rosy one. I lost my parents at a very tender age. I was three years old when they both died in a ghastly motor accident. After their death, my paternal grandfather handed me over to my uncle. I stayed with my uncle for nine months but his wife was maltreating me. Everyday, it was one trouble or the other. While her own children were in school, she compelled me to be selling groundnut for her. It was in the process that I came to know some other street children. I made friend with them. When the suffering in my uncle’s house was becoming too much for me to bear, my friends advised me to join them. That was how I found solace on the streets of Lagos. My dream was to go to school and become a responsible man in future. When we were driven from Lagos, I had no option than to come to Abeokuta.

Ahmed Yahaya, aged 15, is from Borno State. He was born in Lagos where he had lived most part of his life as a beggar before relocating to Ibadan in January 2009. According to him:

My father married eight wives. My mother had thirteen of us and 27 children from other women. As a drummer, it was difficult for my father to take care of all of us. I have no option than to go to the street to beg in order to survive. When governor Fashola drove us away from Lagos, I felt Ibadan was the best place for me to earn a living.

Sadiat Abubakar was 14 years old as at the time of the interview. She had lived on the streets for two years in Ijebu-Ode (where she relocated). She affirmed:

The man, who impregnated me, denied the pregnancy. I am a single parent. My parents have no house to call their own. I grew up on the street. If I have my way, I will not like my child to be in the street begging. I would like to send her to school.

Dayo Okunola 13 hails from Iwo in Osun State. He ran away from his stepmother in whose custody he had been after the death of his mother. In his case, his friends brought him to the flashpoint for street children. When street children were driven away from Lagos, he relocated to Abeokuta where he felt life would be better. He remarked:

I grew up without knowing my mother. She died while I was only two years old. Initially, I thought my stepmother was my biological mother until she started treating me differently from my other siblings. While her own children were in school, she would send me to the street to be hawking boiled corn. I was doing this without food in my stomach. My greatest surprise was that my father was supporting her. When the suffering was getting too much, I ran away to Lagos. When I came to Lagos, I was sleeping under the bridges and later inside buses with my friends who invited me. Thereafter, I became a bus conductor. Sometimes, my friends and I would stay at bus stop to beg for money or go to market places to help people carry their loads. When the Lagos State government drove us away, I could not but come to Abeokuta.

Seyi Lasisi is a 15-year-old boy from Ikirun in Osun State. He has been living in Iwo road area of Ibadan for over two years after he relocated from Lagos. His experience is similar to that of Dayo. His uncle brought him to Lagos on the pretext that he was going to learn a trade. He said:

After the death of my father, my uncle told my mother that he would take me to Lagos to learn how to sell motor spare parts. To my surprise, he did not fulfill his promise as he sent me to the street to hawk without food. One day, a friend of mine told me that if I continue like that, I would die of hunger one day. He then suggested that we should both go to an area in Ibadan where there are heavy traffic jams to help people wash their car windscreens. We shuttle between Mokola and Iwo road. This is what I have been doing since I left Lagos. Sometimes, I make up to N700 per day sometimes it is less.

The study also indicates that some of the street children are from broken homes. For example, Osas aged 13, a victim of broken home, is from Edo State. During the in-depth interview, he stated:

I was born out of wedlock. My father was a commissioner in Edo State. My mother told me that there was a problem between her and daddy after the birth of my younger sister, which resulted in my father divorcing my mother and thereafter, denied being our father. When my mother later remarried, she sent me to live with my maternal grandmother but she was so poor that we could not afford three-square meal a day. I had to follow my friend to Lagos when she died. When we were driven from Lagos, I have to come to Abeokuta because it is closer to Lagos. I did not go to school or learn any trade. I am depending on what I realize from the street.



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The study reveals that children are on the street for different reasons. While some of them are driven by socio-economic circumstances and poverty, others are on the street either because they have no biological parents to cater for them or due to the abuse, maltreatment and violence they suffered in the hands of relatives. This suggests that the majority of the children are on the street through no faults of theirs but due to circumstances beyond their control.

#### **Problems and Challenges**

During the FGD sessions, participants were asked to mention what their problems and challenges of living on the streets were. The most common and pervasive problem reported by the participants was police harassment. For instance, Segun Oke, a self-confessed street child at Iwo road (Ibadan) remarked:

Police is our greatest problem. They believe that it was because of our criminal acts that we were driven away from Lagos State. They see us as common criminals and treat us as alien in our own country. If for instance, there is a case of armed robbery, the first accusing finger will be pointed at us. Once you are arrested they will fabricate all kinds of lies to rope you into any criminal acts you know nothing about.

Vincent aged 16 added:

Early this year (2008), the police arrested, detained and interrogated me at Iyagokun Police Station for an offence I knew nothing about. The police accused me of being part of those who stabbed a schoolchild who happens to be a soldier son at Gate area of Ibadan. I was beaten with police baton, tortured and made to clean toilets. I spent a month and a half in police cell without bail.

Vincent was on his way to Iwo road when he was arrested for an offence he claimed he did not commit. In January 2008, a group of miscreants assaulted and stabbed a soldier son who had confronted and prevented them from extorting money from his friends. This attack on the boy prompted a chain of reprisal attacks by soldiers in different parts of Ibadan for over two weeks. In the process, many innocent street children were killed, maimed while over 300 others were arrested and handed over to the police.

Matthew, aged 16, who relocated to Ijebu-Ode, had this to say during the in-depth interview:

Once the police succeed in taking you to their station, they will force to admit to a crime you did not commit. If you are lucky, they will ask you to sweep both inside and outside their station. At the police station, they take money from us. In some cases, innocent girls are raped.

Felix Ibe aged 15, lives on a street at Abeokuta in Ogun State where he relocated from Lagos. He affirmed during the focus group discussion as follows:

One day, the police arrested me in front of Abeokuta Grammar School. They took me to their station and accused me of armed robbery. They tortured me to confess that I was a member of the armed robbery gang that robbed in one of the new Generation Banks in the Central area of Abeokuta. While one of the police officers was hitting me with a baton, another one was whipping me with “koboko” (horsewhip). They said they would release me if I admitted that I took part in the robbery. I was released three weeks after when they could not find anything incriminating against me.

In some cases, beautiful girls are molested and sometimes raped. Sylvia Ojewunmi aged 16 years (Ibadan) in one of the focus group discussions narrated as follows:

When they are looking for girls to sleep with, the police will just come to the street and pounce on us like bees. One day they arrested us on the allegation that we were prostitutes. They took us to the police station and threw us inside the cell. At night, they would sneak in and have sex with some of the beautiful girls, take their money and released them the following day. Those of us that refused their illicit advances were molested, beaten and raped.

Joy Ehelem aged 15 added:

They had sex with us on the pretext that they would release us. In most cases, they renege on their promise if they have their way. It is only on few cases that they would allow you to go. If the police do not have money to spend especially at weekends, they will be moving from one street to another looking for innocent people to arrest. If they see you near a beer parlour or hotel, you are in trouble.

Idia Oyeneye aged 16, who relocated from Lagos to Ijebu-Ode in Ogun State, gave an account of her experience in the hands of the police during the FGDs as follows:

One day the police arrested me in front of a hotel at Ojota area in Lagos while I was waiting for a bus to Ikeja. This was shortly before I left Lagos. They said I was a prostitute and that I was among the prostitutes harbouring criminals in the area. I pleaded with them. It was not my fault that I was on the street. At the police station, they started calling me names. I was stripped naked and locked up. In the night, one of the police officers sneaked in and said he would talk to his colleagues to release me if I allow him to have sex with me. To my greatest shock, he did nothing about my release until I was released four weeks later.

Apart from the police, street children are also victims of armed robbers. Adeola Ogunyemi aged 14 years (Abeokuta) recounted his experience in one of the FGDs as follows:

I have been a victim of armed robbery many times. Some of these robbers are among us. For instance, when I first came here from Lagos, some people who claimed are my “ogas” (boss) on the street” where I stay would force me to submit half of my earning to them. They used to beat me up and take my money by force. This incidence, made me to develop a thick skin. I learnt how to smoke Indian hemp so as to be able to withstand them. But

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when they discovered that they could not withstand me they would organize themselves to rob me in the night.

Sometimes, some of the street children are kidnapped and used for money rituals. Veronica Ojo, aged 16 years (Ijebu-Ode) remarked during one of the FGDs as follows:

We are also exposed to kidnappers and ritualists who use people for money rituals. For the fact that some of us do not stay in one location or have anybody to look for us, makes it difficult for people to know that many of us are missing on daily basis. Again most of the people knocked down by hit and run drivers are street children.

The study reveals the various plights, risks and hazards street children are exposed to as they try earn a living on the street. These risks range from police harassment, sexual exploitation, rape, false allegations, robbery and the risk of being used for money rituals. Most of them live in environments that are polluted, risky and unsafe and the looks on the faces suggests that they are suffering in a failed society indicating that the traditional Nigerian culture in which children are integrated into the extended family system is fast diminishing.

#### **Coping Strategies**

When the participants were asked how they survive in the new cities, their responses were diverse and varied. For many, it is “man must survive” and for others “struggling is a part of our lives”. It is therefore, not surprising that majority of them hawk along busy streets, selling sundry articles like handkerchiefs, newspapers, car wash among others. Others engaged in menial jobs such as car washing, scavenging, shoe shining, fetching of water or work as bus conductors as coping strategies. It is interestingly to note that some of the wise ones utilize the proceeds from these menial jobs to pursue their dreams. For instance, Sylvester Okoro is an SS III student at Ojoo High School in Ibadan. He is a car washer and had this to say during an in-depth interview:

I came from a very poor family. I am on the street because I need money for my school fees. I am in Junior Secondary School (JSS III). I pay my school fees from the return I get from washing cars for people on weekends and in the evening after school hours. The remaining amount of money is spent on my feeding. I am the one training myself.

Similarly, Yinka Kudaisi 15, now a student of Abeokuta Grammar School. He washes cars on weekends and at close of school. He comes around like others to the street to make some money with which to support his education. He stated during the FGDs as follows:

We are eight children in my family. I am the second child. When I realized that my parents would not be able to send all of us to school, I decided to help myself because I love school. Man must survive. The money I realize from washing cars is really helping me to achieve my aim. I have been able to pay my school fees and enroll for my West African School

Certificate (WASC) and National Examination Council (NECO) examinations. During holidays, I come here as early as seven o' clock in the morning and do not go home until about 7.30 or 8.00 o'clock in the night depending on the number of customers I have. I have more time for my studies than when I was in Lagos.

Matthew Ojerinde 15, grew up in Lagos and read up to primary six. His mum according to him is dead and was living with his auntie in Lagos. He remarked during one of the FGDs as follows:

I lived with my auntie when I first came to Lagos. She is a petty trader and has seven children. Being a widow, she found it difficult to take care of all of us. For us, life was a daily struggle. Therefore, I decided to assist her by finding something to do. When I discussed my problem with my friend, he introduced me to car wash business. I only needed a bucket, detergent and water to start. When I was about to break even, we were driven away from Lagos. I could not go back to my auntie but relocated to Ijebu-Ode. Since I came here, I have many customers. I wash cars for big men who work in the banks and other big companies. I use the proceeds to pay for my school fees and help my auntie.

Oladele Olakunrin is a 14-year-old boy who works as a bus conductor. He remarked during the in-depth interview thus:

I work as a bus conductor and follow the driver I am attached to on his trips. I make do with whatever I am given to survive.

For some street children, the only source of livelihood is begging. According to Ibrahim, a 16 years old boy who now resides in Ibadan, his religion encourages alms begging in the street. He stated during the in-depth interview as follows:

I did not go to school and I do not have any other work. I beg because I do not want to die of hunger and starvation. My religion encourages us to beg for alms. I spent the money I realize from begging on food, clothes and my brother's school fees.

Tunde Olojo aged 15, had this to say during the FGDs:

Baba Tinubu really tried for us when he was the governor of Lagos State. I was one of the people he sent to learn trade at Ita Oko. I was given a small job to do after the training but the money was not enough compared to what I got daily on the street. On the street, I used to realize at least 2,000 Naira every day. With this money, I was able to take care of myself. I relocated to Abeobuta when Baba Fashola drove us away from Lagos. Here in Abeokuta, I realize N1, 500 a day, sometimes, it is less. I know one day things will change for better.

The former Lagos State governor, Chief Bola Ahmed Tinubu designed a scheme during his first term in office in 1999 to free the city of Lagos of the street children defacement. He established a skill-training centre at Ita Oko where street children were trained for six months after which they were given certificates and job placements. In spite of this laudable programme, street children continued to be a growing menace on the streets of Lagos city until Governor Fashola decided to do something about it. Chinedu Nweke

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was a beneficiary of the scheme. When asked how he survives without using the skills he acquired, he said:

The money they were paying us was too small that I could not survive with it. Now I make a lot of money by helping people to carry their loads and on several occasions, I assist Nigerian Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) officials in calling for passengers, I use the proceeds to cater for myself.

The study shows that survival among street children is a difficult process in which coping strategy is very demanding. Faced with the present economic crisis, high inflation and illiteracy, the future of these children may be more difficult in a society that does not have social security for its populace. Thus, the situation of street children in Nigeria reveals weakness in support systems of the Nigerian government, civil society organization as well as perceived failure of the family.

### **CONCLUSION**

The paper has demonstrated the gory experience of street children whose standard of living has put them at great danger of sexual abuse, kidnap, accident and all form of molestations. The study reveals how they are exposed to environments which further expose them to various hazards, criminal activities and other ills of the society. It is no longer news that some of the street children engage in one act or another such as patronizing prostitutes or engaging in prostitution. This trend portends serious risk in this era of the much-dreaded HIV/AIDS. If the nation must meet the Millennium Development Goal of eradicating HIV/AIDS, the issue of street children must be addressed seriously. The mission of the Lagos State government of keeping the children off the street therefore, seems enormous and laudable but the government's efforts towards it seem to be compelling. The social problems associated with street children cannot be resolved by police harassment or by merely passing the laws that keep them off the street overnight. The only way to reach the top of the palm tree is to climb it. Unfortunately, over the years, the Nigerian government has been paying lip service to this social malaise. Since children are the future leaders of any country, their presence on the streets could therefore be dangerous to the future of that country. Evidence abounds that street children are not only involved in criminal activities and are also employed by unscrupulous politicians to foment trouble and cause mayhem during political rallies and campaigns. This phenomenon is not palatable for a country like Nigeria the acclaimed giant and most populous nation of the black race.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on our findings, the following recommendations are offered:

- Both Federal and State governments should as a matter of policy, make education to secondary school level free and compulsory.
- Non Governmental Organizations and Community Based Organizations should also be involved in training and rehabilitating street children.
- As much as possible government should pass laws prohibiting street begging and hawking by all sorts of children, including schoolchildren.
- Police should be enlightened on issues concerning street children. This is necessary because not all children on the street are criminals. Where they are found culpable, such children should be reformed, as they deserve affection not chastisement. Punishment will not only harden them but will fail to address the basis of child's actions.
- The problem confronting the family should be identified and targeted for action. The extended family system whereby a child is seen as everybody's child should also be encouraged.

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