

UNITED NATIONS
NIGERIA

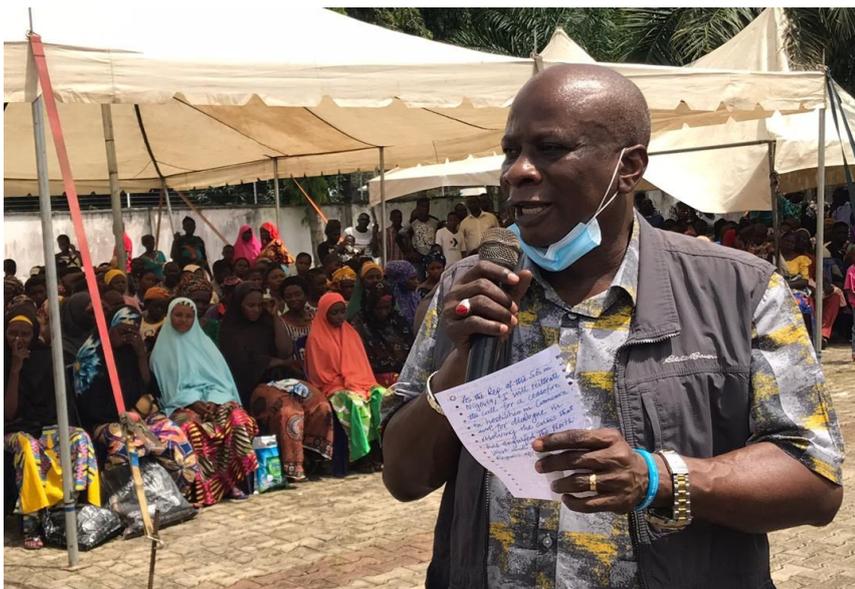
NEWSLETTER

UN75
2020 AND BEYONDSHAPING
OUR
FUTURE
TOGETHER

UN Intensifies Engagement With Governors In North-East and North-Central Regions



L-R: Resident / Humanitarian Coordinator of the UN in Nigeria, Mr Edward Kallon; and Governor Mai Mala Buni of Yobe State



Resident / Humanitarian Coordinator of the UN in Nigeria, Mr Edward Kallon, addresses Cameroonian refugees at Takum community in Taraba State.

HIGHLIGHTS

We're Working Towards A World Free Of Poverty and Disease – Kallon...P. 2
Humanitarian Actors Meet To Define Priority Needs For 2021...P. 5

Muhammed, A Returnee Almajiri, Puts His Dream Back On Track...P. 8

In continuation of his stakeholders' engagement in the North-East and North-Central regions of Nigeria, the UN Resident Coordinator Edward Kallon, has embarked on official visits to Taraba, Plateau and Yobe States.

On 12 October, he arrived Jalingo, Taraba State and on 15 October he arrived Jos, Plateau State. While in the two States, he addressed special sessions of the States' Executive Councils (EXCOs) chaired by the Governors.

Mr. Edward Kallon explained that a UNDP-UNWOMEN-FAO inter-agency project supported by the UN Peace Building Fund was already going on in Taraba, Benue and Nasarawa states, stressing that it was in support of a harmonious and peaceful relationship between farmers and herders.

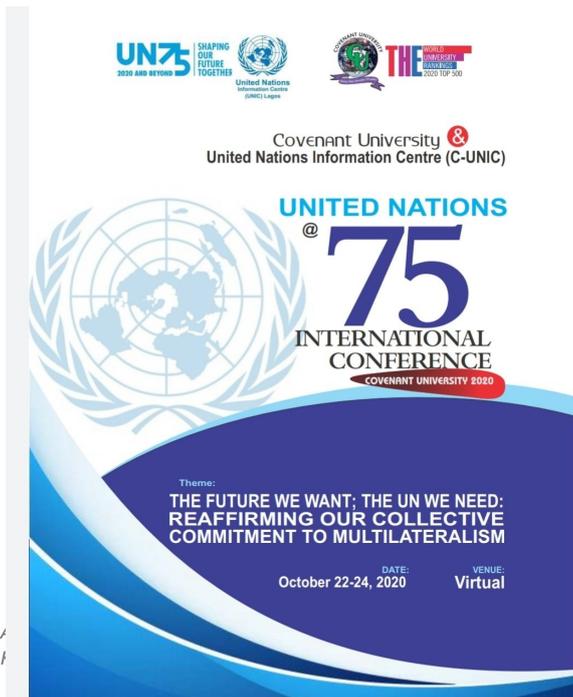
"The intervention would promote dialogue and proactive engagement for the mutual economic benefit of the two groups." He said.

To have a first-hand information about refugees in the region, Mr Kallon visited Takum community, which hosts some Cameroonian refugees.

He thanked the Taraba State government and traditional leaders of the host communities for their peace-loving and compassionate disposition towards the refugees.

Mr Kallon called for Cameroonian and Nigerian Governments to speedily work towards resolving the conflict in north-west and south-west Cameroon to enable the refugees return home safely. He thanked TY Danjuma Foundation for their outstanding service to humanity.

We're Working Towards A World Free Of Poverty, Hunger And Disease – Kallon



Resident / Humanitarian Coordinator of the UN in Nigeria, Mr Edward Kallon

As the United Nations marks its 75th anniversary with the theme, ‘The future we want, the United Nations we need: reaffirming our collective commitment to multilateralism’, the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator of the UN in Nigeria, Mr Edward Kallon, has assured that the organisation was working towards ensuring a world free of poverty, hunger disease and want. “We are working towards a world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive. A world with equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, to health care and social protection, where physical, mental and social well-being are assured.” He said at a UN75 international virtual conference organised by Covenant University and United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) Nigeria from 22 – 24 October 2020.

Mr Kallon said further that if everyone worked together it would be possible to have a world where we reaffirm our commitments regarding the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation; where there is improved hygiene; and where food is sufficient, safe, affordable and nutritious.

“A world where human habitats are safe, resilient and sustainable and where there is universal access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy. And indeed a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination. That world is possible if we all work together.” He added

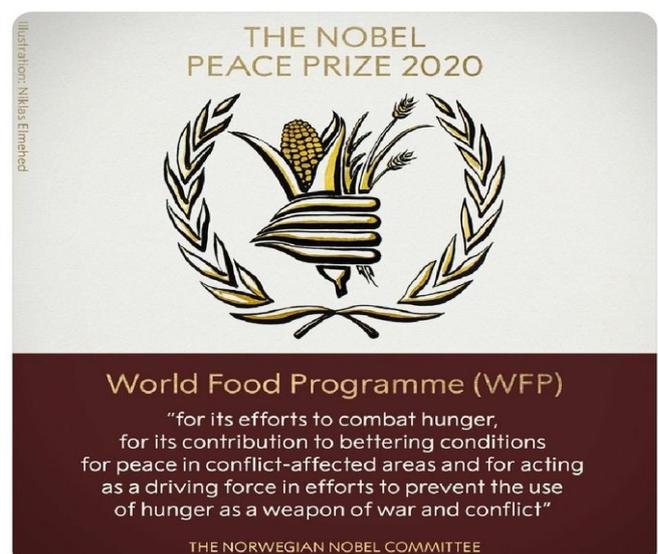
Delivering the conference keynote, the Chancellor, Covenant University, Dr David Oyedepo, urged the United Nations to reform and restructure the Security Council. He said, “UN is due for reforms. For this to happen and to achieve other goals, the UN would have to make the following internal reforms: restructure the UN Security Council in line with the reality of contemporary international relations; position herself for the inevitable challenges of the 21st century international diplomacy, where digitisation is fast outpacing shuttle diplomacy and where power is becoming redefined and diffused.”

Dr Oyedepo further emphasised that the UN must become more democratised in her structure, giving more room to the rising powers and emerging economies, especially from the glob-

al South, to exercise their influence in leadership. “The international community has the responsibility to strengthen existing multilateral institutions of which the UN is the best model to meet these inevitable challenges.” He added.

In his closing remarks on 24 October 2020, the Director of UNIC Nigeria, Mr Ronald Kayanja, observed that the UN 75th anniversary came in a time of great disruption for the world, compounded by an unprecedented global health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with severe economic and social impacts. “But it is also a reminder that times of struggle can become an opportunity for positive change and transformation.” He continued, “The papers presented during this conference are a great testimony to the opportunities that exist ahead of this world if we all commit to working together.”

The Chairman, Conference Organising Committee, Prof. Sheriff Folarin, had earlier at the opening ceremony expressed the appreciation of the University management to the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) for the opportunity to collaborate for such a landmark anniversary.



World Food Day Highlights Impact Of Covid-19 On Food Security, Nutrition In Nigeria



UNICEF is supporting the return of children within the Almajiri system and their successful reunion with their families. UNICEF Nigeria/2020

Nigeria joined the world to celebrate the 2020 World Food Day (WFD) on October 16 with food systems stakeholders calling for global cooperation and solidarity in tackling the threats to food security and agricultural livelihoods, particularly those exposed by COVID-19 pandemic.

With the theme: ‘Grow, Nourish, Sustain. Together. Our Actions Are Our Future’, this year’s WFD celebrations coincided with the 75th anniversary of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and which was also aligned to the UN’s 75th commemoration.

In Nigeria, FAO in collaboration with the office of the UN Resident Coordinator, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), World Food Programme (WFP), UN Women and the UN Information Centre (UNIC) joined the Federal Government Nigeria and other partners including the European Union and Oxfam, among others, to commemorate with week-long events.

Launching the largely online events in Abuja, the Minister of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Alhaji Mohammed Sabo Nanono, notes that despite some general positive indicators in terms of food production in the country, effects of Covid-19, climate change effects in form of recent floods in some States contributed, to low productivity in the agriculture sector.

Other events in the week included a national food security and nutrition stakeholders’ symposium, live talk shows on national television stations and radio programmes in Abuja and in Maiduguri. These focused on the importance of transforming food systems to advance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Similar messages were echoed in special publications in print and social media throughout the week.

In his message for WFD2020, Mr. Kafeero noted that even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2019 United Nation’s report on Tracking Progress on Food and Agriculture Related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the world was ‘off- track’ to meeting the goals by 2030.

This calls for measures to address the issues affecting food security and nutrition across the globe, he urged.

The celebrations culminated into a high-level virtual panel discussion organized by FAO in collaboration with UN Resident Coordinator’s Office, UN Women, IFAD and WFP and moderated by UNIC’s Director, Ronald Kayanja. The panelists reflected on Nigeria’s road towards achieving food security and nutrition-related SDGs and how the country with support from stakeholders was faring towards achieving zero hunger by 2030. It was graced by Senior Special Assistant to the President on Sustainable Development Goals, Princess Adejoke Orelope-Adefulire; and Special Assistant to the President on Agriculture (Office of the Vice President) Dr. Andrew Kwasari.

Other panelists who participated included the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria – Edward Kallon; FAO Representative, Mr. Kafeero; WFP Country Rep. Paul Howe, and UN Women Country Rep. to Nigeria, Comfort Lamptey. Others included the Head of EU Delegation to Nigeria and ECOWAS H.E Ketil Karlsen; the Oxfam Country Director, Constant Tchona, and other development partners.



Save the Date!

High Level Virtual Panel Discussion to commemorate
#WorldFoodDay2020

Topic: With a decade remaining for Agenda 2030, how is Nigeria faring towards achieving #ZeroHunger? What is the role of stakeholders in supporting Nigeria to achieve food security and nutrition related SDGs?

Panelists: Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs, Senior Special Assistant to the President on Agriculture, Hon. Minister of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, UN Resident Coordinator, EU Head of Delegation, Representatives of FAO, IFAD, WFP, UN Women, Oxfam Country Director etc.

Date: October 16, 2020
Time: 10:00 - 12:00hrs
Meeting ID: 917 6190 5839
Passcode: 565997



Nigeria, UN Pioneer Use Of “Keke” And Boats To Get Food And Cash To Coronavirus-affected City Hotspots



WFP using 'Keke' to distribute food and cash to vulnerable persons in Kano

The Nigerian Government and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) last month launched a cash and food assistance programme in the three urban COVID-19 hotspots of Abuja, Kano and Lagos. The Government has released 2,000 metric tons of food from its Strategic Grain Reserve (valued at US\$1 million), while WFP is releasing US\$3 million to provide cash assistance.

Working together with the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, this is the first time that WFP is expanding its programme in Nigeria to reach people in towns and cities - where millions of people are threatened with hunger and malnutrition due to the socio-economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Across Nigeria - Africa's biggest economy and most populous country - people who earn the least have lost the most due to the pandemic. Approximately 90 percent of the population depend on a daily wage to survive, and many of these people live in urban areas. These informal workers have lost up to 80 percent of their earnings. With a lack of income and increasing food prices, more and more people are finding it extremely difficult to meet their food needs.

The prices of basic cereals have risen by 15 percent in the last month alone, and the national price of millet - Nigeria's staple food - has doubled over the past year. To cope with hunger, families are being forced to borrow money and food, or sell their remaining assets - plunging them deeper into poverty.

"This partnership has enabled us to save the lives of thousands of people in Kano State during these difficult times," said Governor Ganduje at a joint press conference in Kano. Distribution of cash and food began in Kano State to complement the Government's ongoing efforts to cushion the impact of the pandemic. In the coming weeks and months, WFP will continue to work with the Governments of Abuja and Lagos to support the most vulnerable families.

To minimise the risk of exposure to the virus, WFP has arranged for home deliveries of cash and food. In Kano, food was delivered using the local 'ke-ke' rickshaw service. In Lagos, WFP is partnering with the State Government to deliver food using boats to reach families living in the riverine community of Makoko. Meanwhile, in all three urban areas, cash was being transferred through pre-paid debit cards or online bank transfers.

"The Government of Nigeria has shown great commitment and leadership in responding to this crisis. This is exactly what we need during this time of pandemic and beyond to achieve Zero Hunger in Nigeria", said Paul Howe, WFP Country Director and Representative.



WFP is working with Nigerian government authorities to distribute food and cash in urban locations

Over 150 Humanitarian Actors Meet To Define Priority Needs For 2021



A cross-section of participants drawn from local communities across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states.

The humanitarian crisis in north-east Nigeria remains one of the largest in the world. In 2020, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated vulnerabilities of people already affected by 11 years of crisis in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states. About four in five people living in these three states – 10.6 million people – need urgent lifesaving assistance in 2020.

Early October, over 150 people from local communities across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states gathered to identify the most dire humanitarian needs the humanitarian response should focus on in 2021. These will be addressed by the United Nations, humanitarian international NGOs and national NGOs who are working together in a joint response, coordinated with the Nigerian authorities and emergency agencies, to provide efficient and timely assistance. Making sure local communities can participate in decision-making and shape the response that will be implemented next year is a key factor to ensure the aid provided is what people affected by the crisis really need.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Nigeria is responsible for bringing all actors together to assess the needs of the most vulnerable people in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states, and plan the actions the humanitarian community will provide to avoid duplications and ensure no one is left behind. This process is ongoing and is called the Humanitarian Program Cycle (HPC), with two important key moments: the preparation of the yearly Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP).

The HNO, which assesses the evolution of the needs of the most vulnerable populations presents an essential step in completing the HPC, as this document puts forward key figures on the number of people in need and what their specific needs are. In order to obtain this information, OCHA and its partners conduct these state-level consultations in Local Government Areas (LGAs), during which the representatives of the IDP communities and host communities share their concerns and wants.

State-level consultations encourage people at the most local levels to participate as much as possible in the HPC process by creating a space for collective open discussions as well as one-on-one interviews. The consultations are also made to be as representative as possible with the participation of one male and one female leader from the IDP community, the host community, one male and one female representing persons with disabilities, a youth leader and, in Borno a representative of girls also participated. The key information that was shared during these meetings answered the following questions: What are the key humanitarian needs in your community? What are your main sources of information? Which complaint mechanism do you mainly use? What methods of flood mitigation and response

measures are you aware of? Are you aware of Covid-19 symptoms and prevention measures?

In all three states, the humanitarian needs focused on food security, followed by health, WASH, livelihood and protection. In Yobe, for example, the dry season following the heavy floods has destroyed the crops, meaning that food security is a major concern for the year 2021. In terms of the response itself, overall, participants noted that they preferred receiving assistance in kind instead of in cash.

As the security situation in Borno State continues to remain unstable, LGA communities in that state placed protection as one of their priority needs. Similarly, the communities in Adamawa State feel that they need more information and updates on the security situation in their areas, whereas, in some communities in Yobe, people noted that they feel safer than they did last year. However, communities in Yobe state LGAs have reported problems of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and a rise in violations of minors within the IDP community. These differences in reporting show the importance of these state-level consultations and the need for the humanitarian community to form their response according to the realities on the ground.

Communities in all three states mainly refer to the community leaders (Bulama) to address their complaints as well as access information. Other sources of information used include radio and mobile phones. In Borno state, like in Adamawa State, people asked to have more access to information on the assistance that they can receive and on security.

When it comes to awareness, communities seem to be well informed on mitigation and response measures in the event of floods taking place and are also conscious of the symptoms of COVID-19 as well as the ways in which to prevent the spread. The main issue, however, is that people have little or no access to relevant Personal Protection Equipment (PPE).

Organizing state-level consultations and gathering all this data is crucial to the HPC process in the sense that it makes it as consultative as possible and gives the beneficiaries of the humanitarian response a voice and a way to shape the support actions that will be provided to them next year. This allows humanitarian partners to be fully aware of the specific needs of communities in every state. Moreover, given that over 80 per cent of the beneficiaries are women and girls, ensuring that their voices are included during these consultations is all the more important, especially in a context where SGBV is on the rise.

Humanitarian needs and priorities constantly change and vary between communities and LGAs. This year's success in gathering over 150 people virtually and physically represents a fundamental piece in the yearly HPC process and support the planning of a more timely and efficient humanitarian response for 2021.

Flying Doctors' Boost Nigeria's COVID-19 Testing



A sample collector in the sample collection booth tests a woman for COVID-19

Set up by Nigerian health investment firm Flying Doctors in eight of the country's worst-affected states, the mobile booths, which separate the sample collector from the people being tested, have boosted COVID-19 testing. Between 80 and 100 tests are carried out per booth every day, although the number varies among states.

Flying Doctors founder, Dr Ola Brown, explains that at the start of the pandemic, Nigeria had few people trained to take COVID-19 test samples, and collectors would also visit people at homes to take samples, heightening infections risks through exposure. "It [the sample collection booth] reduces to zero the number of infections on the people conducting the tests. Secondly, it also saves a lot of time compared [with] the people testing having to go to people's houses to do the tests and thirdly, it saves money because people [are] not having to change their PPE [personal protective equipment]" frequently, says Dr Brown.

For Dr Walter Kazadi, World Health Organization (WHO) representative in Nigeria, "expanding access to services such as sample collection and diagnostic testing are critical for an effective response." WHO continues to support Nigeria's Centre for Disease Control and the national response system by providing resources for training and supplies for sample collection and testing. The COVID-19 response across Africa has propelled a raft of innovations. Across the continent, innovators have worked to create tools to help public health experts manage challenges ranging from contact tracing and clinical care to local production of equipment and supplies as well as laboratory and testing materials.

Many of the innovations were already existing but have had to be redirected or adapted to COVID-19 response. For example, Zipline, a California-based firm, repurposed its high-speed drones that were in use in both Ghana and Rwanda to deliver medical packages to clinics and hospitals to now identify COVID-19 hotspots and collect samples. In anticipation of new treatments

and vaccines that may become available, the company is poised to help with distribution.

In Kenya, to support contact tracing in public transport, a mobile phone-based application, mSafari, was launched in March by its developers in collaboration with the ministries of Health and Transport.

Most of the innovations are homegrown. The mobile booths in Nigeria are made locally. In all there are 14 booths in Abuja, Kano, Kaduna, Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Rivers and Zamfara states. Flying Doctors also has transformed one vehicle into a mobile laboratory. In total, the organization has three laboratories. It has trained more than 100 molecular laboratory scientists to carry out COVID-19 testing.

Working with various foundations, the organization has made its testing free to encourage people to turn up. COVID-19 testing in Africa still lags other regions of the world. The World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa recommends 10 tests per 10 000 people per week in the region. Just 12 countries recently surpassed the threshold.

While Africa has recorded relatively fewer COVID-19 infections compared with other regions, the decline in cases seen between July and September has plateaued, with spikes in cases reported in some countries. Dr Brown stressed the criticality of testing and maintenance of vigilance on COVID-19.

"I think [that] one of the things that has really impacted the focus on testing is the fact that not many people have died in Africa compared [with] Europe or America. When people aren't dying and when people aren't getting horrifically sick and we're not seeing those numbers of course it [testing] gets deprioritized especially in a country that has limited resources," she says.

"It's important for everybody to remain vigilant ... and continue to really keep our guard up."

North-West Communities Prepare For Re-Opening Of Schools Shutdown By COVID-19



UNICEF is working with partners across Nigeria to not only ensure that children get back to school, but also to make the schools safe and protect pupils from contracting COVID-19. UNICEF Nigeria/2020

Aishatu Suleman and Zainab Aliyu are two female teachers in Kano metropolis, north-west Nigeria. Apart from being female teachers, they have many other things in common: both are mothers worried about the fate of their children in the wake of the long closure of schools due to the outbreak of COVID-19. While Aishatu has a child aged six in Tudun Murtala Primary School in Kano metropolis, Zainab has four children in Basic Education at an Islamiya Primary School in Nasarawa Area of Kano metropolis.

"The problem is that throughout this long shutdown of schools, my children have just been sleeping, eating and playing games," Zainab said.

Similarly, Aishatu said her children have been "just playing and disturbing. When exactly are the schools re-opening?" she asked.

To address the worries and questions of both Aishatu and Zainab about the fate of their children, UNICEF is working with partners across Nigeria to not only ensure that children get back to school, but also to make the schools safe and protect pupils from contracting COVID-19 at school.

"In collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education (FME), we have disseminated guidelines on safe re-opening of schools and also trained Community-based Management Committee (SBMCs) members," says Muntaka M. Muhammad, Education Specialist at the UNICEF Kano Field Office. The guidelines have been developed by the FME in consultation with the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19, and stakeholders.

In addition to SBMCs, all chairmen of Centre-based Management Committees (CBMCs) of 44 LGAs of the state have also been trained," adds Muntaka. "They are already working with other stakeholders at the community level to comply with the guidelines on the re-opening of schools."

At the training of the SBMCs and the CBMCs, the Executive Chairman of the Kano State Universal Basic Education Board, Dr. Danlami Hayyod said the support UNICEF is providing for the re-opening of the schools will help allay the fears of parents nursing doubts about sending their children back to school because of the worries of COVID-19. He expressed the commitment of the Kano State government to have children back to school.

The representative of the Kano State Quranic and Islamiyya Schools Management Board (QISMB), Malam Alhassan Ibnu, at the CBMCs' training, spoke in a similar vein.

The efforts of UNICEF and partners are already yielding positive impact at the community level, says Hauwa Muhammad, who is coordinator of Mothers' Association, a sub-committee of the SBMC at Ja'en Special Primary School, Gwale LGA, Kano State.

"We have bought 200 buckets, soaps, hands sanitizers, 2,300 face masks, first aid drugs and writing materials; and distributed among schools in Ja'en and its neighborhood," said Hauwa. "We've also been engaging mothers in our communities through house-to-house campaigns on the resumption of schools for mothers to send their children back to school," added Hauwa.

The Chairman of the SBMC at Gwale, Kabiru Ado, said in addition to what the school's mothers' association is doing, the SBMC is disinfecting the school compound by fumigating the place and cutting grasses that are already grown. "We're also making preparations by replacing some damaged roofs and lots more."

At the end of the training, there was palpable relief in the looks of both Aishatu and Zainab who were glad that government and partners like UNICEF were working to ensure safe re-opening of schools and pledged to play their roles as members of CBMCs to ensure that schools are safe for students, teachers and other stakeholders.

Muhammed, A Returnee Almajiri, Puts His Dream Back On Track



UNICEF is supporting State Governments to reunite thousands of Almajirai with their parents and has trained social workers in child protection and case management. UNICEF Nigeria/2020

Muhammed Abdulkadir, 14, is only now waking up from a two-year nightmare, one that started when his father decided to send him away from home for Qur'anic training under a Mallam (Islamic teacher) in Kano.

Muhammed, who had been in primary four in his Doka village in Kaduna State in northern Nigeria, had dreamed of finishing his education and then proceeding to the Nigerian Defense Academy, so that he could become an officer to serve his country.

But when he arrived in Kano, he found himself among hundreds of other children who had lost contact with their homes and families - also sent out for training as 'Almajiri'. When he woke up the next morning, he was handed a bowl and told he had to go out and beg for the food he would eat that day.

When Muhammed returned to the Almajiri school, the Mallam demanded the proceeds of his begging and Muhammed told him that he had eaten the little he had received. The Mallam punished him by making him kneel for hours and warned him not to do that again.

"Since that day, I made sure I brought food and money home for Mallam," said Muhammed. "There are days I felt I should tell my father what I was going through, but I didn't know where I could find him. I couldn't even find the road to my village."

Almajiri schools are appealing to many parents, as they claim to offer a free Qur'anic education. But once the children arrive at the schools, often in distant locations, they are typically forced by their Mallams to beg in the streets to fund their education.

Happily, Muhammad's nightmare ended when state officials removed the Mallam, part of a UNICEF-supported effort by various state governments to shut down Almajiri schools to stop the spread of COVID-19.

He remembered the day vehicles showed up to take the Mallam away, and then to take the children back to their parents.

"At first, I didn't want to go but they brought us back to Kaduna and after a few days they took me back to my village," he said. "I am so happy to be back home with my parents and my siblings. I have now been registered in school to continue my education and my dream of becoming a soldier is back on track," said Muhammed.

For Muhammed's mother, Bilkisu Yakuba, who had lost hope of ever seeing her son again, the reunion was joyful. She had objected to the idea of sending Muhammed away, but had been told by family and friends it was the right thing to do, as being an Almajiri was part of Nigerian culture.

"I have always hated the Almajiri system, because it turned free-born children into slaves. Anytime I remembered that my son is begging somewhere I felt very bad and prayed to Allah to bring him home safely," she said. "Now that he is back and planning to go to school, I am very hopeful that his dreams and my dreams for him will still come true."

UNICEF supported the Kaduna State government to reunite more than 35,000 Almajirai with their parents during the COVID-19 lockdown and has trained 35 social workers in child protection and case management who can interview and deliver psychosocial support to the returned Almajiri children and help with documenting their cases.

To help support children who have missed several years of formal education and are now too old for primary or secondary schools, Kaduna State officials have set up Business Apprentice Training Centers to help the returnees receive training to enter the workforce.

Adam Zakari, UNICEF Chief of Field Office in Kaduna, said that a deeper understanding of the Almajiri system must be the starting point of a wider analysis of the difficulties facing children in Nigeria.

"The issue of Almajiri is a challenge. We first need to understand the root causes. What are the factors leading parents to send their children to Mallams?" he said.

He points to economic factors, a lack of parental accountability, inadequate laws or improper implementation of laws, and weakness of social services as factors that need to be examined.

"Although people are trying to present the Almajiri issue and the challenges surrounding it as purely a religious issue, we know that things are not always as presented and there are many other factors at play."

Returnees And Peers Lead Face Mask Production In Nigeria's Migration Hotspot



Some returnees and local youths in Edo State producing face masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Nigerian streets and establishments are layered with instructions for preventing the spread of COVID-19, and the city of Benin, Edo State, is no exception. But as the pandemic has taken a toll on people's livelihoods, protective gear such as face masks is, for many, a luxury.

To complement the Nigerian government's response to the pandemic, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in collaboration with the Genius Hub Global Initiative, recently trained 60 returnees and local youth in Edo State in the production of face masks.

Following the two-week training, participants completed the production of 66,000 reusable face masks on 30 September.

"These masks are made according to the highest standards and will be distributed free of charge to communities in Edo State," said Aigbeze Uhimwen, IOM Nigeria Senior Programme Assistant. "The training also provides returnees and local youth with a source of income during these difficult times."

The participants will receive a commission for every face mask they produce in addition to a transportation allowance and reimbursement for distribution costs.

The items will be distributed in six local government areas (LGAs) in Edo State, the main place of origin of over 20,500 Nigerian irregular migrants assisted by IOM with voluntary return since early 2017. The masks are made from ankara, a type of cotton fabric whose vibrant and colorful patterns are seen on pants, dresses and headwear all over West Africa.

Each of the six targeted LGAs will receive 11,000 items which will be distributed in collaboration with local authorities in markets, churches, mosques, and other public spaces.

"When I returned to Nigeria in 2017, IOM assisted me to start a PVC ceiling business but when I heard of this training I jumped at the opportunity and this has made a difference in my life as I intend to diversify my business," said Marvellous Nwagwu, a Nigerian returnee whose irregular journey to Europe was halted in Libya.

COVID-19 has put a strain on the livelihoods of returnees and their communities in Nigeria. An assessment conducted by IOM in May revealed that 96 per cent of 105 Nigerian returnees consulted in Edo and Delta states were worse-off financially compared to before the start of the pandemic. In addition to lower income, beneficiaries' purchasing power has also taken a hit. Three-quarters of Nigerian respondents reported that food and basic items had become more expensive than previously.

Since the start of the pandemic, 3,255 returnees have received reintegration assistance from IOM with support from the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration and other voluntary return and reintegration projects funded the UK Home Office, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ).

Between April and July 2020, 550 returnees across various projects have received reintegration counseling including socio-economic assistance from IOM in Nigeria, where COVID-19 has claimed the lives of 1,112 people as of 1 October.

This activity is funded by the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), commissioned by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany under the Strengthening Assistance for Returnees and Potential Migrants and Promoting Safe Migration Practices Project in Communities of Origin. GIZ is supporting the voluntary return and reintegration of 631 Nigerian returnees back home.



Captions, from left to right in a clockwise direction

1. *Taraba State Governor, Arc. Darius Ishaku (4th from the left); and Resident / Humanitarian Coordinator of the UN in Nigeria, Mr Edward Kallon (4th from the right) at the Government House in Jalingo.*
2. *UN Resident / Humanitarian Coordinator of the UN in Nigeria, Mr Edward Kallon (right) signs the visitors' book at the Plateau State Government House while the State Governor, Rt. Hon. (Dr) Simon Bako Lalong looks on.*
3. *Chief Superintendent Catherine Ekwutosi Ugorji of the Nigerian police and serving with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has been selected by the United Nations as one of two runners-up for the prestigious UN Woman Police Officer of the Year award for 2020.*

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