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Perception and Awareness of Orphanages, Orphan Care and Orphans' Information System in Nigeria

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Abstract:
From time immemorial, cities, towns, individuals and church organizations have operated children's homes in our society for one reason or the other under the appellation, orphanages. Recently, the concept of orphanage and their mode of management in low income countries is seen as a frontier for income generation. In this light, a set of questions in the form of questionnaires was distributed to 150 respondents in eight categories covering all the concerned sectors of children care in Edo State of Nigeria. The questionnaire was designed to capture the three themes, Orphanages, Orphan-care and Orphan information management system in three mutually exclusive sections. Among the distributed questionnaires, 100 (75%) were completed and returned while 50 (25%) were not returned. The responses of the returned questionnaires were captured, presented, and analysis using descriptive statistics. The study reveals that, upon all the efforts by the government and some organizations in the face of this modernization, the conditions in these orphanages are still poor. Secondly popular opinion viewed orphanage care negatively within traditional orphanages. Finally there is need for the Government to introduce Orphans' Information management system in running the day to the day activities of the orphanages.

Keywords: *Orphanages, Community Association, Child Rights Law, Edo State, Child Abuse, Women Affairs and Social Development*

1. Introduction

Community associations (CAs) are seen as a kind of self-help organization that has the development of the people at heart (William, 200). Following William's definition, an orphanage can be seen as a community that has the welfare and development of the orphaned children at heart. The challenges of Orphanages as well as CAs have been to create awareness in citizens that will encourage them to take responsibility for their individual and collective destiny (Mbuagbo and Fru, 2003). According to Williams, CAs play an important role in building up a combination of material and mental reserves that enable one to choose one's own course of evolution, uninhibited by what others desire. As a CA, Orphanages are therefore very efficient in mobilizing the individuals to actively engage themselves in projects within the community through a mechanism of participatory democracy. In a participatory democracy, there is integration of leadership and the masses to move in a mutually interacting process that systematically reduces the consciousness gap between the leaders and the subject (Wikipedia, 2014a).

The orphan care in Ghana is still far from adequately caring for the children in need (Colburn, 2010). Colburn (2010) sees the orphan care system as yet to be fully developed in Ghana because of the reliance on traditional forms of caring for orphans.

Modern-day orphanages is a viable alternative care format to the foster care system with the emphasis that improving traditional orphanages to modern day orphanages should be encouraged to satisfy the child welfare goals of safety, permanency and well-being (Zimmermann, 2012).

As cited by Zimmermann (2012), unenthusiastic orphanage care has been shown to contain some theoretical and empirical truth with the reality that, each system has advantages and disadvantages (McKenzie, 1999). In a follow-up of his postulate, McKenzie was of the opinion that properly monitored and supported these problems of child abuses and inadequate care of orphans within the orphanages is a call of concern to this and future research. A situation where orphanages can provide a loving, safe, effective parenting, preventing delinquency and providing stable community home for children, thereby improving life chances, enhancing development, and providing children with a sense of identity and belonging is our ultimate goal. This ultimate goal of a sense of belonging of orphans has been achieved in the western countries and America where orphans and poorly developed abandoned children are a complete responsibility of the Government. For more information on orphanage management in the United States, see (Wikipedia, 2014b).

Unlike the western world, in the third World Countries, it is a glaring fact that government alone cannot provide virtually all that is needed for an effective community development (Williams, 2010). Following this fact, orphanages tend to make their own contributions to this effect by sheltering and feeding the orphans. The sheltering and feeding of the orphans are not the only things that are expected of orphanages, although this is important, but rather it is the creation of enabling environment that will lead to

overall developmental process of the orphans, for example, in the US. Moreover, it is not the duty of only the public and private orphanages to provide for the needs of the orphans. Also, it is not the responsibility of only the government and its functionaries to monitor the activities of the public and private orphanages.

Until date, it is doubtful the numbers of orphanages, which have fulfilled the operative criteria as stipulated by the government, exist in Nigeria. This study aims at exploring how all stakeholders will be involved in one way or the other, to investigate the role and activities of orphanages in orphan development, identify their contributions and constraints and proffer suggestions that would enable them carryout their expected roles in orphan development and in conjunction with the government.

2. Research Questions

- What specific activities do the orphanages undertake or consider towards orphan care?
- What opinions do people generally have about orphanages?
- What are some government interventions, acts and laws to some child-abuse scandals in the orphanages.
- Are there government monitoring teams and how regular do they supervise the activities of these orphanages?
- Has there being some remarkable improvement or benefits as a result of government interventions?
- Has government tried bringing in other alternative orphan care to substitute traditional orphanages as a result of government interventions and investigations?
- What are the suggestions on what should be done to orphanages engaged in sales of babies, child labour and other abuses?
- What are the suggestions on what should be done to orphanages engaged in defrauding people and the government?
- What are the public perceptions of having Internet based orphanage information system to help in monitoring the activities of orphanages?

2.1. Area of the Study

This study was carried out in Benin City, the capital of Edo State in the South South Region of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The study population was made up of the people selected by simple random sampling that include; staff of Edo state Ministry of Women Affair and Social Development, staff of Edo State Ministry of Information, staff of Edo state Ministry of Youths and Sports, staff of Edo state Central Hospital, owners of three private orphanages, Edo state orphanage, students of social works.

The study being quantitative and qualitative employed the use of an in-depth interview with Edo State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development about Edo State Government intervention on the welfare of orphan; a research on some other organization's intervention of orphan care; and a structured questionnaire to elicit data from respondents.

2.2. Edo State Government Intervention

In an interview with the Secretary of Edo State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, it was observed that Edo state government intervention on some child-abuse scandals in the orphanages are based on the Child Rights Law 2007 and on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC (1989); there are various government monitoring teams that monitor the orphanages; and the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, (MWASD) is a major factor in monitoring the orphanages. The monitoring team visit orphanages regularly and carry out investigations when they receive any report such as sale of babies. They investigate and penalize such homes ranging from closure of the orphanages or jail terms for offenders. The interview also revealed that the Edo state government is in the process of putting in place Transit Shelter as it is not encouraging institutionalization. Edo state government has already put in place the Children Correctional Home (Remard Home) at Welfare street, Ugbekun, Upper Sokpoba Road, Benin City, for children in conflict with the law. With these in place, government reports that there has been proper care of the children, improved facilities, and more adherence.

The National Guidelines and Standards of Practice on Orphans and Vulnerable Children represent an important milestone in the history of the national response on orphans and vulnerable children in Nigeria (FMWASD, 2007) as a demonstration of the commitment of the current administration in the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development to ensure that every Nigerian child has access to a better quality of life. Moreover, the transformation of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Unit of Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development to a Division, in September 2004 is a remarkable achievement in Nigeria's drive to lay a solid foundation based on the 'three ones' principle for quality service provision for children.

2.3. Other Organization's Interventions

Following the First World Summit for Children in 1990, the 'World Fit for Children', States were first encouraged to develop national plans of action for children. Moreover, the documentation of the 2002 UN General Assembly Special Session on Children called for states to commit to developing or strengthening specific, time-bound and measurable National Action Plans for Children by the end of 2003 to direct governments' focus towards children's health, education, protection, and the impact of HIV and AIDS. These are areas which are linked to the achievement of the child specific Millennium Development Goals. In addition, governments were called upon to mainstream the objectives of their country's NPA on children into other national legislation and policies. Again, Save the Children's Southern and East Africa Regional office, has been working in partnership with seven countries to implement activities contributing to the monitoring, implementation and review of National Plans of Action (NPAs) for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (Isabel, 2012)

2.4. Questionnaire (Instruments of Data Collection)

The questionnaire was divided into three main sections. Section A, dealt with the specific activities of orphanages towards orphan care. Section B dealt with People opinion about orphanages, while section C was focused on the public perceptions of having Internet based orphanage information system. One hundred and fifty (150) questionnaires were administered to respondents in eight categories; Edo State Ministry of Women Affair and Social Development, Edo State Ministry of Information, Edo State Ministry of Youths and Sports, Edo State Central Hospital, Edo State orphanage, owners of three private orphanages, students of social works and the few ordinary people. After all possible efforts made by the researcher, one hundred (100) that represents 75% were completed and returned. Fifty (50) questionnaires representing 25% were not returned. Therefore, the analysis is based on one hundred (100) completed questionnaires, which were at the disposal of the researcher. The analysis is divided into two sections. The substantive issues of the research and qualitative analysis from respondents written opinions.

2.5. Methods of Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaire was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Study (SPSS). The respondents' responses were analyzed using descriptive analysis that enabled the mean and standard deviation to be found. The clustered mean was found from the mean. Identified options were clearly defined and codes assigned to them. The criterion mean was determined from the codes. These were used to determine whether the respondents' responses about any question is accepted or rejected. The mean or clustered mean above the criterion mean indicates that the respondents' responses about a question is accepted, whereas the mean or the clustered mean below the criterion mean indicates that the respondents responses about a question is rejected. The questions that required written opinions from respondents were summarized to bring out the similarities that could used to bring out a unified knowledge to the study.

3. Result and Discussion

- Question No 1

What specific activities do the orphanages undertake or consider towards orphan care?

S/N	Questionnaire item	$\overline{X}$	SD	N	Remarks
1	Orphanages keep records of orphans	4.29	.535	100	Accept
2	Orphanages use manual method for keeping records	4.07	.994	100	Accept
3	Orphanages take (inadequate) care of orphans	3.86	1.087	100	Accept
4	Orphanages need and receive assistance	4.59	.603	100	Accept
5	Orphanages accept different categories of assistance.	4.11	.420	100	Accept
6	Orphanages accept assistance from different categories of people	4.29	.457	100	Accept
7	People assist based on their financial capabilities	4.06	.421	100	Accept
	Criterion mean	3.00			
	Cluster mean	4.18			

Table 1: Specific Activities of Orphanages towards Orphan Care

Key and code for determining criterion mean: Strongly agree = 5, Agree = 4, Disagree = 3, Strongly disagree = 2, No opinion = 1

Table 1 indicates that the specific activities of orphanages towards orphan care had an overall clustered mean score of ($\overline{X} = 4.18$) which is above the criterion mean ($\overline{X} = 3.00$). This means that the Orphanages undertake and consider these services towards orphan care. The table further indicates that, orphanages keep records of orphans, use manual method for keeping records, take inadequate care of orphans, need and receive assistance, accept different categories of assistance, accept assistance from different categories of people and that people assist based on their financial capabilities had high mean scores above the criterion mean ($\overline{X} = 4.29, 4.07,$ 3.86, 4.59, 4.11, 4.29, 4.06) respectively. This means that the orphanages undertake and consider these activities for the welfare of the orphans. However, the table revealed that there is inadequate care of orphans

- Question No 2

What opinions do people generally have about orphanages?

S/N	Questionnaire item	$\overline{X}$	SD	N	Remarks
8	Some people do not assist orphanages due to inadequate sensitization and awareness about orphanages	3.82	.803	100	Accept
9	Some people do not assist orphanages because they do not have the orphanages' contacts.	3.39	.897	100	Accept
10	Orphanages are seen via signboards, televisions, discussion, and asking.	4.05	.736	100	Accept
11	Some people claim to be orphans in other to cheat	3.43	1.064	100	Accept
12	Some orphanages defraud people	3.75	1.093	100	Accept

13	Some orphanages defraud government	3.74	1.058	100	Accept
14	Some orphanages engage in sales of babies	3.88	1.146	100	Accept
15	Some orphanages engage in child labour and abuse	3.70	1.060	100	Accept
	Criterion mean	3.00			
	Cluster mean	3.72			

Table 2: People opinion about orphanages

Table 1.2 indicates that the people's general opinion about orphanages had an overall clustered mean score ($\overline{X} = 3.72$) which is above the criterion mean ($\overline{X} = 3.00$). This means that the public accepted the above opinions about orphanages. The table further indicates that, some people do not assist orphanages due to inadequate sensitization and awareness about orphanages and that they do not have the orphanages' contacts, some people see orphanages via signboards, televisions, discussion and asking, and that some people claim to be orphans in order to cheat, had high mean scores above the criterion mean ($\overline{X} = 3.82, 3.39, 4.04, 3.43$) respectively. This means that the people accept these opinions about the orphanages. The table also indicates that some orphanages defraud people, some orphanages defraud government, some orphanages engage in selling of babies and that some orphanages engage in child labour and abuse had high mean scores above the criterion mean ($\overline{X} = 3.75, 3.74, 3.88, 3.70$) respectively. This also means that the people accept these opinions about the orphanages.

- Question No 3

What are the public perceptions of having Internet based orphanage information system?

S/N	Questionnaire item	$\overline{X}$	SD	N	Remarks
19	Internet-based information system will help to create means for people to get the contacts of the orphanages and reach out to these orphanages	4.29	.606	100	Accept
20	The internet-based information system will help to create and promote wider awareness about orphanages	4.50	.588	100	Accept
21	The information system will help to provide and maintain a database and statistics of all the Nigerian Orphanages	4.37	.562	100	Accept
22	The Information System will help to ensure proper, efficient and long lasting documentation of orphan's record	4.31	.695	100	Accept
23	The information system will help to reduce the effort and risk involved in traveling in order to obtain contact information	4.24	.682	100	Accept
24	The information system will help to provide quicker access to orphans records	4.33	.575	100	Accept
25	The information system will help to know the valid orphanages in Nigeria	4.41	.546	100	Accept
	Criterion mean	3.00			
	Cluster mean	4.35			

Table 3: People Perceptions of having Internet-base Orphanage Information System

Table 1.3 indicates that the public perceptions about having Internet based orphanage information system had an overall clustered mean score ($\overline{X} = 4.35$) which is above the criterion mean ($\overline{X} = 3.00$). This means that the public accepted the above opinions about orphanages. The table further indicates that, Internet-based information system will help people to get the contacts of the orphanages, to create and promote wider awareness about orphanages, to provide and maintain a database and statistics of all the Nigerian Orphanages, to ensure proper, efficient and long lasting documentation of orphan's record, to reduce the effort and risk involved in traveling in order to obtain contact information, to provide quicker access to orphans records and to know the valid orphanages in Nigeria had high mean scores above the criterion mean ($\overline{X} = 4.29, 4.50, 4.37, 4.31, 4.24, 4.33, 4.41$) respectively. This means that the people accept these opinions about the orphanages.

- Question No 4:

What are the public opinions on what should be done about those people who own orphanages in order to defraud people and the government?

The finding of the above question shows that government should setup monitoring team that should promulgate law that would punish such an offender. Moreover, the monitoring team should also oversee and ensure smooth running of the orphanages by ensuring that the orphans are well taken care of, educated, interviewing any applicant who wishes to owe an orphanage and organize regular meetings with the owners of the orphanages.

- Question No 5:

What are the public opinions on what should be done about those people who own orphanages in order to engage in selling of babies?

Majority of the respondents were of the view that, in addition to the questions number 16, the monitoring team should ensure that every orphanage and their babies are duly registered and approved by the government. The team should also maintain an information system that will keep records (including death reports) of orphans, thus provide updated statistics of the approved orphanages and orphans. Moreover, the team should *routinely* work with the information system in order to monitor the number of admitted orphans into the homes, how children are being given out for adoption, the number of adopted orphans, follow-up monitoring on adopting parents assigned to the orphans.

- Question No 6:

What are the public opinion on what should be done about those people who own orphanages in order to engage in child labour and abuse

In addition to the public opinions of questions No 4 and 5, the existing law on child labour and abuse should be enforced. The monitoring team should also monitor orphans up to adulthood and reveal any act of child labour and abuse.

4. Conclusion

The findings from the study makes it very clear that orphanages are facing a number of challenges; sales of babies by some orphanages, poor education of orphans, hunger, child labour and abuse, slow execution of projects. It was also clear that the government is facing a number of challenges; loose monitoring of the orphanages, loose follow-up monitoring on adopting parents, loose enforcement of law to the offending orphanages and poor leadership. The study is therefore in line with other study such as Orphanages of Accra: A Comparative Case Study on Orphan Care and Social Work Practices by Colburn (2010).

The study also revealed the need to have an information system that will maintain up-to-date statistics of the approved orphanages and orphans that would aid in monitoring the orphanages and the adopting parents assigned to the orphans. The findings also pointed out that existing law on child labour and abuse should be enforced. Addressing these challenges will tend to improve the role of orphanages and government toward orphan care in Edo State and Nigeria in general. The conclusion is that, orphanages and the governments are agents of development of the orphans and have not been performing their role very well.

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