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- We started the year 2020 with so much hope and energy, piling a lot on our to do lists and ticking them off with vigor and enthusiasm. Indeed, 2020 started off on a high note.

After the successes of last year, we started out with plans of consolidating on our work and pushing further and further. More advocacy, more partnerships and definitely more out of school children swept off the streets and back to the classroom.

At the heart of our work is also the systematic use of technology to ease our processes and maximise our impact. This was also something that we had pledged to improve. The utilization of educational technology in marginalized communities.

Then came the unexpected pandemic. Covid 19 was a wake up call in many ways, glaringly showing us the deficiencies in our systems both locally and globally.

For us at FlexiSAF Foundation, This recent pandemic is a challenge to come up with even better and more effective strategies to ensure that #LearningNeverStops no matter the circumstances.

FlexiSAF foundation is pledging to take our campaign for out of school children to new heights, using all the tools at our disposal to reach as many children as possible, and keep them healthy, happy and learning.

Here is a look at what we have been up to.





DR. Akin Fapohunda

Tell us a little about yourself.

I am Akin FAPOHUNDA: born 1953, attended Ilesa Grammar School (1965-1969), then University of Ibadan (B.Sc. 1972), University of Wisconsin at Madison (M.S. 1980); and finally obtained Ph.D in 1986 at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

I joined the Federal Civil Service in 1976 with various appointments at the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Raw Materials Research & Development Council (RMRDC) National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) and finally as Director, Space Science Office, the Presidency. I voluntarily retired in 2,000

I now own and run a Primary School (Aflon Digital Academy), Secondary School (Aflon Digital College) and Tertiary and Vocational Education School (Aflon Digital Institute) all operational on a six (6) hectares campus at Kuje, Abuja. From 2009 to 2018 I was a visiting Senior Lecturer in Multimedia Technology and Digital Image Processing at Bingham University, Karu, Abuja

We deliberately acquired 6 hectares of land at Kuje, with plans to establish a tertiary institution with Information Technology focus. We were on course for a while, to the point of being approved to operate a National Diploma Programme by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE).

We graduated just a set of 15 students (ND Multimedia Technology) and the problem became overwhelming to manage. All issues considered, the quest thus had to be shelved after just 2 years. The landscape of Nigeria is just too harsh for any such do-good venture.

What inspired Aflon Digital Schools?

Since 1994, and for years subsequently, I ran Aflon Digital Institute as an IT Publishing and Project Management Consultancy Business in the FCT and across Nigeria. The primary and secondary schools at Kuje are logical extensions of my interest and venture into computer education.

Do you think technology can solve Nigeria's educational challenge? How have you incorporated technology in your school?

Infusion of technology is of great importance. Last year, we solved the problem of electricity supply in our school compound.

In August 2019, we executed a Solar Technology Project generating 40 KVa of electricity. We no longer use diesel powered generator, except for just 60 minutes on Saturdays only, for the purpose of ironing of clothes by students in the hostel

We are now able to teach Computer Technology to all our students, without regard to electricity availability. We are now infusing technology-related subjects into our curriculum.

You Provided 12 scholarship Slots to FlexiSAF foundation. What was your motivation?

Even before the Flexisaf Foundation interaction, we already had 10 other students on full scholarship. So we now have 22 students on full cover. And as a matter of deliberate policy, we don't disrupt the learning of any SSC3 students on the account of being indebted. Very many settle their outstandings many months after being already in tertiary institutions.

Of course, quite a few have abused this policy. We have a very bad case of an ex-student debtor already in the final year at Babcock University, despite owing over two hundred thousand still. We are not discouraged anyway.

As a private school owner, how do you balance social giving as a school owner with making profits as a businessman?

The perspective is out among Aflon parents and the Kuje community that we are run like a charity. Our school was built gradually without recourse to bank loans. I infused my earnings from consultancies into building the school compound. Aflon wishes to be known as a Private, but Public School. Eventually, it will be transformed into a company limited by guarantee.

Do you have anything to say to other school owners in your position with regards to philanthropy?

Not many schools can afford to act on philanthropy. Many proprietors are still trying to solve their problems of settling personal bills: their house rent and domestic upkeep. Many proprietors are still grappling with paying school fees for their own biological children.

And then, most schools are still on temporary sites with costly rents to settle, along with epic battles with FCT Development Controls over property conversion. The magnitude of pressure by tax extortion agencies is beyond comprehension by everyone. The operating environment is very harsh indeed, hence survival is the focus of most proprietors.

I have just been favoured to have overcome most personal issues. It is a matter of God's favour that I must acknowledge by giving back just a little.

Our term in pictures



We enrolled 9 beneficiaries back to school in Yola through the FlexiSAF Foundation Scholarship Program.



Adamawa INTERNATIONAL BRIGHT ACADEMY OF NIGERIA



Dougirei Model Academy



Hayatu Iyawa College



Delegates from Street Child paid a visit to our AccLearn Center in Wuye.



FlexiSAF Foundation Retreat



FlexiSAF Foundation donated staff tables to LEA Gwarimpa



FlexiSAF Foundation were delegates at the CSACEFA National Conference



FlexiSAF Foundation sensitization campaign





Written by OLUBUNMI AYANTUNJI

COVID-19: RE EVALUATING THE STATUS OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NIGERIA

“The ambiguity shrouding this whole crisis makes it all the more difficult for the mind to adjust to, runners can only pace themselves if they know how far the finish line is and yet in this race our finish line is just a prediction, an educated guess.”

— Aysha Taryam

The quote above states clearly the reality of the times we currently live in and the hopeless fact that the ruins will be felt in all spheres of human endeavour even as the world battles frantically to conquer the pandemic.

Nigeria, recorded its first case of the Corona Virus also known as COVID-19 on 27 February 2020 and since then, the attention of government and the citizenry moved to stemming the tide of this ravaging pandemic. As at the time of writing this piece Nigeria has recorded 627 cases of Coronavirus with 159 persons discharged and 17 deaths recorded.

Addressing the Out of School Children Menace Pre-COVID 19

Months before the Nation recorded its Index COVID-19 case, the Out-Of School children menace gained some level of prominence in National discourse. Political actors, stakeholders and the development sector experienced some 'sudden' verve and energy in curtailing these consistently embarrassing trends.

On Thursday 12th of March 2020, the House of Representatives held a special plenary session to address the growing issue of out-of school- children in the country and the need to address the problem(s). The speaker of the House of Representative retorted in his opening speech for the special session that "If we do nothing else today, let us take advantage of this special session to tell ourselves the reality, so that we may liberate ourselves from the shackles of limited thoughts, and through our collective efforts, achieve the vision of nation where no child is left behind, where no child is forgotten....and have the opportunity to fulfil the highest achievements of which they are inherently capable of."

The House resolved thereafter to give members a week to go to their respective constituencies to sensitize their constituents on the need for them to send their wards to school and the efforts of government in that regard. The green chambers also mandated its committee on Basic Education to conduct an in-depth investigation that involves all stakeholders in the sector with the view to addressing this menace and backing up the same, with relevant legislations.

The committee was to report back within eight (8) weeks. A move that has been halted by this current 'force majeure'. Happening almost simultaneously,, The Kano State Governor on Tuesday February 25th 2020 announced a ban on street begging by children popularly referred to as Almajiris. The effort according to the state government was to fully consolidate the free and compulsory primary and secondary schools education in the state. Kano state holds one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children in Nigeria and the decision of the government, though belated, is a win for the decade of action vis-a-vis the fourth goal of the SDGs. However, the implementation of this laudable policy was still on when all attention moved to the ravaging pandemic, it is only hoped that the successes recorded so far in this regard will not be backtracked by the neglect the implementation currently faces, as a result of the current challenge. In the same vein, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), recently launched a comprehensive curriculum for Accelerated learning.

The Accelerated Education Program curriculum is expected to provide an alternative for children who cannot enroll in formal school to be able to acquire competencies equivalent to those that attend formal basic education in Nigeria and be able to transition to either next levels within the formal education system or enroll into vocation training programs. Though the reach, and the effectiveness of this curriculum has not been verified, it is conspicuous that the current realities will effect a drawback in the timely implementation of this very robust curriculum.

Addressing the Out of School Children Menace Post-COVID 19

According to experts, 'the aggregate economic impact of COVID-19 is likely to be very large, with various data now suggesting that the global economic impact will be comparable to the 2008–2009 Great Recession, in which GDP contracted by more than two percent worldwide and in the Middle East countries by more than 11 percent'.

The Economic impact of the pandemic on Nigeria as the most populous black nation in the world with the highest rate of out-of-school children in the continent can not be overemphasized. Amongst other things, the government has hinted that there might be some significant changes to its 2020 Budget.

The question therefore arises as to how governments at all levels plan to see most of their educational plans and policies come to fruition. There are genuine fears in some quarters that the gains that have been achieved in the sectors before the advent of the pandemic will be hard to sustain in the country and this will be a huge clog in the move to achieve the SDG goal 4 which hopes to achieve quality education for all by the year 2030. Not forgetting the impacts this economic privation will have on International funding organizations, as recently it was reported that the major country that funds the World Health Organization ceased funding as a result of issues relating to how the pandemic was handled. The effect this will have on the global fight against the pandemic is still a subject of debate amongst experts and nation states.

Recommendation:

It is expected quite naturally that, as the world focuses on getting a vaccine and battling the pandemic, every hand is on deck to restore our clime to how it used to be and our country is void of the Coronavirus. The Education sector should not be completely abandoned as it is just as important. Without needing a microscope, it is quite evident that Nigeria still has a long path to tread in the decade of action, and while we set to restore our health sector with all vigour, it will be commendable to channel some of this energy into the education sector. Countries like Estonia are filling the lacuna in this regard using technology and the digitalization of its educational curriculum. Nigeria can look inwards to devise ingenious means using existing structures, programs/policies of government to sustain the gains made before the pandemic and at the end of all these, the educational sector will be better for it.



Written by Luqman Adamu

When I first came across this man, I was a little unsure of what to expect. I was at a new job and eager to get to know all there was to know about FlexiSAF Foundation and the people they catered to. Malam Jibril resides in Luggere, a bustling community in Yola North Local Government, Adamawa State.

Jibril had encountered some tragedy which was in his own words unbearable.

The reason I met with him was because his child had been identified by a community leader as being out of school, with no funds to return in the near future. This was not a rare case, and I was not expecting to be intrigued when I set out to interview and verify the family's eligibility for our back to school scholarship program.

I scheduled a meeting with Mallam Jibril on a Sunday afternoon to verify his story and certify its credibility. At this point, it was simply routine. Something I was sure to be done with in ten minutes or less.

On arrival, I met with malam Jibril, I studied him as we exchanged pleasantries, he was a dark, rotund man of average height. He looked to be in his early to mid forties, though stress had gouged lines on his pleasant face.

As I dived into an interview with him, he started by telling me how he had lost his father three years back. "That was the greatest tragedy that has ever befallen me.," he said. "I have many siblings; some are in secondary schools, while others are in tertiary institutions".

He looked tense as he was narrating the story, recounting the ordeal in a quiet and very controlled manner, almost as if he was scared of letting too much emotion out.

At first, I wasn't sure if he would open up and share his story, but surprisingly, he did. Maybe it was the fact that he knew aid was coming to his child, or maybe he just needed an outlet. Whatever the case, he started pouring out his unfortunate experience.

"Shortly after my father's death, responsibilities began to pile up for me.

As I told you before, I have a lot of younger siblings. There was no way I would let them down in the absence of our father."

He flashed me a small smile, and in it, I saw a steely determination. "The economic situation of the country had started to affect my business at some point. I used to be a car dealer. I would buy cars from Cotonou, drive them down to Yola and sell them. Back when things were smooth, I would usually have 2-3 cars parked at the car stand waiting for sales. It reached a point where I only had one car at the stand." He paused at this point to take a breath.

"I figured it would be best if I gave the car to a driver who would in turn give me a weekly balance. As viable that sounded, it turned out to be a failed attempt for reasons I still don't understand."

At this point, I was completely absorbed in his story, listening eagerly as he continued.

"A friend of mine introduced me to a company that owned a fleet of trucks. I was interviewed for a driving position; luckily, I was hired for the job. I started working for the company, and all was going well, until just a few months into doing so, I was forced to make the settlement for a damage that wasn't really caused by me, after which, I lost my job. At that time, I had to sell all my possessions." He looked at me, and I had no choice but to relate to the anguished look in his eyes.

"My situation was deteriorating, and I felt it was time to take drastic measures. I had no choice but to withdraw my two boys from school because I couldn't pay their school fees for an entire session. This was a tough choice for me because I couldn't watch my siblings dropout of high institutions when I had already sacrificed a lot for them to be where they are now".

This struck me really hard, I tried imagining myself doing the same and at that moment I realized that it is true that desperate times call for desperate actions. For a man to have to choose between putting his own children through school, or watching his siblings drop-out was indeed a tough choice, and it seemed that he chose what seemed honorable to him.

"When my wife received a call from the headmaster of his school, she thought it was about the school fees we owe the school, because even after withdrawing them from the school, we still have to pay for the three terms we were being owed eventually. She said to me the headmaster wanted her to come to the school, that somehow our son might get a full scholarship. Unbelievable!" This time, all I could see in malam Ibrahim's eyes were joy and gratitude."We are very grateful that FlexiSAF Foundation contacted us; words alone cannot describe how I feel. We have gone through a lot and this now would ease the tension we are currently having". I told him not to raise his hopes high, this is subject to approval, but deep down I knew that they were eligible for this intervention.

As I made my way out of the community, My thoughts were centered on how these kids would grow up, sitting idle doing nothing at home while their friends were chasing their futures.


My second concern was the community itself, because I was fully aware of the dangers within for an innocent child.. Luggere is an area which is characterized with all sorts of social vices. It is mainly viewed as the center of prostitution where lots of brothels are sited, bars located at almost every corner. Luggere is the type of community where you can expect anything danger related coming your way as you walk through the shanty area; ranging from drug users staggering along the uncoordinated buildings, to criminals always scouting for their next victim. It is not a convenient place to have a child roam unchaperoned, even worse, a child not attending any school.

Presently, Jibril's younger son has now been readmitted back at Hayatu Iyawa College where he was in primary 1 before he dropped out.. Thanks to FlexiSAF Foundation for this timely intervention.


Finally, what is the fate of Malam Jibril's other child who was in primary three before he dropped out. Who will come to his aid? It has become clear to me that a lot of work needs to be done to reduce the number of out of school children. FlexiSAF Foundation is doing its own part with limited available resources, but more needs to be done.




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