



## **ENVIRONMENTAL, SAFETY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF PANHANDLING IN LAGOS STATE METROPOLITAN AREA OF NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

*Panhandling is increasing becoming a menace within cities across the globe especially in developing and underdeveloped countries of the world. Literature has shown that street begging and beggars contribute to increased social vices and criminal activities in the society and likewise constitute environmental and health challenges. Most of the crimes and robberies carried out in the traffic are linked to street beggars who disposes commuters of their valuables. The economic hardship in the country has led to people swarming the cities across Nigeria in an effort to make a living through road suppliant. The identified elements to blame for the menaces of panhandling are natural and man-made causes like war, insurgency, flood, earthquake, drought, poverty and unemployment. Most of the religious and political riots in some parts of Northern Nigeria were linked to Almajiri and street beggars who are willing tools in the hands of religious and political leaders. The increasing numbers of migrant beggars from neighbouring African countries into Nigeria pose a great security threat to the country. It is vital that government at all levels step up strategies to restrain the influx of panhandlers and road suppliants in the country.*

**Keywords:** Street Begging, Safety, Socioeconomic, Panhandlers, Poverty, Lagos, Almajiri.

### **Introduction**

Street begging is not location specific or carried out by a specific colour or race. It is a global phenomenon. Globally, there is an increase in the number of panhandlers which is growing at the rate of 2.5% annually. Street begging and panhandlers are more endemic in developing and underdeveloped countries of the world ravaged by poverty, unemployment and inequality. In Nigerian urban centers street begging is alarmingly on the increase and is visible in all the commercial centers and cities in Nigeria. Street begging menace or panhandling is as old as mankind and has increasingly become a global issue, though most rampant in the third world countries (Broun, 2010, Namwata, Mgabo and Dimoso, 2012 and Jelili, 2013). The incidence of panhandlers in our cities has shown there are societal problems which can trigger people to stay away from locations and places with high number of road suppliants (Clapper, 2012). Beggars and begging have existed since the creation of human race and society. Panhandling is taking place in major cities and commercial centers around the world with variation in forms and occurrences.



According to a report, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia arrested a total of 2,710 beggars and 2,140 of these beggars representing 79% were women while 21% were men. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has prohibited any type of panhandling and placed a penalty of SR100,000 and a maximum jail term of one year for offenders. The anti-panhandling rules approved by the council stated that punishments and penalties will be meted out on anyone or group of persons engaged in panhandling, organizing panhandlers and serving an organized panhandlers teams. Individuals engaging, aiding and abetting panhandling in the Kingdom will be punished with a prison sentence or payment of fine of SR51,000. This drastic measure was taken by the Saudi Arabia government to discourage corporate or independent street beggars in the Kingdom. In Africa and Sub-Sahara Africa, panhandling and street beggars are littered everywhere on the streets begging for alms from commuters. This is becoming worrisome and getting normalized as a way of life or means of livelihood.

In several states of Northern Nigeria, alms seeking has been made “official” and supporters are justifying the performance that road suppliant can be traced to the era when Muslim prophets migrated from Mecca to Medina (Khalid, 1995). This view about street begging has explained the method where Islamic teachers (*Mallams*) move with a team of kids from remote areas into cities for the quest of Islamic awareness. According to Ammani (2010), these children that travel with the Islamic scholars in search of Islamic knowledge are left to feed and fend for themselves. These kids take care of themselves through the money gotten by engaging in street begging. According to Cooke (2001), alms seeking and panhandling can be attributed to high rate of low income earners and servitude in the society. Alms seeking and begging is endemic in many urban areas and cities in Northern Nigeria. This region is also has the highest rate of extreme poverty in Nigeria. Statistics shows the rates as follows, Jigawa 87.2%, Sokoto 87.73%, Taraba 87.2%, Zamfara 73.98%, Yobe 72.34% and Adamawa 75.41% (NBS 2021).

Panhandling is defined as unintended situation that an individual or group of persons find themselves which are linked to societal issues like low income, illiteracy, disadvantaged and none access to shelter (Phelan et al 1997 and Osike, 1999). According to Khalid (1995), road suppliant as an employment, is seen as eternal way of livelihood which is carried out by many persons, men, women, children and the handicapped and it has become a menace particularly in Northern States of Nigeria. Osagbemi (2001) and Jelili (2006), stated that panhandlers are exceedingly noticeable in busy locations and places with high rate of human traffic and school environments.

An enumeration on street beggars conducted in 2007 showed that Kano State has 1,590, 000 million beggars, Sokoto state 1,200,000 million; Kaduna has 1.1 million and Borno, State 839,925. In 2020 Nigeria had the highest number of children who are out of school



in Sub-Sahara Africa which is projected at 20,000,000. According to NBS (2021), report showed the number of children who are not enrolled in schools across different states of the federation in the following order Kano State 988,233, Akwa-Ibom State 582,801, Katsina State 537,124 and Kaduna State 54,671. Furthermore, other states on the list are Taraba State 498,923, Sokoto State 437,571, Yobe State 428,231, Zamfara State 424,213 and Bauchi State 355,374. It is also noted that the following states have the least number of children not enrolled in schools Cross River State 98,919, Abia State 92,548, Kwara State 85,247, Enugu State 83,051, Bayelsa State 54,079, FCT 53,972 and Ekiti State 51,945.

The use of under aged kids and new born babies by female street beggars in different commercial cities in Nigeria is becoming worrisome as this constitutes child abuse. Only few states in Nigeria have enacted and signed the child rights acts which protect the rights of minors against all forms of abuse and exploitation.

According to Johnson (2008), aggressive street begging has been exclusively banned by rule in different jurisdictions in North America (USA and Canada), which is characteristically said to be an unrelenting or threatening begging. According to Okolie (2016), an assessment conducted eight years ago showed the number of panhandlers is estimated to be about 10,225,028 million. States in the Northern region of Nigeria have 10.2 million beggars, while the Southern region, states have 25,028 beggars.

The three major ethnic nationalities in Nigeria call panhandlers' different names which are; in Igbo "*Ndi Aririo* or *Onye Aririo*", Yoruba "*Onibara*" and Hausa "*Mabarata*". According to Okolie (2021), panhandlers are categorized in the followings; apostolic beggars, automated teller machine spot beggars, internet, social media beggars, active beggars, persuasive beggars and hostile beggars. Panhandling is also classified into two which are professional and corporate beggars. A study conducted in Enugu State Nigeria showed that 5.2% of the street beggars make above N1000 daily. Most of the street beggars earn more money monthly than those with white collar jobs (Okolie, 2021). Furthermore, in Lagos State Nigeria most of the street beggars make an average of N200,000 per month depending on the location and strategies employed. Those who beg with terminal ill patients make an average of N500,000 per month. This has shown that street begging is becoming a lucrative venture. These categories of panhandlers have different modes of operation which they employ to defraud members of the society.

Street begging has been controlled or banned at different periods and for reasons which are mostly to restore public order and to encourage people to pick up jobs rather than resorting to panhandling. In recent time some developing countries like Philippines have banned



street begging. Recently the Taliban run government in Afghanistan has banned beggars from seeking alms on the streets. The government directed that all beggars should be taken off the streets of Kabul and given something meaningful to do for livelihood and those too old to work will be paid monthly stipend. According to Demewozu (2005), the increasing menace of panhandling is said to be a manifest of numerous demographic proportions. Demographic factors such as tribe, background, gender, marital status, belief system, literacy level and socioeconomic status are contributing variables in the composition and patterning of street beggars.

### **Lagos State Nigeria and Street Beggars**

Street begging has become a nuisance and alms seekers are taking over the walk ways, streets and open places in the city of Lagos State Nigeria. The menace and unchallenged dominance of street beggars in every part of Lagos has become an internal safety and ecological threat which requires immediate action by the government. These street beggars constitute and pose a grave nuisance to the state. Street begging has become a lucrative business organized by syndicates who collect daily returns from the beggars. Most of these street beggars do not have accommodation thereby sleeping under the flyovers, pedestrian bridges, commercial bus garages, under construction houses and other places not good for humans to live. According to Punch Newspaper (2022), street begging colonies are springing up in all parts of Lagos uncontrollably. These street beggars congregate on the streets, thereby obstructing free movement of vehicles and pedestrians. Lagos state has domesticated the Child Rights Act, yet these street beggars have refused to send their children to school or stop using children as beggars.

It is estimated that over 124,000 persons migrate to Lagos state every day because of its economic viability as the commercial hub of Nigeria. Most of the people that move into Lagos for livelihood do not have a proper plan thereby end up engaging in street begging for survival. The vulnerable fall victims to the syndicates who organize them into colonies, then deploy them across different begging clusters in Lagos. It has become a lucrative and money spinning venture which are run by individuals under the disguise of charity by using terminal ill persons to beg for alms from members of the society. The female street beggars have resorted to hiring new born twin babies and triplets to beg for alms along pedestrian crossing, flyovers, commercial bus garages, business premises and worship centres. These female street beggars use unfortunate babies as a ploy to attract public empathy and alms for themselves. Such act is regarded as child abuse according to the adolescent privileges law. Some states in Nigeria are yet to enact and sign the law protecting children from abuse and exploitation. In 2021 the Lagos State government rescued 728 street beggars and destitute made up of 347 adult males and 241 adult females. They also rescued 64 boys and 76 girls.



Under the leadership of Babatunde Fashola, there was an energetic and sustained programme of combating the menace of street begging in Lagos State. In 2007-2015 the Lagos State government initiated and implemented a plan of arresting the road suppliants and transporting them back to their different places of origin. The infamous colonies of street beggars were dismantled by Lagos State government task force. The public spaces like pedestrian crossing, bridges, business areas and religious centres in Lagos State were liberated from menace of beggars. The task force raided beggar's colonies to arrest and prosecute those using children as street beggars and also those involved in child trafficking. The city of Lagos was not completely free from the prevalence of beggars before the then governor completed his tenure; but the plan was ongoing, which needed to be sustained by the incoming administration to put an end to the nuisance that had debased the state for decades. Due to lack of political will the plan was not sustained by the next administration. The stringent enforcement of wandering, ecological and anti-street begging rules has kept unrestricted places in Singapore liberated of beggars (Punch Newspaper 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2022).

According to Tayo (2021), a street beggar in possession of forged Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH) treatment document said he was making about N310, 000 every four weeks from innocent Lagos commuters from panhandling. This has shown that street beggars earn better income monthly than the public servants in Nigeria. Tayo (2021), noted that panhandling has been acknowledged as a method used to defraud unsuspecting commuters and members of the public of their hard earned money and also as a source of internal security in the state. People in the low density areas of Lagos State prefer to call in the security agencies than succumb to the tricks of street beggars by giving them alms, while inhabitants of highly populated areas and environs in the city are friendly to street beggars. Some persons put on customized T-shirts seeking for alms in major bus terminus, traffic lights intersections and other busy unrestricted areas, for medical treatment of these terminally ill persons suffering from different health issues by showcasing the patient's pictures and most times are accompanied by these patients. Most of the street beggars are criminals who hide under the pretext of begging to rob and dispose commuters of their money and valuables on the road or in their residences. According to Tayo (2021), a street beggar who was given money in a residential area of Lagos State mobilized his gang of criminal elements to rob and attack his helper at night. It is on record that most of the street beggars aid and abet diverse forms of crimes and criminality in Lagos State Nigeria.

The Lagos State child privilege act of 2007 is made up of sections that safeguard children from being used for child labour or putting them in an unfavourable conditions. The part 26 (a) states, "No individual shall engage in the purchase, sale, source or hire or carry out transaction in a child with the purpose of exploiting in the name of employment for street trading, begging or child prostitution likewise any other illegal purposes" (**Punch**



**Newspaper 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2022).** The Lagos State government should as a matter of urgency apply these laws strictly. The harsh economic realities and high rate of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria have led more vulnerable people to street begging, but such practice cannot be allowed to become a norm. Based on census conducted on street beggars in Lagos State, 80% of the street beggars are from Northern States of Nigeria. The returning of these street beggars back to their homes was criticized by the governors of Northern State in Nigeria. Panhandling has become a big challenge for the government of Lagos government Nigeria and other cities occasioned by poverty, homelessness and forced migration. It is important for Lagos State government to take stronger measures to tackle the menace of panhandling. A research conducted by the Institute of Development Studies, University of Peshawar India, stated that road suppliants are becoming safety and socio economic problems to the society. This is because these panhandlers are docile and dependent on those who are employed for survival and it has become a lifetime engagement. They milk the working class the money they could have used for investments.

The Lagos State Government should act fast by taking stringent actions to address this abnormality and menace. It is vital for the state government to revive its employment creation program, set up psychosocial support centres and reinvigorates the agenda of getting public spaces cleared off street beggars and arresting and prosecuting offenders and syndicates of child traffickers and street beggars. Lagos State government in its quest to deal with the nuisance of road suppliants put in place a rescue unit with a mandate to rescuing and protecting the destitute and vulnerable on the streets of Lagos. Those rescued vulnerable and street beggars are taken for rehabilitation in the psychosocial support centers established by the government. They are provided with treatment, psychosocial therapy, counseling and skills acquisition training among other things to make them useful to the society (Tayo, 2021).

### **Security and Social Consequences of Street Begging**

Street begging is fast becoming contagious in the major commercial cities and public places in Nigeria which has socio-economic, and environmental implications (Fawole, Ogunkan and Omoruan, 2011). Street beggars employ different strategies of sympathy in seeking for money and food from commuters in open and busy areas. Most of them are hostile and irritant when begging for alms. There are social vices associated with street beggars such as, hostile behaviour, atrocious and illegal activities, prostitution, ritual, kidnapping and drug peddling (Ojedokun, 2015). The increasing rate of crimes and criminal activities carried out in different parts of Lagos State Nigeria especially in traffics, residential and other public places by street beggars has made the security agencies to beam surveillance on them.





Over the years there has been an influx of foreigners from neighbouring African countries into Nigeria who end up in different commercial cities as street beggars and has been used as tools for different ethno religious and political violence that took place in some parts of Nigeria (Salawu, 2010). Because of the extremist inclination of some of these migrants from the Sahelian neighbouring African countries into Nigeria, they are easily recruited by ISWAP and Boko Haram terrorist groups to carry out suicide bombing and other terrorist acts against Nigeria. These migrant street beggars turned terrorist tools constitute security threat to Nigeria and are committing other criminal activities across the country (Okoli, 2013 and Adepegba, 2012). Most of the criminal acts carried out in the major cities across Nigeria like Enugu, Katsina, Ontisha, Kano, Sokoto, Kaduna, Lagos, Port Harcourt, Aba and Calabar has been traced to street beggars (Adewuyi, 2007).

Street beggars has been traced to be among the major transmitters of sexually transmitted infection (STI's) and HIV/AIDS in major cities of Nigeria because of their engagement in unprotected sex among themselves and members of the society who lure them for money in exchange for sex (FGN/UNICEF, 2010). Female street beggars in the city of Jos, Nigeria are victims of sexual assault and mistreatment which has led to wide spread of HIV/AIDS, unsafe abortions and unwanted pregnancies (Osagbemi, 2001). The prevalence of beggars in Nigeria has been linked to drug addiction, prostitution by female street beggars and criminal activities among other heinous crimes (Tambawal, 2010). Many of the street beggars are at risk of being killed for rituals, kidnapped or forced into prostitution by syndicates. According to Ojo (2005), street beggars tend to develop low self-esteem and inferiority complex which has led them to have poor social interaction with members of the society.

Inter-ethnic and religious extremism has been linked to the activities of child beggars (*Almajiri*) and their involvement in hooliganism across Northern States of Nigeria. These *Almajiri* children are large in numbers which has made them veritable tools for religious violence and terrorism because they are religiously brainwashed. These religiously brainwashed *Almajiri* children with extremist and terrorism inclination have become a security threat to Nigeria because many of them who are of age got recruited by terrorist groups operating in Nigeria. The street beggars turned touts and *Agbero's* in the streets of Lagos State Nigeria have become hooligans, assassins and political thugs who are used to carry out political unrest, electoral and election disruption, rigging and political intimidation in the state.

The numerous riots and unrest in Northern states of Nigeria has been traced to street beggars and *Almajiri's* who happen to be the foot soldiers of religious and political elements in their society. The crusade riot of Reinhard Bonnke 15<sup>th</sup> October 1991 and Maitatsine crisis of 1980, 1981 and April 1985 were all carried out by panhandlers and



*Almajiri's* in Kano, Kaduna and Bulumkutu in Maiduguri Metropolis of Borno State on the command of their religious leaders (Olaniyi, 2009). *Almajiri's* (child beggars) are known to be involved in numerous thefts, raiding of homes and business enterprises and setting ablaze properties in different states of Northern Nigeria (Fatai, Rasheed, Abdulrahman and Kunnu, 2020).

Furthermore, street beggars across cities in Nigeria adopt several deceitful methods and strategies to beg for alms with posters, envelopes and pictures of sick patients from members of the public. In Igbo land South East Nigeria, street begging is seen as a taboo in their culture which is alien to them. In Lagos State Nigeria the colonies and shanties inhabited by these street beggars harbour criminal elements and criminal cells which pose a security threat to the city. Most of the dislodged members of Boko Haram terrorist group in Borno State have escaped to Lagos State disguising themselves as street beggars to evade arrest and at the same time serving as spies and informants for terrorist cells.

### **Social and Economic Conditions of Street Begging**

The unfavourable economic realities in Nigeria have led to the prevalence of road suppliants and alms seeking for survival. This harsh economic reality has widened the economic disproportion between the upper class and lower class which has caused disappearing of the middle class. According to Fatai, Rasheed, Abdulrahman and Kunnu (2020), there are factors responsible for servitude which are corruption, weak institutions, poor policy framework and lack of political will to deliver good governance to the people. Fatai (2017), pointed out that the poor economic model and political ideology of Nigeria which has made only the rich to have access to the nation's wealth which has contributed to the wide inequality contour lines between the two classes in Nigerian society, thereby making the rich to become wealthier and the poor to become more vulnerable due lack of wealth distribution. This type of economic model and political ideology has given rise to economic exploitation of the poor masses and increase in poverty.

There are other factors which most times are responsible for street begging such as drought, famine, flood, earthquake, war, insurgency and other natural and manmade disasters. Due to the displacement of people from their habitual place of resident and destruction of their means of livelihood the victims resort to street begging for survival (Ogunkan and Fawole, 2009). Jelili (2006), stated that poverty and physical disability are the main factors driving street begging in cities across Nigeria. The displacement of people in North East and North West rural communities of Nigeria by the activities of terrorist groups has led to the influx of people into the cities thereby resorting to begging and prostitution as a means of livelihood which constitute social, spatial and environmental issues to the society.





The continued increase of unemployment and economic disproportion in Nigeria has led people to fall into abject poverty with an estimated 75% of Nigerians living below \$1 per day with an inflation rate 19.64% 2022. The endemic nature of poverty in Nigeria affects rural Northern Nigeria communities the more compared to other zones. An estimated 85.7% of people living below \$1.92 reside in the interior hard to reach rural communities and 75.4% are believed to live in the Northern region of Nigeria. In 2021 over 10 million Nigerians were pushed into poverty due to government economic policies, loss of jobs and hyperinflation. The rural urban migration has also contributed to the high number of street beggars in cities across Nigeria because of the quest for greener pasture they end up engaging in street begging as a means for survival in the cities. According to Okolie (2021), majority of the street beggars are illiterates with 83.8% not having formal education, while 1.6% had tertiary education and 8.1%, 6.5% had primary and secondary education.

### **Environmental Implications of Street Begging**

All over the world panhandlers constitute ecological nuisance by littering of the walk ways, streets and open spaces. Most of the street beggars stay permanently in the streets while some go back to slums where they reside. Study has shown that street beggars are aware that their acts contribute to the littering of public places and streets around the city where they cluster to beg. They do not see it as their responsibility in keeping the begging clusters clean at all times. Street beggars believe it is the duty of government and waste management companies to clean the city. According to Nurudeen, Lawal and Ajayi (2014), street beggars in Nigeria do not want to take care of the rubbish around them but acknowledged it causes sicknesses and dangerous to the environment. The negative behaviour of littering the streets and public places by beggars has made it very difficult for third world and developing countries to have a clean modern metropolis.

The study by Olang'o, Olima, and Onyango (2012), revealed same perception by street beggars who thought that keeping the streets and public places clean is solely the duty of the government not the people. Street beggars have contributed to poor sanitation and hygiene in the city of Lagos because they engage in open defecation and urination. This is because most of street beggars do not have shelter and are not ready to pay for toilets managed by private individuals in Lagos State Nigeria. The main issue with those who sleep on the streets and public places in Lagos is hygiene with regards to open and indiscriminate defecation.

A study by Tanwne, Rana, Mitu, Rupa and Khadeza (2016), noted that in Bangladesh, street beggars indiscriminately urinate and defecate in the streets and public places which has made it very difficult to keep the streets clean and maintain healthy environment.



Joseph (2011), noted that indiscriminate defecation and urination in the streets and other places by street beggars has exposed street dwellers to numerous diseases in Botswana. Human Rights Watch (2011), stated that street dwellers are highly vulnerable to contracting water borne and airborne diseases. Furthermore, Rodrigo (2013), revealed that in some Rwandan cities poor hygiene does not only affect the health of city dwellers but also people who eat or buy food stuffs in open places.

These street beggars reside, cook and construct shanties on the streets and public places in Lagos State thereby generating all kinds of waste. The increasing presence of street beggars has contributed to the plague of open defecation and outbreak of acute epidemic infectious disease like cholera. The indiscriminate open defecation has made Nigeria to be ranked among the countries with the highest open defecation data. In 2021 over 3,598 persons died in Nigeria from cholera outbreak due to poor hygiene.

### **Conclusion**

Street begging has become worldwide phenomenon that cut across the cities of developed and underdeveloped countries of the world. Street beggars contribute to different security and environmental problems faced by many cities in the world. Street begging is now organized by syndicates who adopt diverse methods in seeking for alms from members of the society who willingly give out of pity. Renting of new born babies, twins and triplets by female street beggars is becoming a norm in cities across Nigeria.

The increasing rate of inequality and unemployment has increased destitution, poverty and crime rate across states in Nigeria. The poverty, unemployment and inequality rate in Nigeria continues to grow despite the huge oil revenue generated by the government. Factors like corruption, unemployment, nepotism and hyperinflation have damaged the economic foundation of Nigeria which has made the country to be named the poverty capital of the world. Street begging has become a profession and normalized across cities in Nigeria. It is imperative to know that beggars and destitute are the reflection of our society which must be tackled by all concerned individuals and organizations. Research has shown that most of the recruited members of terrorist groups in Nigeria are migrant beggars with religious indoctrination. Research findings have shown that the activities of street beggars contribute substantially towards littering of the streets which constitute environmental problems. They also pose health hazard by defecating and urinating in the street and public places which has led to the outbreak of cholera disease.

### **Recommendation**

To combat the prevalence of street begging and beggars requires inter agency, government at all levels and civil societies collaboration likewise nongovernmental organizations



(NGO's). These bodies must develop location specific strategies tailored towards addressing the issues associated with street begging to avoid policy abortion. The forceful evacuation and subsequent deportation of street beggars to their places of origin have not yielded the desired results. The following recommendations are made;

- Beggars with ill health and terminal diseases should be taken off the streets by the ministry of health, social welfare and relevant nongovernmental organizations for proper treatment and medical care.
- Street beggars must be trained to acquire skills for meaningful livelihoods and must undergo rehabilitation.
- The Lagos State government should step up its drive of ridding streets of Lagos off beggars by equipping the task force.
- The syndicates involved in organized street begging should be arrested and prosecuted to deter others intending to join the business.

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