



## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF THE ALMAJIRI DEMOGRAPHIC COHORTS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: THE NEED FOR POLICY REVIEW

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**Abstract:** *The paper discusses the relationship between ineffective leadership and the risk of social exclusion of the Almajiri demographic cohort in Nigeria within the context of sustainable development. It's interesting to note that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been promoted by the UN. These goals are essential for the country to provide its population with opportunities for overall development. Regrettably, a large portion of the Almajiri population has historically been unable to access formal education due to the poor leadership in the country, and their traditional educational system has not provided them with the skills needed to engage in the creation of human capital, which will enable them to contribute to the innovation and socioeconomic competitiveness of the Nigerian state. This limits the country's prospects of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals by reinforcing a cycle of ignorance, poverty, and social exclusion. The objective of this article is to determine the degree of social exclusion and poverty experienced by the Almajiri cohorts in northern Nigeria, with an emphasis on Kano State. The study used mixed method approach with explanatory sequential design in which both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using questionnaires and an interview respectively. According to the findings from this study, social exclusion or poverty were potential risks for 73% of the Almajiris surveyed in the three local governments that were chosen. Thus, the recommendation centers on leadership efforts to determine the proportion of Almajiris who are unable to meet their needs at a given level and on taking further action to enhance the social inclusion of demographic cohorts of Almajiris and meet the requirements of contemporary sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development; Leadership; Almajiri; Poverty; Social Exclusion

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## 1. Introduction

One of the biggest issues facing the modern world is sustainable development (Kalinowski, & Rosa, 2021). According to Hák, Janoušková, and Moldan (2016), one of the most difficult challenges facing humanity today is transforming the world's economy, society, and environment into a sustainable one because it must be done within the parameters of the planet's load-bearing capability. While in this parlance, poverty and social exclusion are the two most challenging issues (Sinding, 2009; Okech *et al.*, 2012; Spencer and Komro, 2017; Prattley *et al.*, 2020). This is because economic conditions (income disparities, material poverty), characteristics that prevent people from using common social resources (disability, addiction, etc.), lack of access to appropriate institutions (functional negligence, spatial mismatch), and other factors are important in this regard. The above list is not exhaustive. Poverty risk has a clear territorial dimension and lowers quality and standard of living. These are complex and multidimensional phenomena that depend on economic, sociological, cultural, and political factors (Rupeika-Apoga *et al.*, 2019). In order to establish and carry out sustainable development strategy, it is crucial to do research on the quantitative manifestation of poverty and its regional inequalities (Michálek & Výboštok, 2018). Information regarding poverty as it relates to specific population groups and geographic areas is therefore a crucial component of social and economic policies (Michálek & Madajová, 2019).

This study is therefore inspired by the above literature background to provide both quantitative and qualitative data regarding poverty as it relates specifically to the population of the Almajiris demographic cohorts in Northern Nigeria. Therefore, the study's spatial scope is limited to the Almajiris demographic cohorts in northern Nigeria. Despite their relatively close geographic proximity (since they are unique to that region) and their shared historical and cultural identities, the cohorts in question differ significantly from the rest of the society in the ways that socio-economic factors have been shaping their lives. It is not hyperbolic to suggest that the Almajiris educational system in Nigeria has not demonstrated the necessary indices for sustainable development. The prevailing literature argues that the system has not aided in the socio-economic and infrastructural advancement of the nation because policy makers have not given it any real consideration (Olaniran, 2013; Usman, & Njidda, 2017; Imoudu, 2020; Egerson, D., & Omu-Ebikaboere, 2021).

The Almajiri educational system as it is constituted today depicted a socially excluded institution that has continue to negatively affect the process of human capital development in Nigeria. This is because character development, which was a fundamental component of the system's very foundation, has gradually vanished

from it as well. This is because the system cannot confidently claim to have produced character development due to the claim that its products are impoverished and unable to make significant contributions to society. To put it another way, the system's inherent capacity to foster character remains dubious because it does not provide for the teachers' (malams) or students' (Almajiris) means of subsistence, rendering them as individuals who do not meet the minimum standards of life.

The nation cannot attain sustainable development without certain technological abilities. Many Almajiris are found to be unable of performing specific tasks, but this is not because they lack the skills; rather, it is because they are not given an opportunity to reach their full potential. Because the Almajiris have not been linked to the industrial and socioeconomic requirements of the society, this issue has persisted (Bala, 2018). The mainstream literature has always associated the Almajiris with poverty, squalor and criminality. For instance, according to a study conducted in Kano in 2008, poverty is a special factor in how the Almajiri practice which was once-exclusive children's activity in Northern Nigeria becomes an adult "business" (Usman, A., & Romic, 2015).

In an earlier study Yusha'u et al (2013) found that the Almajiris are caught in a cycle of poverty, illness, and hunger. He continued by suggesting that the Almajiris fail to receive the care and attention they need from their parents and government. This is consistent with findings from Sule-Kano (2010)'s survey conducted in Sokoto cited in Imoudu, (2020), which found that hunger was the primary issue for 23.0% of the Almajiris. In Talata Mafara, the survey also found that 82.3% of the 260 Almajiris who were interviewed were children from peasant families. On his part Danbuzzi (2013) cited in Gomment, (2020), also discovered that Almajiris cohorts, are dirty, torn, barefoot, pallid, and covered in rashes and ringworm. Flies are also known to peck on their broken lips. These are blatant examples of the Almajiris poverty in Nigeria. According to a related study, Oyeniyi et al. (2009) concluded that street children in Nigeria including Almajiris are socially marginalized. On their part Abbo, Zain, & Ali, (2017), asserted that the Almajiri system is a breeding ground for young people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged hence susceptible to radicalization. They continued by saying that the system has directly contributed to the creation of sizable youth cohorts with strong senses of identity, of which there are indications that of Nigeria's 10.5 million out-of-school children, 9.5 are Almajirai cohort, with 1.8 million of them living in Borno state, the epicenter of the Boko Haram insurgency, accounting for 70% of the country's total out-of-school children.

To this end, it is the contention of this paper that the , the Almajiri system has not contributed to the socioeconomic and infrastructural development of the Nigerian state because it has not been given significant attention by the policy makers in crafting the strategy for achieving sustainable development of the country. The paper therefore intends to achieve the following objectives:

1. To assess the socio-economic conditions of the Almajiris demographic cohort in Kano state;
2. To examine the linkage between the risks of poverty and social exclusion of the Almajiris demographic cohort and Nigeria's prospects of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals;
3. The explore the nexus between poor leadership and the risk of social exclusion of the Almajiris demographic cohort in Nigeria.

## **2. Research Hypotheses**

Based on the above stated objectives the following hypotheses have been formulated to provide a guide for the qualitative design of the study:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between Social Exclusion and Almajiri demographic cohort's living standard.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between Poverty and Almajiri demographic cohort's living standard.

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is an SDGS based poverty reduction strategic frameworks specifically for the Almajiris cohorts in Nigeria.

## **3. Conceptual Clarification**

### **3.1. The concept of sustainable development**

A generally recognized definition of sustainable development has been provided by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). This progress satisfies present demands without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own. This conception of development holds that social and economic development are intertwined. Economic expansion creates jobs, gives people the resources they need to meet their needs, and ultimately lowers poverty. Sustainable development is an economic issue that is included in environmental economics. It is

defined as social progress combined with economic growth without an increase in the entropy of the natural environment (Manteuffel-Szoega, 2013).

The fundamental tenet of sustainable development in environmental economics is the examination of options for combating poverty, upholding moral standards, guaranteeing that future generations' development conditions will be similar to those of the present, and preserving cultural diversity (Pakulska & Poniatowska-Jaksch, 2022). According to Sadowski (2011), sustainable development is the kind in which people intentionally direct their economic endeavors toward environmental protection in order to eliminate the growing ecological costs of development, which pose a threat to future generations' quality of life everywhere.

Miłosztan (2014) asserts that issues with biodiversity, existence (fighting poverty), and equitable access to environmental resources, information access, and social involvement should all be included in the aims of sustainable development. Fields (1999) asserts that while economic development nearly always results in a decrease in absolute poverty, its effects on inequality can vary and not everyone will gain equally from it. Aside from this, it's important to emphasize that every nation interested in putting the idea of sustainable development into practice will need to create its own policies targeted at alleviating poverty. It's important to keep in mind that sustainable development aims to meet the demands of the current generation while maintaining the possibility of meeting the needs of future generations (Dernbach, 1998; 2003; WCED, 1991). The goal of sustainable development is to guarantee that the standard of living and general well-being of both the current and coming generations will continue to rise on Earth. Thus, in a world of peace, stability, and respect for cultural variety, sustainable development is linked to the advancement of a vibrant economy, full employment, and high standards of health, education, and social and territorial cohesion as well as environmental protection. Above all, sustainable development should be viewed as efforts aimed at generating the same circumstances of development for rural and urban populations by giving the former group with opportunity to benefit from the positive consequences of transformations.

### **3.2. Conceptualizing Social Exclusion**

The idea of social exclusion, along with its various applications and causes, has drawn attention from an expanding body of literature. Barsukova, et al (2018), defines it as state in which people are unable to fully participate in economic, social,

political, and cultural life, as well as the processes leading to and maintaining such a state. This definition underlines the ways in which people and social groupings are kept out of society and stress the more procedural aspect of exclusion. Philip and Shucksmith, (2003), more overtly highlight the existence of discriminatory behaviors that prevent people from participating in social, political, and economic spheres, such as ageism, xenophobia, and racism. This definition underlines the consequences of exclusion in terms of restricted political, cultural, and social engagement, as well as restricted access to markets and services.

Cuesta, López-Noval, and Niño-Zarazúa (2024), state that while the deprivations resulting from social isolation vary greatly, they are mostly caused by three factors. First, those who identify differently from the norms and conventions of society run the risk of being marginalized. These identities can represent political and religious affiliations as well as gender, age, caste, ethnicity, and race. This is definitely not the same as claiming that women and ethnic minorities have a greater danger of exclusion in particular circumstances, but rather that their identities always lead to their exclusion from all communities. Second, individuals may face exclusion due to their circumstances, such as being a victim of gender-based violence, being forcefully relocated due to conflict or poverty, or both, particularly in settings where discriminatory institutions, laws, and practices are in existence. Third, low educational attainment, unemployment, or poverty restrict people's ability to access the labor, credit, and insurance markets as well as their ability to exercise their political rights, making them more vulnerable to exclusion (Cuesta, López-Noval, & Niño-Zarazúa, 2024).

These characteristics should be viewed as contributing risk factors to exclusion in particular settings and dangerous combinations of socioeconomic situations rather than as sufficient or necessary grounds for exclusion. Although opinions differ regarding the characteristics of the most severe types of social exclusion, most people believe that it is multifaceted, dynamic, and involves relational processes that lead to group exclusion identifies three components that are essential to understanding social exclusion: the conceptualization's relativity; the dynamics supporting the exclusionary mechanisms; and the agency engaged in the exclusion of others. Furthermore, as stated by.... "It involves the lack of or denial of resources, rights, goods, and services, as well as the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural, or political arenas", highlights the multifaceted nature of social exclusion.

A variety of actors are involved in social exclusion. People may be excluded by globalization-related economic factors, as well as by nation states, their institutions, and even by individual citizens. Deciphering the interplay between factors and consequences at several levels individual, family, community, national, and global is necessary to comprehend the multidimensionality of agency.

### **3.3. The concept of Poverty**

Scholarly investigations on poverty have a lengthy past, best demonstrated by the groundbreaking research conducted in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in England by Booth and Rowntree (Ruggeri Laderchi et al., 2003). Both characterized poverty as a state in which there were unfavorable living conditions in addition to a lack of financial means. Inadequate funds were coupled with inadequate housing and health, insufficient education, and limited services (Shucksmith, 2012). The term “poverty” is commonly used, although it has multiple definitions; it is also subject to debate and has changed over time (Pantazis et al., 2006). Discourse analysis conducted in 2010 by Misturelli and Heffernan on 159 documents pertaining to poverty in developing nations revealed how usage varied over time and within stakeholder groups, as well as how many distinct problem constructs could be identified under the general term “poverty.”

According to Veit Wilson (2006), pragmatically that “it cannot be defined in any way one likes” and goes on to suggest that the “everyday meaning of the word” is the most acceptable definition. According to Veit-Wilson (Veit-Wilson, 2006: 318), this conventional meaning is “the enforced lack of resources demonstrably needed for respect and inclusion.”

The UN, on the other hand, defines poverty as “a condition marked by acute deprivation of fundamental human necessities, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, and information.” This definition is also widely accepted. (Speth, 1998). Researchers on poverty are advised to acknowledge poverty research as an “inescapably political act,” given the contrast between these two “everyday” interpretations, which highlights how normative constructions of poverty are, even in scholarly discourse (O'Connor, 2001). In order to draw attention to the predicament of people living in regions of the world where natural disasters like starvation and drought have catastrophic effects, the UN defines poverty as absolute. The UN asserts that there is very little poverty in Europe.

The definition of poverty in each society is based on social standards, but European governments and citizens are also concerned about inequalities within their states and across Europe. For this reason, many authors have stressed that those living in poverty should not only have material possessions, but also have enough of them to allow them to lead normal lives like the rest of their community (Veit-Wilson, 2006). Some observers believe that this illustrates the idea that having a large income is the “cure for this ordinary poverty,” even though the term “a lack of resources” is frequently used to define poverty. In research, these criteria are more frequently operationalized as “a lack of income” or “a lack of consumption. (Veit-Wilson, 2006: 319). Others think that because governments often collect and examine income data, pragmatism affects the choice of income. (Levitas, 2006), It enables income data to be used as a proxy for broader poverty and welfare concerns (Ruggeri Laderchi et al., 2003). In certain European countries, the approach is to depend more on data about those who apply for government social assistance (Golinowska, 2002).

### **3.4. The concept of Almajiri**

Almajiri derives its etymology from the Arabic word *Almuhajir*, which signifies a migrant. Therefore, in Northern Nigeria, it refers to individuals, most of whom are very young, who typically go from rural to urban regions in quest of Islamic knowledge, either for the purpose of learning or to advocate for Islamic knowledge. The Almajiri system has its roots in an ancient migration culture, in which people, mostly from rural areas, would gather their school-age male children every year after harvest and entrust them to the care of an Islamic teacher so that the teacher could teach them the fundamentals of Islam through the Holy Qur'an, under strict discipline and an austere way of life (Abbo, Zain, & Ali, 2017). The students that attend these kinds of Qur'anic schools are commonly referred to as Almajiris, which is the plural form of the word Almajiri. In order to prevent family distractions, the teachers transported these students to urban areas where they lived in camps called “*tsangaya*,” primarily on the outskirts of the city.

In order to instill in the Almajiris the spirit of self-reliance, discipline, and self-denial known as “*az-zuhdu*,” they are thus forced to live a semi-regular life in this camp (Bambale, 2003). Both the Mallam (teacher) and the Almajiris are dependent on the community for leftover food, called “*sadaqa*” (alms), under this system. But, in most situations, this food may not be sufficient to feed all of the students, so they must go out every day and ask for additional food from the neighborhood. If they are



successful, they bring the food back to the camp to share with everyone (Yusha'u, Tsafe, Babangida & Lawal, 2013).

The purpose of making the Almajiris beg for food and, in almost all cases, clothing is to prepare them for the hardships they would face as adults. As a result, the practice of forcing the Almajiris to beg has earned them the nickname "Almagiranci." According to Usman (2008), the Almajiri school system in Northern Nigeria has been used to instill Islamic education in young children since the 11th century. The system started to spread throughout the region in 1921, when there were roughly 30,411 schools in total. Approximately over seven million male pupils attended Almajiri schools throughout the northern region by 2006 (Isiaka, 2015). But as time goes on, the Almajiri school system experiences institutional pollution and structural stagnation due to the introduction of some unhealthy practices; that is, a number of practices that are structurally out of the system's bounds start to become deeply ingrained. This infusion totally dehumanized it in contrast to the circumstances and mode of operation during the pre-colonial era, when the Almajiri school system did not involve begging and students were undoubtedly not forced to work menial jobs in order to survive. It is important to highlight that, as of present, the image that quickly conjures up when one hears the name Almajiri is that of a street child with disheveled, torn clothing, terrible sanitation, and disease-ridden skin.

### **3.5. Sustainable Development Goals and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria**

Eliminating poverty continues to be one of the world's most pressing issues. The MDGs' implementation did not entirely accomplish the goal of reducing poverty. Following their commitment to the SDGs, several nations began incorporating these objectives into their development plans to ensure their successful implementation. Those goals become the target that nations everywhere work to achieve. The Nigerian government began incorporating them into its development plans in order to ensure their successful execution. Among its broad efforts to accomplish the goals are the two committees established in the national assembly to help the SGD process at the legislative level: A Senate committee oversees the proper distribution of money for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and a House of Representatives committee likewise addresses the same issue by establishing the Inter-ministerial Committee on SDGs to ensure a smooth interface between the agencies, departments, and ministries; and creating the office of the Senior Special

Assistant to the President on SDGs, a legacy of MDGs with the responsibility of overseeing poverty reduction programs (Abdulkareem, Jimoh, & Shasi, 2023).

The Nigerian government has implemented a number of initiatives to aid in the reduction of poverty in the nation in order to achieve Goal 1 of the SDGs, which is "no poverty." For example, the Federal Government of Nigeria allocated \$1.3 billion of its budget to the establishment of the first phase of its social safety nets system when it formed the National Safety Investment Program (NSIP) in 2016 to combat hunger and poverty in the nation (Osondu-Oti, 2020). The program, which targets the poor and vulnerable, was purposefully created in an attempt to achieve the goal. This safety program includes several packages, such as Cash Transfer, which reaches about 300,000 low-income and vulnerable households; N-Power Program, which also empowers 500,000 youth between the ages of 18 and 35; and National Home Grown School Feeding Program, which serves 9.9 million people in 33 states and empowers 107,862 cooking staff nationwide.

Thanks to macroeconomic improvements, first-stage structural changes, and favorable global conditions, Nigeria's economy grew broadly and steadily between 2000 and 2014, averaging over 7% yearly. However, between 2015 and 2022, growth rates fell and GDP per capita flattened as a result of distortions in monetary and exchange rate policy, rising fiscal deficits brought on by reduced oil production and an expensive fuel subsidy program, a rise in trade protectionism, and external shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic. Millions of Nigerians are now living in poverty as a result of the country's inflation, which surged to a 24-year high of 31.7% in February 2024 due to weak economic fundamentals and slow growth.

The nation has been seeking drastic reforms to restore macroeconomic conditions for stability and growth since an administration transition in May 2023. The fuel fiscal subsidy was removed in part, and the FX reforms brought about the unification of the FX markets and the creation of an exchange rate that reflects the market. In order to mitigate the inflationary impact of these policies on the most susceptible, the government has been reaching out to 15 million households with temporary cash transfers. Additionally, attempts are being undertaken to tighten monetary policy and redirect the Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN) attention to its primary responsibility of preserving price stability.

However, the year 2024 is characterized by a rise in poverty to 38.8%. Low consumer spending and purchasing power remain a problem even though the country's unemployment rate is low. This is particularly true now that subsidies have been removed and the government has been displaying unwillingness to raise the

minimum wage in line with it, which would have prevented inflationary growth in the economy. The nation is presently facing difficulties due to comparatively weak monetary policy tightening, inability to rectify fuel price imbalances, and inability to increase non-oil revenue where economic recovery is also being hampered by growing insecurity, unfavorable climate shocks, and public unhappiness with inflation. Even though Nigeria has the biggest population and economy in Africa, most of its people have little possibilities. Nigerians born in 2020 are predicted to have the 7th lowest human capital index in the world, meaning that they will be 36% less productive as workers in the future if they had full access to healthcare and education. The 3.5 million Nigerians who enter the labor field each year are unable to find jobs, and many decide to leave their country in pursuit of better possibilities due to a lack of entrepreneurship alternatives. According to estimates, 87 million Nigerians live below the poverty line, making them the second-largest impoverished population in the world behind India. While nations like China is making great progress in the fight against poverty, Nigeria is finding it extremely challenging to defeat the issue (Osondu-Oti, 2020).

There is still a great deal of spatial inequality in Nigeria, where the best-performing states perform below the average for low-income nations, while the best-performing regions compare favorably to upper middle-income countries. State capacity is inadequate, service delivery is constrained, and violence and insecurity are pervasive across the majority of Nigerian regions. Trade protectionism makes infrastructure deficiencies worse by limiting access to electricity and impeding domestic economic integration, which would enable the nation to capitalize on its sizable market. These persistent development concerns are exacerbated by new issues including the rising intensity and frequency of extreme weather occurrences, particularly in the country's northern regions.

#### **4. Materials and Methods**

This section aims to shed light on the methodology used in an effort to investigate the ways in which inadequate leadership raises the likelihood of poverty and social exclusion for the Almajiris demographic cohorts. This section detailed the research design and the underlying paradigm that emphasized the philosophical presumptions. According to Cresswell (2013), the nature of a problem that motivates the study, the underlying objectives, and the philosophical stance of a certain discipline all play a significant role in deciding which research methodology should

be used. This study aims to adopt a pragmatic world-view by utilizing a combination of descriptive survey and ethnographic research designs.

Direct observations and in-depth Key Informants Interviews (KII) with a total of 15 informants including academics, representatives of civil society organizations, community leaders, and Almajiri School teachers were used to gather data for the ethnographic research design where the information from the interview were transcribed and analyzed thematically. The data used in the descriptive survey research design came from the Almajiri. Based on the number of Almajiri Schools in each of the eight metropolitan Local Government areas (Municipal, Nassarawa, Gwale, Dala, Fagge, Tarauni, Kumbotso, and Ungogo), samples from these areas made up the study's sample frame. The sample size that was taken into consideration was 10% of the Almajiri schools, or 346 samples (Table 1). Purposive sampling was used in the investigation. One student was chosen at random from each sampled school, taking into account his age group (i.e., 4–13 years, 14–17 years, and 18–24 years). For example, if the age group 4–13 years was chosen in school X, the age group 14–17 years would be chosen in the following school, and the age group 18–24 years in the school after that, until all the samples that need to be collected are used up. A structured interview was conducted with the sampled respondents, and their answers were recorded. Multiple regression and Chi-Square( $\chi^2$ ) were employed in the analysis

**Table 1. Number of *Almajiri* schools by Local Government in Kano Metropolitan Area**

Local Governments	*No. of <i>Almajiri</i> schools	**No. of questionnaire administered to schools
Municipal	461	40
Gwale	608	50
Nasarawa	721	60
Dala	932	80
Kumbotso	853	70
Ungogo	625	50
Tarauni	313	20
Fagge	487	39
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5000</b>	<b>409</b>

Source: \*\*Field survey, 2024

## **5. Data Presentation and Analysis**

In this section the result of data collected were presented and analyzed in accordance with the research objectives and hypotheses posed for the study. The study distributed 500 questionnaires to participants in the survey area. However, it is important to note that out of the (409) copies of the questionnaires distributed by the researcher to the eight selected local governments. Three hundred and forty-six (346) copies were returned representing 84% of the total distributed copies of the questionnaire. While nineteen (63) were not returned representing 15% of the total distributed copies. Out of the three hundred and forty-six (346) returned questionnaires nineteen (19) copies were screened out representing 5% of the total returned copies. The remaining three hundred and twenty-seven (327) copies were used for the analysis, representing 79% of the total distributed and total return copies respectively. The raw scores gathered from the respondents' responses were assembled, tallied and their frequency and percentage worked out. The frequencies and percentages were used to present the research objectives that guided the study. The quantitative data collected from the Almajiri cohorts in the selected local government areas was analyzed using multiple regression analysis with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science (version 23) for the first two hypotheses while the last hypothesis was tested using Chi-Square( $\chi^2$ ) at significant level of 0.05 respectively While thematic analysis was used in the analysis of qualitative data for the third research objective.

### **5.1. Research Objective One**

An assessment of the socio-economic conditions of the Almajiris demographic cohort visa-vise poverty and social exclusion.

**Table 2. Result of frequency and mean score on effect of Social Exclusion on Almajiris**

S/N	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	N	Mean
1	Almajiris do not have access to public services such as formal education, health insurance etc.	148	131	27	12	9	327	<b>4.21</b>
2	Almajiris do not enjoy the right to contest in an election.	126	145	32	7	17	327	<b>4.09</b>
3	Almajiris do not enjoy any welfare benefit from the state.	52	126	32	47	27	327	<b>3.39</b>
4	Almajiris always faces segregation in the society.	48	127	67	61	24	327	<b>3.35</b>
5	Almajiris lacks job opportunities	27	83	74	88	55	327	<b>2.81</b>

*Source: Authors' Analysis, 2024*

Results presented in Table 2 above are the effects of social exclusion on Almajiri demographic cohorts within the studied area. The item that says Almajiris do not have access to public services such as formal education, health insurance etc. was ranked first with the Mean score (4.21) which is greater than 3. This means that majority of the responded agreed and accepted the statement. Almajiris do not enjoy the right to contest in an election was ranked second with the mean score (4.09) which is greater than 3. This impliedly means that majority of the respondents agreed that Almajiris do not enjoy equal political participation. Almajiris do not enjoy any welfare benefit from the state was ranked third with the mean score (3.39) which is higher than 3, meaning that majority of the respondents agreed with the statement. Almajiris lacks job opportunities was ranked fourth with mean score (3.35) which is greater than 3, meaning that majority of the respondents agreed with the statement. However, the statement that says Almajiris always faces segregation in the society was ranked fifth with mean score (2.81) which is less than 3, meaning that majority of the respondents disagreed with the statement that Almajiris always faces segregation in the society.

**Table 3. Result of frequency and mean score on effect of Poverty on Almajiris**

S/N	Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	N	Mean
1	Almajiris always struggles with issues related to Ill-health.	53	93	46	90	45	327	<b>3.06</b>
2	Almajiris are facing problems associated with joblessness.	29	81	63	84	70	327	<b>2.74</b>
3	Almajiris have difficulties having access to food.	70	177	44	19	17	327	<b>3.81</b>
4	Almajiris always face poverty-stigma in the society.	37	105	77	74	34	327	<b>3.11</b>
5	Almajiris have difficulties having access to finance and loans.	20	45	81	108	73	327	<b>2.48</b>

Source: Authors' Analysis, 2024

The effects of Poverty on the Almajiri demographic cohorts are presented in Table 3 above. The statement that says Almajiris have difficulties having access to food with mean core (3.81) which is greater than 3 was ranked first. Almajiris always face poverty-stigma in the society was ranked second with Mean score (3.11) which is greater than 3, meaning majority of the respondents have agreed with the statement. The statement that says Almajiris always struggles with issues related to Ill-health was ranked third with Mean score (3.06) which is equal to 3. Almajiris are facing problems associated with joblessness was ranked fourth with mean score (2.74) which less than 3.

However, the statement that says Almajiris have difficulties having access to finance and loans was ranked fifth with mean score (2.48) which is less than 3, indicating that majority of the respondents disagreed with the statement

**Table 4. Summary of Regression Outputs**

R <sup>2</sup> = 0.299		F= 69.259		
Almajiri Cohorts		$\beta$	T	Sig.
Economic Condition	Social Exclusion	0.308	5.897	0.000
	Poverty	0.334	6.399	0.000

Source: Authors' application, 2024

Table 4 above indicates the summary of the multiple regression analysis. The empirical findings show that R<sup>2</sup>, the multiple coefficient of determination stood at 0.299 indicating about 29.9% of total variation in sustainable development studied is explained by variations in the independent variables (Social Exclusion and

Poverty) captured in the study. Thus, the remaining 70.1% of the variation in the dependent variable can be explained by other variables not included in this study.

#### **Test of hypothesis I**

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between Social Exclusion and Almajiri demographic cohort's living standard

The coefficient of "Social Exclusion" stood at 0.308, which is positive. This implies that an increase in social exclusion would lead to a decrease in the standard of living of the Almajiri cohorts in Northern Nigeria. However, the significance of this can be judged from the t-statistics and its significance. The t- statistics of "Social Exclusion" stood at 5.897 with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship depicted in the model is significant. This implies that the study does not have enough statistical evidence to accept the null hypothesis. Thus, it was rejected.

#### **Test of hypothesis II**

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between Poverty and Almajiri demographic cohort's living standard.

The coefficient of "Poverty" stood at 0.334, which is positive. This implies that an increase in poverty for the Almajiris would also lead to a decrease in their standard of living. However, the significance of this can be judged from the t- statistics and its significance. The t- statistics of "Poverty" stood at 6.399 with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, indicating that the relationship depicted in the model is significant. This implies that the study does not have enough statistical evidence to accept the null hypothesis. Therefore, it was rejected.

**Research objective Two:** Assessment of the linkage between the risks of poverty and social exclusion of the Almajiris demographic cohort and Nigeria's prospects of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals



**Table 5. Contains the summary of the responses on the existences of SDGS based poverty reduction strategic frameworks for the Almajiris demographic cohort in Nigeria**

*There is an SDGS based poverty reduction strategic frameworks specifically for the Almajiris cohorts in Nigeria*

Options	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
Job creation	32 10%	51 16%	25 8%	56 16%	163 50%	327 100%
Integrated educational programs	32 10%	29 9%	37 12%	59 17%	170 52%	327 100%
Provision of basic needs	28 9%	41 11%	16 5%	62 20%	180 55%	327 100%
Adequate Budgetary allocation	29 9%	66 21%	44 14%	126 38%	62 18%	327 100%
Poverty alleviation policies/programs	55 18%	28 8%	44 14%	67 21%	120 38%	327 100%
<b>Total</b>	176	215	166	370	695	327
<b>Percentage %</b>	11	15	11	21	42	100

*Source: Research Data, 2024*

Table 5 above showed the 42% of the respondents strongly agreed that the SDGS based poverty reduction strategic frameworks (covering job creation, integrated educational programs, provision of basic needs, adequate budgetary allocation, poverty alleviation policies/programs) for Almajiris does not exist in Nigeria; 21% agreed; 11% undecided; 15% disagreed; and 11% strongly disagreed.

**Hypothesis three:** *SDGS based poverty reduction strategic frameworks for the Almajiris cohorts does not exist in Nigeria.*

**Decision Criteria:** When the computed value of chi-square ( $X^2$ ) is > the table value of chi-square ( $X^2$ ), the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) will be accepted while the null hypothesis ( $H_2$ ) will be rejected.

**Presentation of the chi-square result of hypothesis three****Table 6. Observed frequency for hypothesis three**

Options	Strongly Agree	Agree	undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Total	65	109	51	61	28	327

*Source: Field Work, 2024*

Where R = Number of Row in the contingency table; C = Number of columns in the contingency table

$$DF = (3-1) (5-1) = 2 \times 4 = 8$$

At 0.05 significant level and 8 degree of freedom the table value of chi-square = **15.51**

Computation of chi-square (X<sup>2</sup>)

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O - e)^2}{e}$$

Where O = Observed frequency; e = Expected frequency

Expected frequency (e) is giving by  $\frac{RT \times CT}{GT}$

Where RT =Row total; CT=Column total; GT=Grand total

Observed Frequency(o)	Expected Frequency(e)	(o-e)	(o-e) <sup>2</sup>	(o-e) <sup>2</sup> /e
314	17.642	331.642	109986.42	14.40

*Source: Research Data, 2024*

When the computed value of chi-square (x<sup>2</sup>) is > the table value of chi-square (X<sub>2</sub>), alternative hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>) is accepted while the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) is rejected. Therefore, since the computed value of chi-square (X<sub>2</sub>) of 14.40 is < the table value of chi-square of 15.51, alternative hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>) is rejected while the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) is accepted. The study therefore established that there are not SDGS based poverty reduction strategic framework in place for the Almajiris in Nigeria.

## **5.2. The Nexus between Poor Leadership and the Risk of Social Exclusion of the Almajiris Demographic Cohort in Nigeria**

The third and final objective of this paper is to explore how poor leadership contribute to the risk of poverty and social exclusion of the Almajiris demographic cohorts. According to UN estimates, Nigeria might have 400 million citizens by 2050, with a population of about 200 million, of which 60 percent are under 25. Due to a global boom in commodities, the nation experienced a spike in economic growth (over 5 percent annually) between 2000 and 2011, however this relatively prosperous period did not result in a significant increase in employment. Nigeria's employment situation, educational attainment, and attendance rates have not improved. These variables directly affect poverty, hence the country's chances of benefiting from a demographic dividend in the coming years appear bleak.

Nigeria's economy has grown slowly ever since the nation entered a recession in 2016, especially in non-oil sectors. With around 94 million people living on less than \$1.90 per day, nearly half of the population, Nigeria holds the dubious title of being the world leader in the concentration of extreme poverty. Its per capita GDP has decreased over the past two years, and in the third quarter of 2018, the estimated jobless rate was 23.1%. Nigeria's business climate is still subpar despite some recent improvements; the nation is ranked 131 out of 190 in the World Bank Doing Business 2020 Report.

Concerning the advancement of society. Nigeria's position in the World Bank Human Capital Index is 152nd out of 157 countries. A child born there today is predicted to be only 34% productive as an adult because of malnutrition and limited access to healthcare and education.

With an estimated 32 percent of children under five suffering from stunting, the nation has the second-highest prevalence of stunting in the world, according to UNICEF. Nigeria ranks among the nations with the highest percentage of school dropouts, with only 61% of children between the ages of six and eleven regularly attending primary school. In the country's whole northern region, the enrollment rate in Almajiri schools is higher than that of formal education. The number of students enrolled in formal schools in the northwestern geopolitical zones of Zamfara and Sokoto was three times higher than that of Almajiri schools, according to a 2009 National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) inquiry (Aluaigba, 2009). According to research, there were around 30,411 Almajiri schools in northern Nigeria by 1921. By 2006, the system had produced more than seven million graduates. Approximately 9.5 million Almajiris live in northern Nigeria as of right

now. Additionally, it is projected that about half of these, or 4.2 million people, reside in the northeastern geographical zone. It is also crucial to remember that the terrorist organization Boko Haram has its headquarters in the northeastern geopolitical zone (). Another study carried out in 2008 by UNICEF and the Federal Ministry of Education found a similar pattern, with the Almajiri school system recording an enrollment rate of roughly 514, 264 in the states of Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Kano, Borno, and Bauchi, compared to the 54,434 public primary school enrollment nationwide. This shows how the Almajiri school system is becoming more and more popular in Northern Nigeria (Goodluck & Juliana, 2012).

This presents a serious challenge in that the Almajiri school system as it currently exists is a shadow of what it once was. Originally designed to instill Islamic virtues in children, the system has gradually deteriorated into a subpar establishment typified by cruel and unhealthy practices that force students to perform menial labor and other forms of slavery that were not previously part of the system. Currently, one can easily recognize a typical Almajiri school system student by their unkempt appearance, which is typified by torn clothing and begging on the streets with a plastic plate. Since the Almajiris were viewed as social nuisances, good people frequently drove them out. They wander aimlessly down the street, observing other affluent children enjoying the comforts of home and attention from their parents, which usually makes them feel alienated. They spend much of their time sleeping on bare floors or discarded pieces of cardboard.

Because of their social exclusion and poverty, the Almajiris are inevitably forced to work as errand boys for wealthy families and restaurant owners in order to obtain food, shelter, and clothing. A sizable portion of them also frequently participate in criminal activities like drug sales, pick-pocketing, and political thuggery. Some of them, however, are driven to suicide by the intolerability of such a purposeless and harsh existence; in 2011, a young Almajiri killed himself by hanging in Niger State (Aghedo & Eke, 2013).

Against the above backdrop, two factors have emerged as themes from the KII linking poor leadership with destitution of the Almajiris cohorts which also help in achieving the third objective of this paper. The first theme anchored around lack of sustainability policy while the second factor hinged on the lack of will by the political leaders in those states

## 6. Lack of Sustainability Policy

Informants in this study were candid about the significance of the Almajiri school system's lack of sustainability plans and how it contributed to the cohorts' alienation and deprivation. Empirical data indicates that although government measures offer a framework for tackling poverty, their effectiveness in improving the lot of impoverished Almajiris in the northern region of the country is debatable. When inadequate leadership is the primary cause of these programs' inefficiency and lack of sustainability (Ajulor, 2018). According to this study, the National Board for Arabic and Islamic Studies (NBAIS) and the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) have been actively supporting the Almajiri system by the government. Nevertheless, there is a lack of tangible policy regarding the development of skills, particularly in the area of entrepreneurship, to improve the socioeconomic standing of Almajiris and allow them to make significant contributions to the advancement of the nation and its sustainable development.

For instance as observes by one of the informant:

*"Inclusion of vocational training will make the Almajiris system to be functional and contributive to sustainable economic development in the country. However, there is lack of vocational training package in the Almajiri educational policy"*

Another informant has this to say:

*"In order to achieve meaningful change, it is paramount to initiate and implement economic policy that will improve the condition of destitute Almajiri children in the Northern part of the country. Unfortunately no such policies exist in Nigeria today"*

Same view was share by an informant when he opined that:

*"I think the Almajiris education policy is very shallow when it comes to sustainable development. Because the only initiative that can be instrumental in development is the inculcation of a small scale business or entrepreneurship policy among Almajiri children will unfortunately it is not there"*

This suggests that, despite the United Nations' support for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are necessary for the nation to provide opportunities for its citizens in order to achieve overall progress, the government is not providing the Almajiri children with a sustainable policy plan to care for their future. Regrettably, Nigeria does not currently have a practical policy framework that can adequately prepare the Almajiri cohorts to participate in the development of human capital by enhancing the country's socio-economic competitiveness and

creativity. Despite the fact that the National Board for Arabic and Islamic Studies (NBAIS) was founded in order to unify and standardize the curricula of Islamiyyah and Almajiri schools across the nation, the board makes no attempt to incorporate entrepreneurship skills into the curriculum in order to make Almajiris beneficial to both the community and themselves.

It is crucial to remember that, contrary to what literature claims, sustainable growth in the Almajiri system can only be accomplished when entrepreneurship skills and vocational training are prioritized as part of strategy that will turn it into a thriving economic hub in the Northern region. This is only possible if the impoverished Almajiri cohorts have access to resources and facilities by a good leadership. Without a doubt, the Almajiri education system has made an effort to instill moral values and provide religious knowledge, but inasmuch as it does not now reflect sustainable development, it has caused more policy issues than it has solved because the educational opportunities offered within the system do not develop students' potential to the extent that would allow them to participate actively in the general development of society and include entrepreneurship and vocational training in order to achieve socioeconomic growth.

On this point, research suggests that the government should use a holistic strategy to improve the social, economic, and ecological aspects of the nation in order to achieve overall sustainable development (Ogunkan, 2022). It is important to emphasize that improving the economic circumstances of the impoverished and reducing the gap between the rich and the poor constitute the core of sustainable economic growth (Unegbua, et al, 2024). Political stability and social order will suffer if the issue of poverty and street begging among Almajiri youngsters in the North is not addressed. In order to lower the rate of poverty among citizens, as literature claims, economic viability requires the engagement of stakeholders or decision makers, those who formulate economic policies, and all sectors of the economy (Gbirevbie, et al, 2017).

### **6.1. Lack of Will by the Political Leaders in States**

One of the key elements that determines whether any government project in Nigeria survives and is sustainable is political will. Political will is defined by DFID as "the determination of an individual political actor to do and say things that will produce a desired outcome" (DFID 2004, p. 7). The sustainable implementation of the Almajiri education strategy in Nigeria is contingent upon the presence of political will. There appears to be a lack of enthusiasm on the side of certain successive state

administrators to replicate similar programs in their respective states as the government administration switches between political parties. The study's informants were unequivocal about how the state's inadequate accountability framework hinders the implementation of policies. They said that the federal government, which receives sizable monthly allocations from the Federal Accounts Allocation Committee (FAAC), is to blame for the nation's failure to build a thriving economy and the infrastructure necessary for the growth and development of its citizens.

According to a recent analysis by The PUNCH Newspapers, states have seen an increase in income allocations as a result of the large revenue spike that followed the elimination of fuel subsidies (Sambo, & Sule, 2024). Within a year, monthly allocations to about ten states increased by more than fifty percent, while allocations to twelve additional states increased by forty percent, according to data from the Federation Accounts Allocation Committee. What have the governors of the northern states done with the funds to combat poverty and destitution in their respective states, given the massive allocations? The National Bureau of Statistics revealed in its National Multidimensional Poverty Index report that 133 million Nigerians are multi-dimensionally poor.

An informant from the civil society asserted that:

*The public outcry against poor governance, which is frequently aimed at the federal government, might not be as strong if state executives closely followed their constitutional obligations.*

*Nigerians tend to forget that since the country's democratic inauguration on May 29, 1999, the country's revenue has been allocated to the Federal, State, and Local Governments according to a predetermined percentage. Consequently, it is expected that all tiers of government will prudently employ these monies for the good of the people, including paying salaries, establishing important economic sectors, supplying infrastructure, social programs, security, health care, and education. This mixture creates a well-run country where the welfare of the people is the primary focus of governance a fundamental feature of democracy that is applied globally.*

Another informant from the academic echoed the same point:

*Consider the persistent need for accountable and responsive governance, which largely places the responsibility on the federal government. People easily disregard the fact that state governors have received more money than they did under the previous administration amid the calls for change. With the removal of fuel subsidies and a significant boost in monthly*

*funding to states and local governments, it is unexpected that few hold the governors accountable for how they handle these more resources.*

It is evident that, aside from the federal government's initiatives, no state governor has developed a distinct policy aimed at the Almajiris cohorts. In actuality, state governors frequently embezzle even the federal funds designated for the Almajiris itself. For example, Leadership, a Nigerian newspaper, conducted an investigation on the implementation of Almajiri model schools throughout the northern states of Nigeria to determine how the approach is being actualized. The findings of the investigation revealed that, apart from Zamfara State, almost no facilities utilization is occurring. The majority of the Almajiri schools have not been finished, or even those that have are not operational, according to the research. Many of the schools were shut down shortly after they opened. Those that remained open have extremely low student enrollment rates when compared to the conventional tsangaya system (Jimba, 2021).

Informant from among the members of the academics expressed concern:

*The state governors do not show consideration for the needs of the Almajiri Cohorts. For example, the Almajiri cohort is one of the most disadvantaged groups in society; it is not employable in the public or private sector, and its members who possess some entrepreneurial skills are not eligible for financial assistance from their state governors.*

In another response by an academics, he asserted that:

*The Almajiri cohorts and the Boko Haram elites are connected primarily by cultural and ideological ties, but political and governmental factors strengthen this bond because our ruling class's hypocrisy about governance severely isolates them from the rest of society.*

Furthermore, a lot of North American public schools are similar to Almajiri schools in that they are typically underfunded, have deteriorating infrastructure, and have a high student-to-teacher ratio. This means that access to a better learning environment is restricted, even in cases where parents and kids want their children to attend more inclusive schools. The aforementioned suggests that state governors in Nigeria do not appear to have the political will necessary to achieve sustainable development. As advance by this informant:

*Being a governor carries a lot of responsibility, and it is obvious that those who want to hold the position must live up to high standards. As stated in the constitution, governors have important duties. In addition to overseeing the day-to-day operations of the state and appointing people to the state judiciary and other regulatory organizations, their duties also*



*include executing laws and carrying out other tasks aimed at enhancing the quality of life for the populace. Sadly, a sizable portion of them don't appear to have this political will.*

The aforementioned data indicates that state governors are falling short of expectations when it comes to demonstrating the kind of effective leadership needed to achieve sustainable development in northern Nigeria. A leadership capable of bringing about significant change for the betterment of society and establishing social institutions with accountability and transparency as guiding principles. Therefore, it is anticipated that state governors would have a major impact in this area, particularly in establishing the institutions and structures required to improve the socioeconomic status and quality of education for the Almajiri generations in the North. To help students become self-sufficient after graduation, for example, entrepreneurial activities and skills might be incorporated into the curriculum (Agiri, Erude, & Ohanyelu, 2023).

This becomes evident when we take into account the opinions of some of the Almajiri school teachers (mallams) who participated in this study. A sizable portion of them voiced concern about how weak leadership causes the cohorts to face severe challenges like poverty and social marginalization. The below exemplified the comments made. An informant from the teachers of Almajiri schools argued that:

*The Almajiris are the worst group of citizens in Nigeria today since the political system has rendered them economically and politically insignificant.*

From the foregoing, it is evident that the Almajiri cohorts are still subjected to social marginalization and shame from the government. This is a result of the Almajiri demographic cohorts being marginalized as young people, being prone to stereotypes, being chastised for their cultural upbringing, feeling a covert sense of hopelessness and powerlessness, and having limited access to social networks of support. In the academic literature, the Almajiri cohorts are often studied in relation to their alleged lack of hygiene, criminality, sexual abuse, and intellectual inadequacy. These cohorts are also characterized by poverty and chronic unemployment, which are attributed to their lack of education and skills that are necessary for a better life. Below response by a member of civil society organization is indicative of this:

*These boys' poverty is the result of the government's failure to provide them with skill-building programs that would have allowed them to support themselves like those with formal education credentials.*

In another interview an academics argued that:

*While there is no denying that parental irresponsibility plays a part in the Almajiri scourge, the political establishment, particularly the northern state governors, bears the most of the blame due to their apparent lack of dedication and passion in finding a long-term solution.*

Three things usually lead to the deprivation and marginalization of the Almajiris: losing their historical standing as a respected community, the destruction of old political and social structures, and inadequate leadership that frequently abandons their people in poverty. The following responses from a community leader is indicative of this:

*Once the most prestigious and well-respected institution, the Almajiri School has gradually been corrupted by government neglect, turning it into a factory for producing menial laborers and beggars.*

A mallam (teacher in the Almajiri School) has this to say:

*Since the Almajiri School is a part of our religious and cultural legacy, it should not be treated or appreciated as it is now. Regrettably, modernization and so-called civilization have all played a part in pushing it to the sidelines.*

Therefore, it is clear from the foregoing that poverty, the chance of social exclusion, and the inability of leadership to empower the Almajiri cohorts are all related. Empowerment and bettering the lot of the common people should be aspects of leadership; yet, this is not the case in Nigeria, where a sizable segment of the population still lives in poverty. In Nigeria, one of the major factors responsible for poverty is the inability of the political class to adequately adhere to the essential precepts of democracy and constitutionalism (Ogbeidi, 2012). As Mustapha (2010:2) appropriately observed, this circumstance “has given rise to abuse of power, brazen corruption, disregard for due process and the rule of law, intolerance of political opposition, abuse of the electoral process and the weakening of institutions.” This negates the tenant of good governance, which presupposes “the procedure of social engagement between the rulers and the ruled in a polity” (Adejumobi, 2004).

Good governance could be achieved when the operation of government is in accordance with the predominant legal and ethical standards of the political entity. When all the elements of good governance are fully entrenched in the polity, system effect will be high, and the masses would collectively display keen interest in the operation of the state, knowing fully well that adherence to the tenets of good governance would lead to greatest happiness for the greatest number of the populace. Deprivation of benefits and inequality would be discouraged, as people's

rights would be ensured within the ambit of the law. Political leaders would hold dear the watchwords: accountability and transparency in governance.

However, in Nigeria these important tenets of governance especially transparency and accountability are not observed by those in power except in its application to frustrate the opposition (Achua, 2011). The more profound motives of introducing the anti-corruption measures were never nationalistic; they were basically motivated by the strong desire to remain in power by displacing and wading off all opposition. As summed up by Sklar et al "The growing distance between this political elite and the general public, however has undermined accountability...poverty and frustration over the slow pace of change fan public anger..." (2006).

## **7. Discussion**

The Almajiris are effectively abandoned by their parents, neglected by the state and exploited by members of the public; as they end up facing a future lifestyle woven by poverty and hardship. This is because the Islamic education they receive do not appear to equip them with the skills needed to survive in the harsh and capitalist-oriented modern economy that the nation operates and, thus, cannot offer them profitable employment. The Almajiris are trapped in the vicious circle of poverty, disease and hunger. For instance in this study hunger was found to be the major problem of 73.0% of the Almajiris in the study area, it was equally found that out of 327 Almajiris surveyed, 96.3% were children from peasant families. Unsurprisingly, the results from the quantitative survey revealed a significant relationship between Social Exclusion and Almajiri demographic cohort's living standard. The findings also revealed a significant relationship between Poverty and Almajiri demographic cohort's living standard. The result from the survey conducted further established that there are not SDGS based poverty reduction strategic framework in place for the Almajiris in Nigeria. Where further findings indicated that there are numerous challenges of implementing SDGs to reduce poverty among the Almajiri demographic cohorts in Nigeria. From mere observation the Almajiris in Northern Nigeria roam about dirty, tattered, bare foot (in most cases).

Almajiris are socially excluded in Nigeria. This has a serious implication for the future of the country in two ways: firstly, Almajiri cohorts are not adequately being prepared for future employment and as a result of poverty are unable to contribute to the socio-economic development of the country in the sense that poverty hinders

sustainable socio-economic development. Secondly, since it could lead to the proliferation of street gangs who are often involved in various crimes and ready instruments of violence. Social exclusion is a risk factor that can push people into some things they probably would not have done under normal circumstances. The participation of Almajiris in the Boko Haram insurgency shows the level of exclusion as they feel the insurgency could pave way for their inclusion in the scheme of things, going by the promise given to them by the leader of the Boko Haram sect (Abbo, Zain, & Ali, 2017).

The Almajiri system in the Northern part of the country is an epitome of poverty and social exclusion which has continue to work against the achievement of sustainable development in the country. Nonetheless, the government has initiated different strategies that can bring meaningful economic growth in order to achieve a better society that will improve the conditions of the poor and more importantly, reduce poverty in a drastic way. For instance, there are several programmes in the country aims at reducing poverty and improving economic conditions of the citizens such as National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) (2001); National Economic Empowerments and Development Strategy (NEEDS) 2004).

It is however noteworthy to say that these strategies did not make significant impact in the lives of destitute Almajiri children in the Northern part of the country where the reason for their ineffectiveness are majorly corruption and bad leadership. Good Leadership is therefore a vital factor in promoting the wellbeing of every citizen. A leadership that will make an effective change for social transformation which would definitely put in place social institution whereby transparency and accountability shall be considered as its core values. Hence, the government is expected to play significant role in this regard especially in putting necessary structure and institution in place towards improving the education and socio-economic conditions of Almajiri cohorts in the North. For instance, entrepreneurship skill and entrepreneurial activities can be introduced into system in order to make the learners to be self-independent after graduation.

## **8. Conclusion and Recommendation**

To this end, the mainstream literature identifies that a number of factors inhibit sustainable development and of such factors are: high rate of poverty, social exclusion, mismanagement of national economy and poor educational development (Kalinowski, & Rosa, 2021). Undeniably, the aforementioned factors are true about what Almajiri system is facing in various Northern states. For instance, Almajiri

children with experience of street begging is an indicator of determining high rate of poverty. As a result of poor parent and negligence by the policy makers, they experience social exclusion consequently which made them to indulge in social vices.

In proffering a solution, it is important that the idea behind the Almajiri system be preserved, but the schools ought to be properly integrated into the educational sector and their curriculums upgraded and revised in a way that allows the students get both Quranic and secular education. This blend is critical to ensuring that they develop economically-useful skills. In the sense that the weakness of the system is that, it only focuses on religious learning and lack of essential vocational training that can contribute to sustainable socio-economic development in the country.

Therefore, the inadequate educational system of Almajiri requires adequate policy that will include these children into the core focus of national development. Similarly, misplacement of priority manifesting from mismanagement of national economy immensely contributes to the overall challenges facing Almajiri in the North. Economic growth is important for sustainable development whereby education immensely contributes to it. Thus, meaningful development can be attained if educational system of Almajiri is reviewed alongside with provision of entrepreneurial activities that will boast investments and business enterprise which will enormously contribute to socio-economic development of the country.

It is only by this means that, negative impression about Almajiri can be changed for better practice. This can be changed for better specifically by making the overall system sustainable in the country. There is a connection between education and sustainable development. Without proper skills like entrepreneurship skill, Almajiri children can become a liability to the society and to the entire country. It is therefore important to explore sustainable educational development that will prepare Almajiri cohorts for the future especially in meeting up with the knowledge driven world in order to achieve sustainable development in the Northern part in particular and the entire country in general.

Local communities and religious leaders also have a role to play in governing the system. The 165 Almajiri Schools built by ex-President Goodluck Jonathan have come to nothing as most of the structures have become dilapidated due to negligence, while some were never used at all. This is typically due to lack of sustainability plans, and a lack of will by the political leaders in those states and the current administration to see to the continuity and funding of those schools. Adequate funding should be made available from the annual education budget to

finance the education for marginalized and disadvantaged groups in Nigeria. This will help in recruiting committed teachers as well as procuring useful materials for the programme. The same spirit backing formal education should also back other forms of education targeted towards special groups. More collaboration should be made with both local and international research agencies in gathering data related to Almajiri education in Nigeria. Experts and researchers from the universities communities should be involved for accuracy and reliability.

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