

Breaking Religious Barriers: Once Opposed to Western Education, Islamiya Devotees Embrace Kachako Community Learning Hub

Story of
Change

LESSON DAY AT COMMUNITY LEARNING HUB, KACHAKO, TAKAI LGA, KANO STATE

Deep-rooted cultural and religious norms in some communities can unintentionally limit children's access to formal education. In Kachako, Kano State, the UK-funded Partnership for Learning for All in Nigeria (PLANE) programme is helping to change this through focused community advocacy and sensitisation. By establishing over 200 safe, community-based learning hubs, PLANE has created opportunities for both in-school and out-of-school children to learn. These hubs have sparked interest among children who were previously disengaged from education, including those from backgrounds resistant to Western-style schooling. Many are now beginning to embrace formal learning, marking a promising shift in attitudes and access.

Every Tuesday afternoon, dozens of children gather at the community learning hub in Kachako, a rural community in Takai Local Government Area (LGA) of Kano State. They arrive from all corners of the village and nearby communities – some after returning from school, others, like the Almajiris, after attending Islamiyah or hawking on the streets. These Almajiris, are mostly boys, who are sent by their families, to study Islamic education under a teacher/cleric.

By 3 p.m., the lessons begin at the hub. For the next hour, the air is filled with the lively sound of children responding to trained facilitators. They recite the alphabet, sing songs, chant poems, count numbers, and even do simple mathematics. Week after week, the hub has become a space where the children look forward to coming to learn, play, and grow; a place to gain foundational literacy and numeracy skills that some of them had missed.

 **Over 200
Learning
Hubs**
Established

The Power of Community Collaboration and shifts in Mindsets

The Kachako community learning hub is the result of a collaborative effort by many individuals and groups. These include the Kano State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), the government agency coordinating basic education in the state, a School-Based Management Committee (SBMC), mobilising the Kachako community to take ownership of and ensure the sustainability of the hub, Social Mobilisation Officers (SMOs), and facilitators who volunteer to teach the children in the provided space. Supporting all these groups is the Partnership for Learning for All in Nigeria (PLANE), the UK-funded development programme that introduced the initiative to Kano State and two other neighbouring states, Kaduna and Jigawa.

Parents, guardians, community leaders, and religious teachers have also been instrumental to the growth of the hub – permitting and encouraging the children to attend. Among them, an individual stands out – Mallam Ibrahim Abubakar, 57, an Islamic teacher who generously offered his compound as the space for the weekly community learning hub.

Abubakar's gesture might look like a normal support by a community member, but it was a big deal coming from a person who had openly disliked Western education, preferring only the Qur'anic education he organises for children in his compound.



“Before, I hated Western education. Before the coming of PLANE, I hated it. I didn't want any Westerners to come and interfere in my affairs [as] I was trying to give Islamic education to our children”, Abubakar admitted.

As an Islamic tutor, Abubakar's strong preference for religious education over formal education was not unusual. The impact of religious education in Nigeria has been significant. It has offered spiritual and moral grounding for numerous children,

promoting values such as honesty, hard work, compassion, and justice. It has also strengthened community bonds by providing children a shared cultural and religious identity.

However, not integrating religious education into the broader national educational system could cause drawbacks.

According to the Nigerian government, school-age children who do not attend formal schools are considered out-of-school children. And according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), there were over 15.2 million out-of-school children in northern Nigeria in 2023, about 85% of the national figure. Majority of these children lack foundational skills in reading, writing and mathematics, often feeling excluded and inadequate in a secular world.



MALLAM IBRAHIM ABUBAKAR, ISLAMIC TEACHER

Driving Change Through PLANE's Support

Recognising the negative effects of a large population of out-of-school children, the Kano State government sought support from development partners, including the PLANE programme, to address the issue. PLANE's support includes establishing community learning hubs in rural communities like Kachako to help children gain foundational learning and numeracy skills. These hubs, though set-up to support in-school children have attracted out-of-school children and have become a platform to catch up on lessons they have missed. Some are eventually mainstreamed into conventional schools where they can learn more skills that will prepare them for a better future.

Funded by the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), PLANE has been supporting Kano as well as Jigawa and Kaduna states and the Federal Government since 2021 to achieve sustainable improvement in learning outcomes for Nigerian children, especially marginalised groups like girls and those with disabilities.

Enabling Trust and Community Ownership

Halima Shehu, 45, is from Kachako and the Social Mobilisation Officer for Takai LGA. She was among many SUBEB officers and SBMC members across four LGAs (Ajingi, Albasu, Gaya, and Takai) in Kano State trained by PLANE to establish community learning hubs in specific communities. They were also trained to organise outreach activities to sensitise the communities about the hubs.

According to Halima, they met on several occasions with parents, guardians, community and religious leaders, and Islamic tutors, assuring especially Islamic tutors like Abubakar that the learning hubs would not stop the children from attending Islamiya or prevent them from hawking to assist their parents.



HALIMA B. SHEHU, SOCIAL MOBILIZATION OFFICER, TAKAI LGA, KANO STATE



“There was a sort of an arrangement that after the Islamiya, the children could then go on to the learning centre. In fact, the learning hub space was donated by one of the Islamiya tutors, to be used after Islamiya classes”, she added, referring to Abubakar’s offering of his compound for the Kachako hub.



“I was happy to give my space for promoting education in my community, as getting a space here in Kachako could be difficult”, Abubakar said, noting the challenge in getting a place like his that is centrally located, easily accessible and spacious for dozens of children in and around Kachako to gather and use every week.

With Abubakar’s compound meeting the specifications for siting the hub in Kachako, Halima and others had a big boost for starting the hub.

Visible Results: Children Learning and Thriving



“We started with only five learners. But with more sensitisation, more outreaches, we went to 20, and then to 50. Today, we have more than 200 who come to the learning hub”, Halima said, confirming the critical role of community advocacy and sensitisation in encouraging parents and guardians to let their wards attend the hub.

The main facilitator at the Kachako hub, Tasiu Sabo, 35, is happy that all these efforts – the training by PLANE, community outreaches by SMOs and SBMCs, Abubakar’s gesture, community ownership of the hub, his volunteering as a facilitator, and other collaborative efforts – have led to many previously underserved children acquiring essential learning skills.



“The children have learned how to write and read as well as do some mathematics. Many of them, including those already enrolled in school, couldn’t read or write before. We even have some Almajiri learners who had never been to school at all. We have those that go to hawk and return. We have some who wouldn’t want to return at the initial stage, but when they saw that we give out exercise books and pencils, they came back. Some of them are refusing to hawk during lesson hours now. The children who are coming here, they are enjoying themselves and so they come. I am very happy and excited to see their enthusiasm to learn”, Tasiu said.



TASIU SABO, FACILITATOR AT THE KACHAKO HUB

The children are not only gaining foundational literacy and numeracy skills, the aim of eventually mainstreaming the Almajiris and other out-of-school children into conventional schools is also being achieved through the hub.



According to Halima - “Up to 70 out-of-school children approached me to be enrolled in a regular school. With the help of the SBMC, they have been enrolled in different primary schools. Some in Kachako, and some in Takai North. Meanwhile most of them still come here after school for the experience of the learning hub.”

For Abubakar, the Kachako hub landlord, he is happy that his decision to embrace formal education with Islamic education is yielding positive outcomes, especially for the Almajiris who were attending only his Qur'anic classes before.



"I'm very, very happy to see that PLANE has so many plans concerning children's education. I realise that they are giving a good chance for our children to learn. Nowadays, it's good for our young ones to learn Western education, together with Islamic education. So, they will grow up with wide knowledge. This will help them in the future to be good citizens, to be good scholars", Abubakar concluded.

Through the hub in Kachako, the Almajiris under the tutelage of Ibrahim are getting to learn with some being encouraged to get into formal school, like Hashimu, who said 'I was in school before I stopped to attend the *Islamiya*.'

Other out-of-school children, like little Hussaina have also enjoyed community support in returning to school.



"I was hawking yam. My parents did not want me to go to school but I later got some people to make uniforms for me and I started attending school", Hussaina, 11, said.

HUSSAINA, KACHAKO HUB LEARNER



LEARNERS GATHER AT COMMUNITY LEARNING HUB FOR FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY AND NUMERACY ACTIVITIES

Scaling Impact Across States

Across Kano, Jigawa and Kaduna states, PLANE has supported the establishment of over 200 community learning hubs, creating safe and inclusive learning spaces. Through targeted advocacy, flexible learning schedules, and community ownership, these hubs have reached over 25,000 children and helped reintegrate many out-of-school children into conventional schools. As more communities embrace this model, the initiative will not only improve foundational literacy and numeracy, but also foster a more inclusive culture that values education for all—regardless of background.

* The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

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