Children Begging for Qur’ānic School Masters

Evidence from West and Central Africa

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Acronyms and abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANPPCAN</td>
<td>African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFA</td>
<td>Communauté Financière Africaine (African Financial Community)</td>
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<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
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<tr>
<td>ENDA</td>
<td>Environnement et Développement du Tiers Monde</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICI</td>
<td>International Cocoa Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO-IPEC</td>
<td>ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUTRENA</td>
<td>Lutte contre le Trafic des Enfants en Afrique de l’Ouest et du Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAEJT</td>
<td>Mouvement Africain des Enfants et Jeunes Travailleurs</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSF</td>
<td>Médecins Sans Frontières</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCW</td>
<td>Understanding Children’s Work</td>
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<td>WACAP</td>
<td>West Africa Cocoa Agriculture Project</td>
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Definitions and labels

Children attending Qur’ānic school go by different labels: **Talibé** (Wolof); **Garibous** (Dioula); **Al-majiri** (Hausa); **Almudos** (Fulbe).

Muslim teachers are labelled differently: **Marabout** (derivative of the Arabic word *Murābit*) is commonly used in Francophone countries; **Mallam** (Hausa version of the Arabic word *Mu’allim*) in Anglophone countries; and occasionally **Alfa** (Yoruba term for a Muslim cleric).

Qur’ānic schools are named differently according to their type and language: Traditional schools are usually called **Daara** (Wolof derivative of the Arabic word *dar*, house) or **Makarantar** (Hausa for a place of learning and reciting), whereas schools associated with Islamic modernism and incorporating other topics than the Qur’ān are called **Madrasa**, plural Madāris (Arabic for school), Arabic schools or Islamiyya schools.

In this paper, the term **Talibé** is used as a generic label for boys (and some girls) learning the Qur’ān in a traditional school, whether they are involved in begging or not. Specific note is made when the information pertain to Talibés who beg.

**Marabout** is used for the Islamic teacher leading the school and teaching children the Qur’ān with or without assistant teachers, and **Daara** for the school.
Preface

A third of all children in West and Central Africa are estimated to work full- or part-time, paid or unpaid. Many of children are involved in hazardous and harmful economic activities, such as working in mines. Some are also exploited for sex and trafficked. Even if the work itself is not hazardous, many working children do not have access to education or drop out of school due to the opportunity costs for parents of keeping children in school and out of work. However, some children do combine work and school and earning an income may enable children to continue their schooling. Where the quality of education is poor or children are exposed to violence in schools, some children may prefer work to school. In some contexts, children derive a sense of meaning and responsibility from their work and the contributions they make to the family. To take them away from work without replacing the meaning and status they may receive can result in worse outcomes.

The prevention and response to child labour and exploitation in the region has fallen short in terms of quality, impact and scale. Over the past decade, much has been learned about what works and what doesn’t in relation to child labour, exploitation and trafficking. Internationally, Understanding Children’s Work (UCW) has done much to strengthen the evidence base. Many other organizations and researchers from different academic perspectives have contributed to a more differentiated analysis of children’s work and of prevention and response efforts (e.g. Bourdillon, Myers, White, Boyden, Liebel, Woodhead).

Reviews and evaluations of anti-trafficking efforts have highlighted the need to distinguish between child migration and child trafficking and to avoid labelling all forms of child movement as child trafficking. These evaluations also emphasise the need for a better understanding of child mobility and the cultural, social and economic foundations of children’s work in a broader context of social and economic mobility. A regional child mobility initiative was launched in 2008 to improve understanding of the cultural foundations of ‘child labour’, ‘child migration’ and ‘child trafficking’ and the role children’s work and mobility plays in children’s socialisation. The work done by the child mobility initiative is an important effort to rethink and redevelop prevention and responses to child labour that take social and cultural concepts of child development and education, social mobility and social protection into account. From this perspective, children and migration are linked to transitions within the life course and to rites of passage, whereby migration is part of becoming an adult, to earn cash and to get married. This perspective complements, and to some extent challenges, other approaches to child labour that focus more narrowly on poverty reduction, human resource development, or the application of international labour standards.

Five thematic briefing papers have been developed for types of child labour that have particular relevance for children in West and Central Africa. The focus is on the most pressing forms of child labour in the region, types of work that are receiving the greatest level of attention and have seen most resistance to change: Children in artisanal quarries and mines; Talibé children (Qur’anic school pupils who are begging) in Sahelian countries; Children in commercial agriculture; Children in the informal urban sector; and Child domestic workers.

The purpose of the child labour briefing papers is to synthesise the empirical evidence of effective approaches to child labour and exploitation and identify approaches that have not worked or are unlikely to work with the current levels of human and financial resources. The briefing papers are aimed towards professionals working on child protection, education and social policy in countries in West and Central Africa. Each briefing paper presents evidence on the following aspects: description of the phenomenon, situation, trends, scale, impact on children; effective approaches to preventing child labour and exploitation.

Acknowledgements: The briefing papers were developed in collaboration between the UNICEF education and child protection sections in West and Central Africa. Materials and comments were provided by country-level child protection and education staff. The regional education section provided the funding for the briefing papers. The papers were researched and written by Dr. Dorte Thorsen, anthropologist at the University of Sussex.
Introduction

This briefing paper focuses on children in Sahelian countries, who are enrolled in Qur’anic schools and beg as part of their education. In the region, Islamic education predates colonization and the establishment of mission and secular state schools. Ideologies about religion, politics and education have shaped how Qur’anic schools have transformed and proliferated over time and have resulted in a wide variety of schools today.

Some schools – the Daaras or Makarantar – are founded on Islamic traditionalism and a Master-disciple pedagogy, while others - the Madāris (Arabic schools) – are founded on Islamic modernism and combine the study of the Qur’ān with subjects from the curriculum of state schools and a teaching style resembling that of state schools. 

Pupils in Madāris pay school fees and are not sent out to beg, whereas education in Daaras often is free or almost free but implies that pupils – Talibés – may beg for alms. However, some Marabouts have found alternative ways of maintaining their Daaras and do not sent their Talibés out to beg.

The specific focus in this paper on Talibés who beg provides a partial picture of religious education in Qur’anic schools.

International agencies, NGOs and media often equate the highly visible phenomenon of child beggars in large cities, such as Dakar, Bamako, Ouagadougou, Niamey, N’Djamena, Kano and Maiduguri with Talibés, and with forced begging. Many Talibés are also perceived to have been trafficked, because they have moved from rural villages to Qur’anic schools in urban areas within their country or in neighbouring countries.

Based on the review of a broad range of literature – spanning from newspaper articles, to reports of commissioned research, to Master and Doctoral theses, to peer reviewed academic publications – this briefing paper aims to unpack why children become Talibés and the conditions in which they live, including the time spent begging. The paper also raises a number of issues that need further investigation.

Situating Talibés in the 2000s

A typical Talibé is a young boy of school-going age, but girls also attend Qur’anic schools. Girls almost always study in Daaras close to their home so they can continue living with their family and they are not sent out to beg. Boys also study close to home but may also relocate to Qur’anic schools away from their family, in which case they are more likely to beg. Begging is usually done by younger students while older ones, who have advanced beyond memorization of the Qur’ān to study mysticism and other core subjects, do not beg but help supervise younger students.

Talibés come from all ethnic groups, especially in countries like Mauritania, Niger, the Gambia, Senegal and Mali and Guinea, where over 85 per cent of the population are Muslims. Some parents use cultural explanations along the lines of ethnic origin to justify why their children are not sent to Daaras where begging is part of the curriculum, e.g. the Felupe, Balantas and Papel of Guinea Bissau.

While children from certain ethnic groups may be overrepresented among the Talibés who beg, using ethnic origin as an explanation for child begging misses important inequalities. Children from some regions are more likely to become Talibés than those from other regions for reasons ranging from lack of access to state schools in

Benin. In 2003, 89 per cent of the Talibés were boys and 11 per cent girls. The Talibés' average age was 12 years. Age at which children begin Qur’anic school:

- 3-4 years: 12 per cent
- 5-8 years: 43 per cent
- 9-12 years: 30 per cent
- 13+ years: 15 per cent

(Sample N=485)

Senegal. In 2009, 25 per cent of the children who left home, studied the Qur’ān. Among the boys, 43 per cent left for this reason compared to 4 per cent of the girls. The mean age for beginning Qur’ānic school was 7.2 years; two in three Talibé had begun before the age of 8 years but only 14 per cent had begun before they turned five. There was a noticeable decline in Talibés older than 12 years. (Sample N=2,400 households)

Mauritania. In 2006, 40 per cent of the Talibés interviewed were aged 6-8 years; 48 per cent 9-10 years and 12 per cent 11 years or above. (Sample N=300 Talibés).
remote areas, to relative poverty, to child circulation within kin groups and to the importance given to religion.\textsuperscript{[15, 30, 49]}

Whether or not children beg as part of their Qur’ânic education depends on the wealth, reputation and moral stance of the Marabout. The fact that more Fulbe than Wolof children (Talibé and non-Talibé) beg in Dakar and two-thirds of the Fulbe child beggars are Talibés,\textsuperscript{[44]} may suggest a variety of things: that they attend poorer Daaras; that they primarily migrate to urban areas to pursue Islamic education; that demand for well-established Daara places is higher than the availability; and for non-Talibés that they either have few urban-based relatives or that these relatives are unable to mediate employment for migrant children. It is therefore important to examine in greater detail why some ethnic groups are overrepresented and to consider issues, such as gender, age, inequality and processes of marginalization.

Census data and the UNESCO education database do not offer much statistical information on the different types of Qur’ânic schools. However, small-scale studies offer some indication of the situation. In Niger, for example, more than 40,000 Qur’ânic schools existed in the early 2000s and in Chad 45 per cent of children in education attended Qur’ânic schools.\textsuperscript{[19]} Similarly in Senegal, around the same number of children were educated in Qur’ânic schools as in state schools in 1991.\textsuperscript{[39]} In two of the Sufi city-states — Toubia of the Murides (Wolof) and Medina Gounass of the Tijaniyya (Fulbe) — the Caliphs closed state schools in the 1990s due to the fact that the number of children attending Madâris was decreasing and to prevent a further drain of students away from Islamic education.\textsuperscript{[30]}

The rejection of state schools cannot be explained by Islamic traditionalism. The first Madrasa in Toubia in Senegal opened in 1969.\textsuperscript{[37]} In northern Nigeria the Fityan al-Islam organization is behind a great proliferation of Islamiyya schools (Madâris). They opened the first school in 1972; by 1983 they ran 183 schools and taught 11,835 students in Kano state alone, and by 2000 they had 2,881 schools with 302,514 students across northern Nigeria.\textsuperscript{[48, 49]} In Mali and Burkina Faso, Daaras are important educational institutions, whereas in northern Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire and Cameroon they have gradually been replaced by Madâris.\textsuperscript{[19, 35]}

Without reliable statistical data, it is difficult to assess the importance of Qur’ânic schools vis-à-vis state schools and the degree to which children enrolled in public schools also pursue religious education outside school hours, as studies in Cameroon\textsuperscript{[20]} and Ghana\textsuperscript{[13]} show. Furthermore, it is impossible to assess the number of pupils enrolled in different types of Qur’ânic schools, let alone in Daaras, which are among the most marginalized institutions in the educational system.\textsuperscript{[30]}

**Reasons Why Children Become Talibés**

Some reports argue that poor parents send children away, including to study in Daaras, to reduce the number of mouths to feed within the household.\textsuperscript{[15, 44, 46]} This is a utilitarian but too simplified view of long-standing child circulation and fostering practices. This view reduces family decisions to pure economics without considering the importance for children and parents of strengthening social alliances, the prospects for education,\textsuperscript{[24, 34, 38]} and, in certain communities, of dissociating themselves from the stigma of slave origin.\textsuperscript{[28]} The poverty narrative assumes that children are consumers and not producers.\textsuperscript{[34]} Although parents often mention poverty as a reason for sending children to Qur’ânic schools, poverty cannot be used as an
explanatory factor in isolation. The decision to send one or more children to a Daara is intertwined with religious and moral norms, pedagogical beliefs, and parents' own experience and broader processes of marginalisation and exclusion.\textsuperscript{[9]} Moreover, not all Talibés come from the poorest quintile.\textsuperscript{[17, 26]}

In the Sahel, with its long history of Islam, many parents give priority to studying the Qur’ān and the Daara system is deeply embedded in how many people think about education.\textsuperscript{[5, 15, 16, 28, 44]} Parents’ motivations for sending a child to a distant Qur’ānic school are part of their own religious beliefs. By ensuring the reproduction of religious practices and sacrificing the benefits of keeping children at home, parents hope to be rewarded by Allah.\textsuperscript{[17, 34]} Their religious position vis-à-vis their local community of Muslims may also influence educational choices, as the family’s social standing may increase if their children study the Qur’ān successfully or they have good relations with a powerful Marabout.\textsuperscript{[17, 34]} Finally, parents are motivated by their aspirations for their children, as they believe Talibés acquire life skills and come closer to Allah by studying the Qur’ān.\textsuperscript{[3]} Those who advance in their Islamic studies will earn respect and accumulate symbolic and material wealth by: leading prayers, writing charms and making protective amulets, and by becoming part of vibrant and influential networks of Islamic scholars.\textsuperscript{[34, 38]}

Parents rarely send all their children to Qur’ānic schools. In poor communities, it is common to diversify children’s educational paths by enrolling at least one child in formal education, sending one or more children to a Qur’ānic school, arrange apprenticeships, keeping some children at home to work on the farm, while permitting others to migrate for work or to help relatives.\textsuperscript{[26, 28, 31, 42]} Many parents carefully consider whether a child can endure the hardship of living in a Daara and whether the chosen Marabout has a good reputation and provides his students with opportunities for a better future.\textsuperscript{[14, 17, 28]}

Poverty plays a role at a more structural level. The generally poor socio-economic situation of most countries in the region, and in particular of rural regions, means that few public services are available for the rural population.\textsuperscript{[17]} The choice is not necessarily between enrolling a child in the local primary school or sending him to a Daara elsewhere. It may be between sending a child to a relative to get access to formal schooling and sending a child to a Marabout; or sending a child away to pursue formal education instead of being in the local Qur’ānic school.\textsuperscript{[15, 17, 57]} Decisions are rooted in the availability and quality of education options.

The appeal of public schools may have decreased due to spending cuts, deregulation and privatisation following neo-liberal economic policies,\textsuperscript{[30, 49]} and to young people’s difficulties finding paid employment after completing basic education.\textsuperscript{[16]} However, parents are sometimes critical of the local Qur’ānic schools too and justify sending children to distant Daaras in order to ensure education of higher quality.\textsuperscript{[17]} Generally, parents appreciate a broader education for their children, combining the study of the Qur’ān with literacy, numeracy and other skills that enhance the children’s job prospects.\textsuperscript{[3, 15, 17]}

There are few indications in the reviewed literature of children’s own reasons for pursuing education in Islamic institutions. Some children obey the wishes of their parents despite having other preferences, others may be motivated by the prospect of future travels.\textsuperscript{[3, 17]} Given the importance of migration for rural, and perhaps also urban, children\textsuperscript{[21]} and the number of West African students enrolled in Islamic colleges and universities in Morocco,\textsuperscript{[100]} programming needs to examine children’s own motivations for enrolling in Qur’ānic education.
Ways in Which Talibés Become Beggars

Many children are placed with a Marabout by their parents or, occasionally, by another relative who takes responsibility for their education outside the home.\[^{[3, 5, 15, 17, 26, 31, 34, 46]}\] A small number of Talibés join a Marabout on their own account.\[^{[3]}\] Although research focusing on Talibé beggars has examined parents’ motives for sending children to Qur’ānic schools and Marabouts’ teaching practices, little is known about how parents choose a Daara for their children or how Marabouts recruit students for their Daara.

Explanations of why Talibés have to beg, highlight the need of the Marabout to feed the children in his Daara, since poor parents do not pay any fees to the Marabout.\[^{[3, 17]}\] Some religious teachers are accused of being ‘false Marabouts’ who do not teach the Qur’ān and force children to beg by dispensing harsh punishments if they do not bring back a fixed amount of money every day.\[^{[22, 44, p. 41]}\]

At one end of the spectrum, Marabouts are represented as having no other choice than sending Talibés out to beg. This is linked with deteriorating rural economies over the past forty years or more. In the past, many Qur’ānic schools were rural, where students lived on the Marabout’s farm, took a place similar to that of an unmarried son in terms of productive activities, and learned the Qur’ān at dawn and dusk.\[^{[38]}\] Generally, the local community supported the Marabouts’ work, and some Daaras housed up to 100 Talibés.\[^{[8, 16, 55]}\]

The severe droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, persistent economic crises and the effects of structural adjustment programmes have decreased people’s ability and willingness to support large Qur’ānic schools. This has resulted in the shrinking size of schools and an increase in expenses for the Marabouts.\[^{[3, 6, 8, 17]}\] Alongside the migration of rural people to cities and towns\[^{[44]}\], the adverse economic climate has also prompted transformations in the economic base of many Marabouts. Brotherhoods, like the Muridiyyah of Senegal, which was founded on groundnut cultivation,\[^{[16]}\] have shifted their base from rural to urban economies,\[^{[7]}\] leading to the evolution of new forms of Qur’ānic schools.\[^{[28]}\] This transformation is often used to explain the increasing numbers of Talibés begging in the streets. However, since not all Qur’ānic school students beg, it is important to examine whether urban Talibés are involved in other types of remunerative activities.

At the other end of the spectrum, Marabouts are portrayed as exploitative and as recruiting Talibés with the purpose of increasing their revenues by forcing children to beg. Evidence of Talibés spending time begging instead of receiving an education has been documented for more than a decade in Senegal\[^{[32]}\] and Nigeria.\[^{[21]}\] As such malpractice may be possible due to lack of state or religious regulation, it is important to examine the political economy of education in each country to understand why the state has not issued, or does not enforce, legislation to regulate religious education.

At this end of the spectrum, children’s relocation to urban Daaras is often analysed through the lens of trafficking. Contrary to migrant children working in cocoa framing, who are described as having been bought, migrant Talibés are seen as victims of trafficking primarily due to the begging. Relocation to neighbouring countries or over long distances adds to the perception of these children being vulnerable.\[^{[22]}\] The prevalence
of migrant Talibés differs greatly from one country to another, but existing studies do not allow to say whether this is linked to general migration patterns or other dynamics.

The importance of social relations between the Marabout and his Talibés is rarely mentioned despite the fact that around half the children learn the Qur'an under a Marabout with whom they are related, or with whom older siblings or children from the village have studied. Many of the children travelling from their home to the Daara with the Marabout are thus travelling with a close or distant relative in agreement with their parents or guardians.

To avoid blanket accusations of trafficking, parents’ response to situations in which children are exploited need to be examined, as do the ways in which this may transform educational strategies in the long run. Important questions to ask are whether parents send their children to other types of schools, to other Marabouts, travel to urban Daaras to check on the conditions and, if their practices appear unchanged despite reports of maltreatment of children, why they do not believe such reports.

Terms of Learning and Living in Daaras
Traditionally, the education offered in Daaras is at the elementary level. Students begin to learn the Qur'an by rote and then gradually learn to read and write Arabic through writing verses on wooden slates. The most common pedagogical methods are one-on-one teaching or small-group teaching of students at the same level of learning but of different ages. This is a significant difference from public schools, where the teacher-to-pupil ratio often is considerably higher. In Burkina Faso, for example, the average ratio was one teacher to 55.3 pupils in 2007/2008. Like in state schools, some Marabouts use corporal punishment to discipline their students when they misbehave or recite verses from the Qur'an incorrectly. The length of elementary education varies between four and ten years, depending on the child’s aptitude, the Marabout’s pedagogical skills and the time devoted to studying. Only the youngest students (under 15 years of age) beg. Older students are less numerous as they have proceeded to more advanced studies or have left the Daara to work.

In the literature on forced begging the time dedicated to studying is often used as an indicator of whether a Marabout has genuine educational motives or primarily is interested in the money Talibés can beg. Talibés who study the Qur'an most of the day and only beg around meal times are usually seen as being in accordance with tradition and not as involved in forced begging. The Talibés who study primarily at dawn and dusk or in the evening are more difficult to assess. First, Daaras do not offer full-time education only. In some places, traditional Qur'anic schools have transformed to give children the possibility of studying the Qur'an outside normal school or work hours, as is the case in Ghana. In Benin, Marabouts sometimes support Talibés’ formal education but it is also common that parents or other relatives pay for the expenses related to

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1 Jacquemin’s study of child domestic workers in Côte d’Ivoire shows that parents adapt with whom they place daughters in response to girls being given disappointingly low compensation for their work and Thorsen’s study of rural child migrants in Burkina Faso that parents worry about exploitation and maltreatment.
formal education. In Côte d’Ivoire, migrant children sometimes combine work with religious education. Daaras organised around children’s work or begging for the Marabout are in line with the way in which rural farm and itinerant Qur’anic schools functioned in the past, but Talibés may also spend so much time begging that it is at the expense of their achievements in school. 

No comparative analysis has been done of study hours in countries, such as Senegal, where Talibés often beg. Ghana, where Daaras provide after-school religious education and the Gambia, where a ban on begging is enforced and Marabouts are interviewed by the police if any of their students are found begging. 

Number of study hours is just one indicator among others and the diversity in educational practices makes it an inadequate proxy indicator of exploitation.

Talibés begging in the street walk long distances to stand at crossroads, mosques, pass restaurants, markets, banks and bus stations where they hope to receive alms in food or cash. Talibés may also work in the urban informal economy or collect firewood to sell for the Marabout. Talibés interviewed by Human Rights Watch in 2010 revealed that, while some Talibés only beg a couple of hours per day, others beg up to 10 hours most days.

Some Marabouts in Senegal set begging quotas which they expect their students to meet. Such quotas include rice, sugar or money.

The sums Talibés earn through begging are relatively small and few marabouts make large profits, though in some of the very large Daaras the sheer number of Talibés means that some Marabouts earn more than is needed to maintain the Daara.

Certain Marabouts demand higher quotas on Thursdays and Fridays to benefit from the piety of people attending the mosques, which in turn requires Talibés to beg up to 16 hours on those days. This practice is most common in Dakar where the average begging quota is 40 per cent higher on Fridays, whereas in other large cities the quota is unchanged or only slightly higher. It is therefore important to examine local practices surrounding begging in each context. Much attention has been focused on the time Talibés spend begging to meet their Marabout’s quota and to obtain sufficient food for themselves. This tends to overshadow information about Talibés’ other activities. In Burkina Faso, a study showed that 98 per cent of Talibés do not work, but it is important to examine the extent to which Talibés also work or attend other forms of education. Talibés interviewed in both Senegal and Burkina Faso revealed that they may also spend time on leisure activities with or without their Marabout’s consent.

Risks, Abuse and Punishment

Talibés can be subject to abuse at many levels. A number of studies suggest that sending children to Qur’anic schools amounts to child abuse because of the begging involved, the fact that many Talibés are dirty and wear rags when they are on the streets to beg, and Marabouts’ use of corporal punishment. Furthermore, it is suggested that many Talibés are trafficked. Such broad generalisations are not useful because they ignore the diversity in children’s experiences. While some Talibés find the living conditions in the Daara so

| Senegal. Average begging quota in 2010 (in CFA francs) |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Dakar             | 463               | 642               |
| Saint-Louis       | 228               | 228               |
| Thiès             | 254               | 268               |
| Mbour             | 246               | 246               |

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<td>54 per cent of Talibés spent time on leisure activities, such as table football (34 per cent), video clubs (31 per cent) and football (18 per cent).</td>
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| Benin. 46.2 per cent of Talibés also pursued formal education and of these, 68.5 per cent were supported by their Marabout while 24.3 per cent were supported by others, 2.8 per cent had their school fees paid for by an NGO and 2.2 per cent paid their own school fees. |
deplorable that they return home or choose to live in the streets, others find they are treated appropriately even if punished from time to time.\\[17, 22, 40\\]

Parent’s acceptance of different forms of suffering must be understood in its local context. First, parents who perceive begging as work, are not necessarily concerned about their children spending more time working than studying, especially not if the children retain some of the money they earn. In contrast, parents who are opposed to child begging are unlikely to choose Daaras where begging is involved.

Second, the issue of appearance may result from poor living conditions and the Marabout’s negligence, but it may also be the ‘dress code’ for beggars in general to increase their chances of receiving alms. Elsewhere it has been shown that the right demeanor is important and also that young children are successful in begging due to people feeling pity for them, whereas older children earn much less because people think they are lazy or delinquent (Ethiopia, Haiti, and Indonesia). The differences between Daaras with regard to how Talibés are treated, the sufficiency of food and treatment in case of illness affects a child’s development. Research suggests that Talibés may be stunted in their growth due to malnutrition, endemic and untreated diseases. While such evidence should influence policy responses, it is also important to examine the impact on children’s physical development comparatively to ascertain whether siblings at home or living with other relatives are better off.

Third, the issue of corporal punishment needs to be analysed in greater depth. Adults may consider the sanctions they inflict on children to have a positive effect on children’s behaviour and socialisation. Disciplining may involve deprivations of various types – from withholding food to barring the child from watching TV – corporal punishment, such as a slap or a beating and verbal abuse and curses. Talibés’ experiences of discipline are diverse and so are parents’ views on harsh forms of disciplining. Some fathers have themselves been severely beaten in Qur’anic schools but are not deterred from sending their sons to a Marabout, and yet not all parents approve of the harsh treatment of Talibés.

Finally, children begging in the street are vulnerable to the risks of traffic accidents. Talibés may also be verbally abused while begging. Some Talibés may become street children if they leave the Daara and do not feel they can return home. Some children join kin or other social relations in the migrant community aim to become successful migrants. To find children integrating into the migrant community is difficult but would be of interest for programming.

Implications for Children of Begging as Part of their Qur’anic Schooling

The mediatised images of skinny Talibés in rags begging in the street give a very strong impression of the suffering to which these children are subjected. However, the images are offered without contextualising the importance of mobility in the Sahelian countries, local practices of child rearing, and general educational constraints shaped by economic hardship and government policies. Knowledge is also lacking about local
norms that may protect children from a variety of risks in places of education, play and residence. The image of begging talibés often hints at a critique of Muslim parents and Marabouts, which does not take fully into account changes that are already happening, such as the development of Madâris for full-time education and Daaras that are suited to children who attend state schools or work. The hazards should not be ignored but the failure to see that so-called traditional practices are changing in diverse ways, hinders identifying how best to protect and support these children and their families.

**Child Development, Education and Learning**

It is important to look at local practices of child rearing to understand the underlying ideologies among adults for the expectations they have of boys and girls of different ages but also for understanding the expectations children and young people have of their parents. The relocation of children for educational purposes is rooted in the view that children do not belong to the birth parents only but to the extended kin group. Consequently, a child’s socialisation and learning of various skills is the responsibility of a large group of people.

This is particularly important when the child is related to the Marabout through kinship, as were at least one-fifth of the Talibés interviewed in Benin in 2001.[3]

Educational relocation is also rooted in the belief that distance helps children adapt to all kinds of situations and stand on their own feet.[46] Some studies portray the sending of children to Qur’anic schools as parental neglect and as a denial of a proper childhood. Talibés are reported to miss their parents and parents to be withholding contact to prevent Talibés from running away from the Daara. Other studies report that parents miss and worry about children who have left.[3, 15, 17, 21] Parents and children regularly state that good education involves repressing emotions and being able to endure. Suffering in different forms is accepted as an integral part of socialisation and of acquiring knowledge.[12, 16, 17]

Parents’ views on the virtues of Qur’anic schools vary. Generally, Daaras are viewed as important educational institutions, and some parents in Senegal argue that in addition to learning the Qur’ân, rural children learn about the urban economy, other languages and cultures when studying away from home.[17, 34] In their view, urban and rural Daaras are similar and the only difference is that urban Talibés ‘farm’ is the street and their ‘crop’ is money instead of groundnuts.[34, p. 63] Underlying this perspective is a conceptualisation of begging as work and a reluctance to criticise a religious authority, such as the Marabout.

However, other parents, as well as child rights advocates, stress that Talibés spend excessive amounts of time begging for alms and note that the children may not attain the level of religious knowledge they and their parents had hoped for.[17, 46] As these Talibés are also likely to miss out on technical training and on gaining skills in farming, it is argued that the children’s Qur’ân studies may end up undermining their future possibilities.[17] Underlying this perspective is a broad critique of Daaras. Yet, it is questionable whether Talibés’ job prospects are undermined in reality. Many Talibés leave their studies in their early teens when they join the pool of young people with little education who compete for jobs in the informal economy. They are neither better nor worse off than other children and youth of this age when it comes to finding employment. Although recommendations were made in 2001 by an assembly of authorities from the Muslim community, law enforcing institutions and child protection officers in Benin to incorporate practical skills training in Qur’anic schools,[3] the reviewed literature does not address this issue.

**Educational Trajectories and Upward Social Mobility**

The focus on Talibés who beg provides an account of living and learning conditions in Daaras that does not distinguish between students of different ages. No accounts exist of the progression from entry-level Qur’anic student to more specialised Islamic learning and becoming assistant teachers. Apart from situations where Talibés leave their Daara to live on the streets, little is known about Talibés’ activities once they finish Qur’anic
school and make the transition to income-earning activities. To enrich the understanding of parental choices regarding the type of education they send their children to, it is important to identify how studying in a Daara may impact positively or negatively children’s prospects for the future.

Policy and Programme Initiatives

This paper examines recent child protection work implemented to protect children who beg on the streets as part of their education in Qur’anic boarding schools and assesses the effectiveness of programme initiatives. Given the paucity in statistical data on children’s education in religious institutions and the focus on one of several forms of Islamic education, effectiveness cannot be measured in numbers of students. A more qualitative assessment is needed of whether policies and programmes are based on a nuanced understanding of the circumstances in which children are sent to Daaras, of local notions of childhood and education and of alternatives to education in urban Daaras.

International policy is premised on the idea that many Talibés have been trafficked and that children are forced to beg at the expense of their education. The presence of children in the streets during school hours supports the perception of children not being protected. This perception is based on a globalised notion of childhood according to which children should have a care-free childhood and be in school. Internationally-funded programmes that aim to rescue children from exploitation highlight opposing views on Talibé begging. While Marabouts and parents are concerned about attempts to curb children’s education in Qur’anic schools and do not see children’s mobility as trafficking, child rights advocates, NGOs and civil servants are concerned about practices they consider as a violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).[^30]^ [^17]

National policy environments are ambiguous. On the one hand, several countries have legislated to address the problem of Talibé begging[^15] and the trafficking of children linked with Daaras.[^52] However, religious education is changing over time and the proliferation of different forms of Qur’anic schools is a response to changing political economies, whether driven by Islamic clerics, the state or the international community.

Preventing Talibés from Begging: prohibition, awareness raising and education

Programmes to address Talibé begging began several decades ago but the international push for child protection legislation increased after the ratification of the CRC in 1989.[^47] The only country in West Africa to implement an outright ban on begging is the Gambia, where security forces routinely enforce the law against Marabouts who send Talibés begging.[^17, ^52] International organisations advocate for similar measures in other countries,[^15] but enforcing laws requires support from political and religious leaders, as well as the general public. Most preventive measures target child trafficking. In Senegal the ‘Law to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Related Practices and to Protect Victims’ of 2005 devotes a section to forced begging and the vulnerability of children. Accordingly, anyone found guilty of organising or pressuring another person to beg can be fined or imprisoned. However, considering the scale of Daara education involving begging, few persons have been prosecuted. This suggests that the government is taking some action but falls short of protecting Talibés due to a lack of leadership and the thorny political issue of regulating religious education.[^15]

Other interventions seek to prevent begging by subsidising Daaras through food aid, clothing or assistance to construct better sleeping facilities. Some Marabouts also have received direct income support as incentives or compensation to stop sending their pupils out to beg. However, these interventions are being replaced by activities that target Talibés directly because of concerns that assistance to Marabouts could create incentives for Marabouts to relocate Daaras to urban areas.[^34, ^44] Assistance to Marabouts can be seen on a par with

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[^17]: Senegal. Neighbours’ allegations of forcing children to beg resulted in the arrest of a man, who was then found to have trafficked children from Guinea Bissau. A few other Marabouts were awaiting trial for similar offenses.[^52]

[^52]: Guinea Bissau. The main traffickers come from Bafata and Gabu, where they operate openly and are protected by their status in the Muslim community.[^52]
Universal Primary Education policies that provide school lunches, school infrastructure in the form of school buildings and furniture and salaries for teachers. This is not only a thorny political issue globally but also nationally. Countries, such as Senegal, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso and Chad promote secular public education systems despite the popularity of Islamic schools. This has hindered state-driven reforms of religious education.\textsuperscript{50} Interventions by international organisations are likely to be seen as unwelcome interference with sovereign politics.\textsuperscript{50,2}

Anti-trafficking initiatives supported by IPEC’s LUTRENA programme focused on capacity-building of government and non-governmental agencies addressing the trafficking of children. Current policy recommendations point to the need for further capacity-building in relation to services dealing with children who beg as part of their Qur’ānic studies.\textsuperscript{15, 45, 46, 47} In Guinea Bissau, for example, police officers have been trained to intercept groups of children who are, or are perceived to be, trafficked within the country or between countries.\textsuperscript{17, 47, 52} These children are repatriated to their village after a short stay in an NGO-run transit centre while their parents are being located.\textsuperscript{17}

Interventions also include awareness-raising campaigns targeting the ‘supply-side’, namely the parents or guardians who are assumed to be unaware of the extent to which their children beg, the level of corporal punishment or low attainment of religious knowledge among Talibés. However, this approach fails to take into account the diverse reasons underlying parents’ decisions to send a child to a Qur’ānic school. Parents may feel antipathy towards civil servants and NGOs implementing anti-trafficking measures if they see these efforts as attempts to reduce educational and social opportunities for their children.\textsuperscript{16, 17, 34} Awareness-raising campaigns also target the ‘demand-side’\textsuperscript{3} to make the general public aware of exploitative practices and the fact that alms given to Talibés may not benefit the children.\textsuperscript{15, 16, 34}

Awareness-raising campaigns include press releases and public statements featured in national newspapers and on radio and TV programmes.\textsuperscript{34,47} Child rights activists may frame awareness-raising in terms of children’s rights to education or to have a childhood. This framing is premised on a globalised notion of childhood according to which children lack protection and suffer when they are away from their family. Local authorities, including some Marabouts, are more likely to stress institutional failures pertaining to the under-performance of some Qur’ānic schools or the malpractice of Marabouts who are more interested in material gains than in teaching the Qur’ān to the students.\textsuperscript{17, p. 57}

Finally, anti-begging measures supported by international organisations have focused on education. Recent interventions have been targeted directly at Talibés, supporting a variety of combinations of secular and Qur’ānic education,\textsuperscript{16, 17, 53} as well as second chance education in the form of a condensed curriculum, a shorter alphabetisation programme or technical training.\textsuperscript{44, 45} Furthermore, interventions aim to enhance the access to education in rural areas. This is done by aiding parents economically through social transfers to ensure they can afford to keep children in school\textsuperscript{47} and by assisting Marabouts to return to rural areas.

Child Protection Services

By the late 1990s, child rights organisations and NGOs had taken over policy responses to Talibés begging and implemented programmes that put Talibés on a par with street children.\textsuperscript{44} NGO-driven response services to assist Talibés and other children begging on the streets have proliferated and a large number of NGOs are involved in the provision of such child protective services.\textsuperscript{17, 47} The provision of drop-in centres, shelters and

\footnotesize{2} Please note that academic research is underway on the issue of parental preferences and religious education in Senegal, Mali and Niger. See http://www.institutions-africa.org/page/religious-education.

\footnotesize{3} ‘Demand-side’ refers to the duty of Muslims to give alms and to the widespread popular belief that giving to poor children is a good deed that will be rewarded spiritually or materially.

Senegal. A pilot project implemented by ENDA GRAF supported the return of one Marabou to his village by investing in buildings for the Daara, a well and training in new agricultural techniques. This was seen as a means to make village-based Daaras attractive to prevent parents from sending children to urban-based Daaras.\textsuperscript{44}
telephone hotlines is aimed at all children in vulnerable situations. The centres often provide material support in the form of food, clothing, health care, psychological support and legal advice. \cite{17, 22, 44, 47} Some centres also have staff who provide outreach services for Talibés and street children. Another initiative is to find ‘foster mothers’ for Talibés, i.e. to find a woman who is willing to take on the responsibility of feeding one Talibé every day, provide him with clothes and support the child emotionally. \cite{47}

Finally, some NGOs support the repatriation of Talibés found begging in the streets. Such programmes are often represented as rescue missions aiding children at risk who need assistance to return to their families. Repatriation and reintegration programmes have to be voluntary and need to include specialised psychosocial care and support and appropriate education, vocational training and livelihood options. Many poorly implemented reintegration programmes fail because they do not consider the educational, social and economic aspirations of parents and children.\cite{16, 17} There is a need to develop a broader range of educational and economic options for Talibés, including in the urban areas to which they have migrated. Sending them back home and expecting them to go to school cannot be the only option.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Guinea Bissau. An eight-year-old Talibé who was repatriated from Senegal described how he had been lured to a reception centre by the promise of money, only to be trapped in the centre and repatriated one week later.\cite{17, p. 55} According to one government officer in Guinea Bissau, all they did was to take children from one punishment to another. Repatriated boys were given money to give to their fathers, which would be enough to buy rice for two weeks. Otherwise the children were not supported and rarely pursued education, technical training or found jobs.\cite{17, p. 40-42}}
\end{figure}

\textbf{Regularisation of Education in Daaras}

In some countries the reform of traditional Qur’ānic schools has created a viable alternative to secular state schools.\cite{16, 29} Yet, Marabouts are divided on the subject of regularising education in \textit{Daaras} by integrating subjects from the public education system. Some see state schools as corrupting and uprooting children from their cultural values and Qur’ānic schools as places that teach humanistic values, while others see the advantage in combining Qur’ānic studies with a broader curriculum.\cite{1, 5} In Benin and Guinea Bissau there is broad support for the standardisation of the curriculum and of methods of teaching in Qur’ānic schools. Consultations with \textit{Marabouts} reveal that they ask for assistance to provide the basic needs for children which normally are met by parents and guardians, or demand the same subsidies as government schools.\cite{1, 3, 5, 16, 17} With regard to the curriculum, modernised \textit{Daaras} resemble \textit{Madāris}.\cite{16} Reformed Qur’ānic schools, such as the Arabic schools, place emphasis on religious studies and some secular topics but use Arabic as the language of instruction. Modern schools, such as the Arabic-English and the Franco-Arab schools, cover most or all of the government curriculum in addition to studying the Qur’ān.\cite{1, 13, 17, 19, 29, 34, 50} Some countries, such as Ghana, have government schools that offer a programme of religious and Arabic language studies, which is a trade-off between having teachers and textbooks paid for by the government and a curriculum that limits the number of hours allocated to studying the Qur’ān.\cite{13} In Mali, Chad and Senegal, students in Franco-Arab schools sit exams recognised by the state.\cite{16, 19, 50} As these are private schools, fees have to be paid. In Senegal, for example, fees of $5 to $15 were paid per seven-month school year.\cite{34} The teaching in these types of schools resembles the way in which children are taught in secular schools.

Parents are generally positive about modern Qur’ānic schools because they see them as more efficient, as teaching children additional subjects to the Qur’ān and as inclusive because girls can also pursue Qur’ānic education.\cite{13, 34} What keeps some parents from sending their children to improved schools are the costs, but there is scope for developing Islamic schools further to offer an alternative to state schools for Muslim children.\cite{13}
Questions that Need Further Investigation

• Why does uneven representation of ethnic groups occur in Daaras? How do gender (notions of masculinity), age, poverty and processes of marginalisation impact on uneven patterns of Daara attendance?

• Examine the political economies of education to understand why the state has not issued – or does not enforce – legislation to regulate religious education?

• How do parents choose a Daara? How do Marabouts recruit students?

• How do parents respond to situations in which their children are exploited? How do such responses impact on common educational strategies?

• Is the physical development of a Talibé different from that of his siblings back home or living with other relatives?

• What are children's motivations for studying in Qur’anic schools?

• Do Talibé migration patterns reflect general migration flows in West Africa?

• What do former Talibés do for a living? What are their career options and paths?

• How do former Talibés integrate in migrant communities?

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57. Author’s observations in Burkina Faso and/or Côte d’Ivoire.