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Options for Africa's Child Welfare Systems from Nigeria's Unsustainable Multicultural Models

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Abstract: The sustainability of Africa's existing child welfare systems remains uncertain, potentially owing to the maltreatment of children amid the competing worldviews of the continent's indigenous and non-indigenous practices and international childcare models. This article focuses on Nigeria's unsustainable multicultural child welfare system in order to highlight the inherent challenges of child welfare systems in Africa and proffer remedies. Seven discernible trends derived from available indigenous sources of information and scholarly literature on Nigeria are used as mind maps to describe and discuss Nigeria's multicultural characteristics and childcare practices. From the discussion, the country's child welfare challenges manifest in the following forms: ethnocultural, or more specifically, ethnoreligious diversity; the infiltration of Nigeria by non-native worldviews; colonial legacies; vacillating post-colonial social policies; conceptual ambiguities in non-indigenous welfare terminologies; and persistent unnecessary professional rivalries, which are also present in other African countries. As remedies, three transformative response options for the sustainability of the Nigerian child welfare system and those of other African countries are recommended: embracing cultural relativity regarding child maltreatment, leveraging the transformative and expanded mandates of the social work profession for the development of effective and sustainable child welfare systems, and using research and systems thinking as a driver for transforming professional rivalries into multidisciplinary approaches.

Keywords: Africa's child welfare systems; child maltreatment; childcare models; cultural relativity; Nigerian childcare practices; social work profession; sustainability; transformative responses

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1. Introduction

The objective of this article is to offer potential options for a sustainable Nigerian child welfare system in the 21st century and beyond, and by extension, for many African countries' child welfare systems. Therefore, this paper aims to highlight and address the unsustainability of existing African child welfare models with respect to their multicultural dispensations and varying worldviews by focusing on Nigerian unviable childcare practices. In particular, the political, cultural, social, and economic sustainability of African existing child welfare systems remains uncertain due to an increasing amount of child abuse, neglect, and maltreatment in many African countries.

Child maltreatment is a global and ancient phenomenon [1]. The history of what may be regarded as child maltreatment spans all civilizations (i.e., Western, Eastern, Islamic, Asian, and Middle Ages and Enlightenment civilizations) and exists in the modern day. Fortunately, the prevention of child abuse and neglect is a focus of modern child welfare systems, both globally and nationally. Famuyiwa [2] recommended that scientific studies ascertain the epidemiological data of child abuse and neglect in the third world. The increasing child maltreatment in Africa suggests that the continent's existing child welfare systems have yet to find a sociopolitical and culturally sustainable solution. The coinage of the term "battered child syndrome" in the clinical profession (circa 1962) did not grasp the sociocultural complexity of what is considered child abuse and neglect [1]. Even in

Nigeria's multicultural context, the syndrome remains understudied [3]. The different manifestations of child maltreatment suggest that a more effective and sustainable child welfare system would require a comprehensive knowledge of child maltreatment's socioeconomic and cultural occurrences, causes, and consequences in a range of settings. In addition, Famuyiwa [2] highlighted that attempts at an integrative declaration of child maltreatment are often fraught with over-inclusiveness, perhaps as in a cross-cultural and international study by Korbin [4].

In other words, what may be regarded as abuse and neglect around the world is culturally relative, at least from a sociological point of view. A global but culturally sustainable interpretation of child maltreatment may be necessary. In Africa, what is regarded as abuse and neglect varies according to families' and ethnic groups' values and beliefs as well as the varying socioeconomic and political worldviews of the country's indigenous societies. Furthermore, the age range that defines a "child" varies across sociocultural traditions, even in current country-specific social policies. Africa is a continent that has been inhabited by several indigenous ethnocultural groups over the millennia, each with its own indigenous worldview that influences how the group organizes itself and sustains everyday living, with implications for ethnocultural-related child welfare practices. As a matter of fact, the sociocultural, political, and economic sustainability of the indigenous political units and welfare practices were somehow secured for centuries, but the continent was later infiltrated by non-indigenous worldviews, specifically, the Arabs' Islamic and Judeo-Christian worldviews. Unfortunately, it was the magnitude of the inhumane slave trade by the Arabs and Europeans "predicated on the existing age-long and pre-colonial internecine rivalries and wars among the ancient societies" [5] (p. 61) that accounted for the many indigenous Africans in diaspora prior to the 20th century.

The infiltration and the historical slave practices, among other factors, were particularly threatening to sociocultural sustainability of the indigenous child welfare practices and were precursors to the unstable and ineffective child welfare systems in Africa. That is to say, the trans-Sahara slave trade and Arabic worldview infiltration of ancient African chiefdoms, city states, kingdoms, and empires replaced some of them with emirates and sultanates. The European colonialization and partition, as a consequence of the events following the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 [6], later merged the old geopolitical units into various new political units. The merger led to the carving out of a number of culturally diverse or heterogeneous nations, including Nigeria, the most populous African nation. Both the initial Islamic worldview infiltration and the later European colonization of the continent (with the exception of Ethiopia) contributed significantly to the disruption of indigenous welfare practices in Africa. Hence, modern African child welfare systems are now more complex than before. This complexity is rooted in the continent's ethnocultural diversity; its past and present socioeconomic and political upheavals, including those facilitated by non-indigenous worldviews and colonialists; and the current input of international organizations. Furthermore, the sustainability of current child welfare systems in Africa may be difficult to guarantee now and in the future due to prevailing domestic ethnoreligious hostility and competition for political power, and the seemingly new external scramble for markets and economic advantages.

Nevertheless, just as country-specific sociocultural traditions shape social welfare and, by extension, models of child welfare in many modern countries [5,7], the various native social welfare practices were greatly hampered among the different ethnocultural groups and geopolitical units that were carved out and named Nigeria. A subunit of the Nigerian social welfare system is the child welfare system, which seems inadequately captured by the modern generalization that is foreign to indigenous Nigerian ethnocultural groups. Such foreign but functional concepts are child development, child protection, and family service developed around the role of government, problem definition, and mode of intervention [8]. They are likely inadequate to describe the complex childcare and upbringing practices in Nigeria's multicultural context, even challenging the existence and sustainability of many indigenous ethnocultural childcare practices. Thus, amid the need

for sustainable and effective options of child welfare systems in Africa, this paper describes and discusses the Nigerian child welfare system to highlight inherent hostilities and the growing challenges in African child welfare in relation to modern functional concepts of childcare practices.

2. Concepts of Sustainability and Child Welfare System, and Significance of the Paper

Key concepts in this article are sustainability and child welfare system. First, sustainability has been argued as a term that has multiple meanings and is in danger of overuse [9]. The 1987 Brundtland Report used the term sustainable development to refer to impending global environmental and economic challenges. In other words, the environmental sciences have dominated the global sustainability agenda. However, as humans use language to make sense of things, the concept now has three dimensions: environmental sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability. Thus, sustainable development is a principle to attain sustainability. Presently, it is common to talk of Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, which calls for action to end world poverty, protect the planet, and guarantee the well-being of people. It is in the sense of the last phrase that the concept of sustainability is used in this paper. It means guaranteeing well-being or stable individual and social well-being of African children through the existing childcare practices.

Second, the concept of child welfare system refers to programs, social assistance, welfare benefits, and ways of intervention in a child's best interest by government or other stakeholders in a country that is regulated by that country's set of laws and/or social policies. In the advanced countries, child welfare systems are characterized by practices or models or functional concepts such as child development, child protection, and family service [8] backed with Acts of parliaments, with professional social work playing a dominant role in the best interest of children. That is, we have children and family social workers dispensing both social services and (sometimes) cash benefits to these population groups in some welfare states. It may be emphasized that child protection is a subunit of social protection (cash benefits and health insurance), which is currently being inculcated in the global development policy. Therefore, in this paper, African child welfare systems refer to African countries' laws, social policies, and practices or models necessary for the survival, development, and well-being of children and/or young adults and in their interest. In other words, the political, cultural, social, and economic sustainability of Africa's existing child welfare systems is the focus of this paper.

The article is of importance to all of Nigeria's stakeholders at home and abroad, whether they view the country as an experiment or economic interest or as a home for understanding the challenges of sustainable development of a complex multicultural state in the 21st century. First, as an experiment: In 2019, the United States' Ambassador to Nigeria, William Stuart Symington, reportedly made the following declaration in Nigeria on 4 July (Independence Day in the United States):

Nigeria is more than a country. Nigeria is an idea. But the idea, that is, Nigeria is bigger than Nigerians. This idea of bringing the world together, so that we truly are not just one nation under God and indivisible, but one family under God indivisible [10].

Hence, this discussion highlights the fundamentals of Nigeria's multiculturalism and its inherent problems, not only for Nigerians and Africans but for the benefit of all existing or emerging global multicultural countries with respect to sustainable development or sustainability. In other words, this paper brings to light what obstacles cultural differences can pose to state social policies, laws, and educational systems and their implementations, with heavy implications for childcare models. Appropriately, the Director-General of the Center for Black and African Arts and Civilizations (CBAAC), Osaro Osayande, asserted that cultural differences are responsible for most of the conflicts in Nigeria [11].

Second, this article demonstrates how economic, political, and departmental rivalries, as opposed to a multidisciplinary approach to social policies, can rob a multicultural country of the most necessary social institution, the social work profession, and keep it

from exercising its mandate to sustainably secure the effective implementations of social welfare programs as practiced in most developed countries of the world. Third, this paper illustrates the dangerous state of African sociopolitical culture, particularly the Nigerian ethno-religious, political, and economic systems, which may lead to a failed state [12] if appropriate social changes are not embraced. Finally, a Google.com search for similar or previous articles on the Nigerian child welfare system did not yield any result. Hence, this paper's themes and foci make it a novel one. Eight questions serve as the method or *mind maps* that are deployed for the description and discussion as follows:

- I. What are the multicultural bases of the Nigerian child welfare system?
- II. What can be described as Nigeria's indigenous orientations of child welfare practices?
- III. What are the influences of the Islamic and Judeo-Christian worldviews on the Nigerian child welfare models?
- IV. How has the colonial and post-colonial era influenced the Nigerian child welfare system?
- V. What international organizations' models are currently influencing the Nigerian child welfare system?
- VI. Assessment: How effective is Nigeria's present child welfare system?
- VII. What are the options for the sustainability of the Nigerian child welfare system or of most African countries in the 21st century?

In other words, these questions guide the comprehensive description and discussion of modern Nigeria's child welfare system with implications for other African countries, and the postulation of sustainable options as follows.

3. What Are the Multicultural Bases of the Nigerian Child Welfare System?

Modern-day Nigeria is influenced by many competing and contradictory historical factors that hamper a sustainable child welfare system. The area now called Nigeria has been dotted since ancient times with human settlements that have developed into chiefdoms, kingdoms, city states, and empires, each with its own indigenous civilizations and distinctive social welfare practices prior to the infiltration of both Arabic and European civilizations [13]. The concept of civilization is used in two senses in this study. First, as in "Aegean civilization" or "Egyptian civilization," and second, as a term describing cultural or even regional traditions of one or more separate states [14]. Nigeria was given its name by Sir Frederick Lord Lugard in 1914 [6]. It occupies a total area of 923,769 square kilometers, which is 909,890 square kilometers of land area and 13,879 square kilometers of water [15]. Consequently, the country is regarded as a fusion of several nations with differing cultural practices (see Olufayo [16]), which were initially demarcated as the northern and southern areas or protectorates with the infiltration of Arabic and European worldviews and influential social welfare practices.

Therefore, Nigeria's numerous social welfare practices, and, by extension, its child welfare practices, are seemingly associated with the different sociopolitical cultures that have characterized the country since ancient times. In other words, three core complex factors: the indigenous and ancient ethnocultural institutions' orientations, the initial geographically regionalized sociopolitical and religious orientations, and the merger of the northern and southern protectorates or the Western political legacy shape social welfare and childcare practices in modern Nigeria. Below, Table 1 illustrates social welfare practices in ancient, pre-colonial, and colonial Nigeria that served as precursors to independent Nigerian social welfare practices.

Table 1. An illustrative matrix of welfare practices in ancient, pre-colonial, and colonial Nigeria.

External Factors	Welfare Consequences	... and Scholarly Comments
[17] “The pre-colonial geography of Nigeria dotted with human settlements millennia before the spread of agriculture . . . ”.	[18] Indigenous welfare practices included mutual, familial, and filial aids. Also, rampant were domestic slaves as internecine wars among ancient political institutions were common.	Cultural values and practices are perhaps related to indigenous beliefs.
[19,20] Islam *ca. 1440 in Bornu and *ca. 1804 in Sokoto—both in northern parts of present Nigeria (where traditional governments were replaced with caliphates and emirates or sultanates).	[19,20] Enforcement of Zakat—the 5th pillar of Islam, which is giving to the needy—and Almajiri or Koranic schools.	[21] “Enter, the Destruction of the Almajiri System; the coming of the British.” “ . . . our indigenous education system.” NB: This comment seems to not acknowledge or be a complete obliteration of the history of pre-Islamic indigenous systems in northern Nigeria.
[19,22,23] Christianity *ca. 1550 in Benin and *ca. 1842 in Badagry—both in southern parts of present Nigeria. Benin is in the present Edo State, while Badagry is in the present Lagos State.	[19,22,23] Missionary work included: first primary school by Thomas B. Freeman (1842); dispensaries and clinics by E. C. van Cooten (1850), W. Henshaw (1815–1853), and Dr. Irvin (1853–1855); leprosy asylum by Mother Veronique and Father Conquard (1886–1933); hospitals by the Methodist Mission (1912); tuberculosis control and child welfare by the American Baptist Mission; home for maladjusted children by the Salvation Army (1920s).	[19] “The advent of Christian Missionaries set in motion the establishment of a number of social services institutions.” [22] It was argued that missions provided therapeutic social services, drugs, and clinics, taught midwifery and simple nursing, sanitation, hygiene, and child welfare, and designed women’s programs. Nevertheless, “these social educational services were primarily to lure more converts into Christianity and in return the trained converts were hired to expand missionary activities.”
[24] The Trans-Sahara (*ca. 650–1900) and the Atlantic slave trade (1562–1887), the scramble for Africa (*ca. 1880–1914) and the Berlin Conference (1884–1885).	[25] Slaves tricked, captured, or kidnapped disrupting the familial and communal welfare system indigenous to Nigerian (African) societies and instilling a culture of mistrust in the people.	Globally, [26] “slavery (could be rendered) as a special form of human parasitism.” [17] “The Sokoto Caliphate, for example, had more slaves than any other modern country, except the United States in 1860. Slaves were also numerous among the Igbo, the Yoruba, and many other ethnic groups.” [24] “One of the chief justifications for this so-called ‘scramble for Africa’ was a desire to stamp out slavery once and for all.”
[19,22,23] As a British Colony (*ca. 1861–1960).	[18] Formal social work (of the British model) began in Nigeria.	[27] “Colonization of Africa . . . ensured that people of diverse culture were brought together under one country.”
[23] Industrialization and Urbanization.	[19,22,23] Hence the need for organized public social services (based on the institutions started by the Missionaries).	[22] “As a result of urbanization, there was a drift and relocation of individuals to the urban cities hence the movement away from the traditional family settings and a decline in traditional control on individuals and families.”

*ca. = Circa. The figures in superscript are the specific references.

Table 1 contains, chronologically, the various factors and their contributions to social welfare in modern Nigeria. It also contains some scholarly comments on the contributions of each factor, both positive and negative.

In 2017, Nigeria’s population was estimated at 192 million with an annual growth rate of 3.2% since 1950 [28]. Similarly, as of September 2020, Worldometer [29] estimated Nigeria’s current population at 206,139,589, based on the latest United Nations data.

However, the demographic characteristics of Nigeria's ethnic groups are often given in percentages, as in Figure 1 below. This gives the erroneous impression that some ethnic groups' cultural values and welfare systems are seemingly homologous. This is far from the truth. For example, the Hausa–Fulani-bundled unit in Table 1 is not inherently ethnoculturally homologous, as was the situation among the Habe Kingdoms, a pre-Islamic name for the Hausa Kingdoms, before the Fulani infiltrated with their Islamic worldview and usurped the so-far homologous Hausas' political power.

Figure 1. Percentages of Nigeria's ethnic groups according to Simpson and Oyetade [30]. Culled from Akintayo, Hämäläinen and Rissanen [13].

The first Islamic political unit known in Nigeria was the Kanem–Bornu empire. Its remains are in today's eastern Nigeria, the base of Boko Haram insurgency. But in terms of the scope of influence, this paper illustrates the Fulani jihad of 1804. Evidence gathered from oral court traditions, praise epithets of indigenous rulers, and post-jihad records, which are collectively known as the Zaria and Kano Chronicles, asserted that the ancient Hausa Kingdoms' orientation of social welfare was based on indigenous beliefs or animism, for example, as in Nwabara [31] and Hunwick [32]. Each indigenous belief was ancient in its area of influence. The beliefs were a combination of family ghosts with relations to primordial spirits of a particular site or area, which conferred upon an ethnocultural group by common genealogical descent the rights to a place or settlement within it, as explained in the Library of Congress Country Studies [33]. After the initial infiltration of the Hausa Kingdoms by the Islamic worldview, one reason for the 1804 Fulani jihad that sacked Habe or Hausa kings and established Fulani political hegemony was lack of social welfare from the Islamic point of view, which painted a negative picture of the indigenous welfare practices. However, not all the Hausas accepted the Islamic worldview, as non-Muslim populations called *maguzawa* [32], which also existed in the emirates and sultanates later created by the jihad. Even in modern-day Nigeria, the areas covered by the emirates and sultanates also include indigenous and Christian religions, which influence their family and community welfare practices. These same characteristics apply to other ethnic groups in the country.

Nigerians' indigenous languages and their dialects are as varied as its ethnic groups. Hence, modern Nigeria has had to borrow the English language as its official language of unity. According to Akintayo [5], the 1999 Constitution (as amended) acknowledges only three dominant indigenous Nigerian languages: Hausa, Ibo, and Yoruba. However, the literature estimates and documents between 200 and 510 indigenous languages (see National Bureau of Statistics [15], Ezenma [34], and Simpson and Oyetade [30]). Languages constitute unique means of fostering intergenerational relationships and cultural transmission among the varying ethnocultural groups. Other core divisive elements, highlighted in Table 2 below, reveal the difficulties of securing a uniform, sustainable social welfare system in the interest of children or any other population group in Nigeria.

Table 2. Core factors of Nigeria’s multiculturalism. Culled from Akintayo [5].

Factors	... and Their Attributes		
Laws	[35,36] English Law	[35,36] Sharia Law	[35,36] Customary Law
Religions	[36] Christianity	[36] Islam	[36] Indigenous Religions
Educational Systems	[37,38] Western Education	[37,38] Islamic Education	[37,38] Indigenous Education

NB: The numbers in superscript are the specific references.

In Table 2 above, Nigeria has three types of laws, religions, and educational sub-systems, each of them seemingly enhancing or competing with the others. According to Akintayo [5] and in agreement with Onokerhoraye [38], among the subsystems in the table that have the potential to influence social welfare system and childcare practices in Nigeria, only the indigenous education subsystem has yet to be institutionalized. Preferences for types of health services, housing designs, architecture, etc., can also be seen in Nigeria, though these are usually based on an individual’s or family’s financial abilities. In other words, the numerous indigenous ethnocultural and political unit orientations, with both Islamic and Judeo-Christian worldviews with respect to the colonial secular approach, play dominant roles in Nigeria’s child welfare design.

Given the complex background of modern Nigeria, international organizations—the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), for example—in conjunction with various levels of Nigerian government have played vital roles in the current Nigerian child welfare systems. However, in the quest for a socioeconomically, politically, and culturally sustainable child welfare system in modern Nigeria, there is a tendency to disregard Nigeria’s indigenous orientations of childcare practices. Such an approach may render ineffective any child welfare system in the country.

4. What Can Be Described as Nigeria’s Indigenous Orientations of Child Welfare Practices?

Native child welfare practices abound in modern Nigeria. These multicultural or varied agrarian-economy childcare practices are not available in documents but in folklores, proverbs, and daily practices, perhaps for cultural transmission, intergenerational relationships, and individual community sustainability [19,39]. Such practices include body tattoos for identifying families and facial marks distinguishing community members from one another. Contrarily, in some modern societies, tattoos and facial marks on children may be considered as forms of child abuse.

Evidence from the literature revealed three historical social influences responsible for childcare and upbringing in many traditional Nigerian communities:

- the biological parents,
- the extended family,
- the community.

These historically enduring influential factors are intertwined with what Okoye [40] and Ogundipe and Edewor [22] referred to as familial, kinship, and filial organizations of indigenous welfare practices, summarized by Olaleye [41] as communal care. The belief underpinning the indigenous model of childcare is that a child constitutes one of the most valuable resources to each of these three social institutions, and as one fundamental element, indigenous knowledge is usually embedded in the economic, political, and cultural text in which it has been developed. Olaleye [41] (p. 108) further elaborated on this fundamental element by positing that indigenous knowledge refers “to the particular beliefs, rituals, traditions, and environmental relationships that exist in an indigenous community.”

Indigenous knowledge varied among the native Nigerian ethnocultural groups [42]. Nevertheless, a common trend was the sharing of responsibilities for the caring and upbringing of the child by all stakeholders in a community [19,42]. These practices were rooted in their respective indigenous or traditional worldviews of a child’s value to the biological parents, family, and community. Such worldviews and practices remain in many Nigerian societies, particularly in rural communities. Each community holds on tightly and

cherishes its cultural tradition, because it represents the social identities and uniqueness that distinguish one from the others. Hence, their social sustainability depends upon their cultural traditions.

Therefore, due to the lack of uniform concepts and documented child welfare practices (see Olaleye's [41] recommendation) or native knowledge of managing children's behavioral challenges or describing childcare and upbringing in Nigeria, this paper uses the concepts of pre-birth socialization; mother and child well-being after birth; early childcare or pre-school education; child upbringing, and socialization to describe the similarities and commonalities in Nigeria's ancient and indigenous child welfare models, as follows.

4.1. Pre-Birth Socialization and Mother and Child Well-Being after Birth (Approximately 0–2 Years of Age)

The principal source of a child's well-being, and the first place of socialization among Nigerian ethnic groups, is the family [42]. Specifically, the mother's womb is the first place of nutrients and social environment for the child. Thus, unlike the father and other work-capable members of a family, the mother does less work in order to support her health and ensure a well-developed pregnancy. Indigenous agrarian economies of Nigerian ethnic groups were woven around *mutual aid* as a means of exchange; that is, the mother is expected to help other women in return. This is a form of social security for the child's and mother's initial basic necessities, with the exceptions of services from *traditional herbs healers* (doctors) and *circumcision practitioners* among the ethnic groups. It is extremely rare to separate a child from his or her immediate family, particularly the biological mother.

4.2. Early Childhood Care or Preschool Education (Approximately 2–6 Years of Age)

The child's well-being, particularly his or her early education, begins with what is called the *nuclear family* from a sociological point of view and later expands to the extended family. The well-being of the child is cultivated; this includes love, warmth, affection, guidance, appropriate discipline in accordance with the family's traditional beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices [19,42]. Every child is brought up to respect and protect their family's values and heritage, which otherwise may result in social sanction by stakeholders and/or negative consequences in the child's future. It is also at this level that a child is introduced to domestic activities (house chores) commensurate with his or her physical ability and age [42]. Initial discipline appropriate for the child's age may be applied if he or she fails to participate or meet the family standard. However, such discipline may be regarded as child abuse elsewhere.

4.3. Child Upbringing and Socialization (Approximately 6–18 Years of Age, or Culturally Young Adult Years)

In this age range, child upbringing (socialization and social maturity) [19] is a combined effort of the immediate family and extended family members as well as the community. In other words, the child is exposed to the processes and practices at home and of the entire community. For example, each family in a community is a working unit; therefore, appropriate child labor, like a child going to the farm with his or her parents, is seen as part of the socialization process. Among the Hausas, hawking is a cultural practice that not only prevents idleness but also enables a girl to meet with a prospective bridegroom. Other common enterprises include smithery, carpentry, and woodwork. Adejuwon and Balogun [42] argued further that such societal participation builds up the child psychologically with a sense of personal worth, pride, accomplishment, confidence, and self-esteem, among other things (see also Okunola [19]). In other words, child labor seems to be a part of systemic indigenous child welfare among the numerous Nigerian ethnocultural groups, though it has been categorized as child abuse in other modern dispensations. Even the female genital mutilation adopted by ethnic groups for the prevention of promiscuity among girls has been declared harmful by scientific studies [43].

Nonetheless, though it seems that the communal care adopted by each indigenous community has a way of preventing abuse in its own community, particularly as it concerns children, evidence abounds in the literature regarding abuse perpetrated by one ethnic group against another. The most socially devastating abuse perpetrated by one or more indigenous ethnic groups in pre-Islamic and pre-colonial Nigeria was ethnic conflict. It created widows and orphans and produced slaves among the ancient political units [13,22]. Even in modern Nigeria, ethnic relations still remain a major problem in such a large and diverse country [33].

Though the immediate and extended families of the children and the ethnocultural groups into which the children are born seem to portray a converging system of childcare practices among indigenous Nigerian societies, each family's values and beliefs vary, even within each indigenous community. These varying factors determine approaches to childcare in their respective domains, and are, however, affected by the penetration of the duo of Islamic and Judeo-Christian worldviews as well as colonialism.

5. What Are the Influences of the Islamic and Judeo-Christian Worldviews on the Nigerian Child Welfare Models?

The infiltration of non-native religions or worldviews into the numerous indigenous ethnocultural Nigerian communities makes an already complex social welfare system more difficult to sustain, both culturally and structurally. The Islamic worldview was the first to penetrate the present day northeastern part of Nigeria (circa 1100) and the northwestern part (circa 1804). The Judeo-Christian worldview also began to penetrate the southern parts of Nigeria circa 1500 in Benin and circa 1840 in Lagos.

5.1. Zakat Principles and Almajiri Schools of the Islamic Order

With respect to the Islamic-order social welfare model in the northeastern part of Nigeria, very little material is available regarding how divine kingship habits of the Sefawa Dynasty (Kanuri people) of the present Bornu State came under the political influence of the Islamic order. Comparatively, the historical accounts of the Habe rulers/Hausa kings [44] dethroned by the jihad (Islamic revolution) of 1804 in other parts of northern Nigeria are much more available. Therefore, the focus is on the political revolution brought about by the Fulani jihad of 1804 and its scope in modern northern Nigeria. Dethroning the Hausa kings and taking over political institutions in much of the northern region with Islamic order overrode any other religion, at least in public. Zakat, i.e., a tax levied by Islamic political units to help the poor, was to be a state function in pre-colonial Nigeria [45], and Almajiri schools (Koranic schools) were introduced as an alternative way to provide for the people. Thus, the arrival of the British was asserted by AbdulQadir [21] as responsible for the destruction of the Almajiri model, which he declared "our indigenous system of education" (p. 2). Nevertheless, the school model is still sustained in Nigeria today.

However, three factors may explain the failure of the Almajiri and Zakat models. First, the incorrect assumption that the Almajiri model was indigenous to the numerous ancient and indigenous ethnocultural political units that were displaced by the Islamic revolution of 1804; second, the aftermath of the jihad, and third, the aftermath of European colonialism with a new orientation of social welfare provisions. In other words, it was incorrectly assumed that the jihad of 1804 that followed the initial Islamic infiltration of then-northern Nigeria fundamentally reconfigured the indigenous sociocultural landscape of the collective area. The country has remained pluralistic under the yoke of religious bigotry, tribalism, nepotism, etc., as anchored in the news media. For example, [46] a former president of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, asserted that the country is even more divided under the current government than it was before.

The incorrect assumptions about the diversity of northern Nigeria seemingly explain, at least partially, why this part of the country remains the poorest and the least developed.

5.2. Western Medicine, Education, and Other Activities of Christian Missions in the South

European-style education and Western medicine came to Nigeria through missionaries in the south, perhaps to complement or improve the existing traditional practices; Okunola [19] (p. 12) posited that “the advent of Christian Missionaries set in motion the establishment of a number of social-service institutions.” Missionary work included: first primary school by Thomas B. Freeman (1842); dispensaries and clinics by E. C. van Cooten (1850), W. Henshaw (1815–1853), and Dr Irvin (1853–1855); leprosy asylum by Mother Veronique and Father Conquard (1886–1933); hospitals by the Methodist Mission (1912); tuberculosis control and child welfare by the American Baptist Mission; and home for maladjusted children by the Salvation Army (1920s) [19,22,23]. These social welfare models or interventions are sustained to date and have spread to all parts of modern Nigeria. In particular, Western-style education competes in the northern parts of the country with the Almajiri school style. It is even the main bone of contention with Boko Haram (whose slogan is no to Western education and/or culture) that has fatally disrupted the child welfare system in northern Nigeria. Thus, we have the infiltration of two major non-native orientations added to the existing numerous indigenous orientations of Nigerian child welfare models, prior to the colonization of Nigeria. The colonial powers, however, soon came with their own political variants of welfare, which subsequently had ripple effects on existing Nigerian childcare practices.

6. How Has the Colonial and Post-Colonial Era Influenced the Nigerian Child Welfare System?

The colonial approach to child welfare in Nigeria came with a secular approach, a neutral preference for any religion. Colonial Nigeria was initially demarcated into the northern and southern protectorates to reflect the influences of the two non-indigenous religions. On one hand, there was the Muslim north, groomed under the British indirect rule and accommodating the Islamic legal order (sharia) of the jihad of 1804. It forced traditional religions to disappear from public places. On the other hand, there was the Christian and indigenous religious south, completely under the British secular regime [36]. These two approaches, the indirect rule in the north and the secular regime in the south, seemingly revealed a contradiction of Abdul Qadir [21] in that the British colonial government deliberately destroyed the Almajiri model of education. In addition, the formal introduction of the Western style of social welfare into Nigeria began with the provision of a legal framework, the Native Children (Custody and Reformation) Ordinance of 1928 [5,19,20,22,47], to address the problem of juvenile delinquency in the country. It was a British indirect rule mechanism for consultations with native chiefs on the social welfare of the people under their jurisdiction [5,48] (see Table 3 below).

Table 3. Effects matrix of Nigeria’s child welfare system from colonial time to independence.

Date and Problems or Programs	Legal Framework	Effects of Social Policy or Instrumental Provisions	*+ Meta Effects
1914–1932: Street children who were orphans of parents sold as slaves or deserted by relatives /juvenile delinquency /juvenile justice system.	The Prison Ordinance of 1914 separated 14-year-olds and below from adult prisoners. The Native Children (custody and reformation) Ordinance of 1928.	Three reformatory schools modeled after industrial schools in Europe, were opened—the Salvation Army School, Lagos (1925); the Kano Native Juvenile Reformatory School (1931); and the Industrial School in Enugu (1932).	Indigenous communal care largely remained the trend for child development and upbringing in colonial time. Government intervention in child welfare focused on street children and was restricted to regional capitals. Other critical areas of child welfare at this time, such as food and nutrition challenges, were not reflected in documents. The UPE initiatives of the regional governments in the south were modeled after the Western style. Almajiri’s style was also in the northern regions.
1943–1960: Juvenile delinquency cont., and basic formal education.	The Native Children Ordinance of 1928 was replaced with the Children and Young Persons Ordinance (CYPO) in 1943, a colonial adaptation of the 1933 Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA) in Britain. In 1958 in Nigeria, the ordinance was replaced with a law (now CPYL) to include child welfare.	Donald E. Faulkner (OBE)—the pioneer of official social work in Nigeria—was appointed (under the British Colonial Act) as the first social welfare officer of the Lagos colony in 1941. The establishment of a social welfare department under the Ministry of Labor in 1942. Regional Universal Primary Education (UPE) policies in the 1950s.	

For references, see [5,19,47,48]. *+ Meta Effects = inferences made in the matrix by the researcher.

Table 3 contains the legal framework and intervention instruments in response to certain problems in the history of colonial Nigeria. The meta effects of those interventions are also included. The child welfare system under the colonial rule was more about *legal frameworks* and *more group-focused*. Street children were orphaned by slave trades in the hinterlands, and orphans produced by the effects of World War I in the urban areas succumbed to juvenile delinquency, which heralded the Western-style childcare model in Nigeria. Similarly, the Western style of education predicated on the Christian missionary initiatives was further developed at a governmental level.

In 1960, Nigeria became an independent sovereign nation. However, its first decade (1960–1970) was marred by tribalism, nepotism, and ethnic violence that resulted in a civil war from 1967 to 1970. Many families lost members. Orphans and widows littered the country, and child maltreatment was rampant, though it was not fully documented. The evacuation of some Nigerian children with the support of international organizations to other countries was successful, but it was not without some cultural violations [49]. After the war came the introduction of social development to Nigeria, based on a recommendation in the 1970s by Dr. A. H. Shawky, the United Nations’ regional advisor on social welfare policy [5,50,51]. Hence, social development became the welfare model in Nigeria due to the promulgation of the Social Development Decree No. 12 of 1974 by Nigeria’s military government. Subsequently, the Ministry of Social Development, Youth, Sports and Culture was created in 1975. See Table 4 below for specific illustrations.

Table 4. Effects matrix of Nigeria's child welfare system in post-colonial independence.

Date and Problems or Programs	Legal Framework	Effects of Social Policy or Instrumental Provisions	*+ Meta Effects
1960–2020: Colonial government focus on <i>social welfare</i> was directed to social development at Nigeria's independence.	Social Development Decree No. 12 of 1974 by the military government, and the creation of the Ministry of Social Development, Youth, Sports and Culture in 1975.	Vacillating social policies and problems of departmental loyalties and rivalries section-wise among state officials resulted in the amendment of the Decree in 1976. As that was not the solution, the ministry was either merged with another or renamed ten times between 1976 was 2019.	The concept of social development disappeared from the ministry's nomenclature for many years.
Social development problems: national unity, civil war, poverty, unemployment, urbanization, child labor, homelessness, etc., with serious implications for family and child welfare.	From 1975–2017, the social work professionalization bill failed in successive legislative assemblies. But in January 2018, the current president conveyed to the National Assembly his decision not to grant assent to the bill.	The Social Development Policy for Nigeria (SDPN) was not published until 1989. The policy was adjudged as traditionally and narrowly focusing on social welfare. In the same year, the ministry that produced the policy document was dissolved.	To date, the 1989 SDPN has yet to be implemented. It contains explicit social welfare provisions for children and families. It also contains social work roles (family and child welfare), as in Europe. Lack of legal status for social work makes social case work in schools, family, probation, hospitals, psychiatry, institutional care, etc., ineffective.
Since 1970, successive Nigerian governments have demonstrated ignorance of the dignifying roles of the social work profession in sustaining both individual and collective well-being in societies, particularly in family and child welfare, as practiced in all developed countries of the world.	Nigeria ratified the Children Convention 1991 and the African Charter on the rights and Welfare of Children in 2001, but in Nigeria, national and international laws constitute two legal systems (dualism). Hence, after due process, the Convention became the Child Rights Act (CRA) in 2003.	CRA puts child welfare processes under four broad categories: Child Survival (nutrition and health); Development (recreational facilities and education); Protection (against harm, injury, and exploitation); and Participation (in decision-making). There are a few highly political social protection programs that may indirectly affect childcare, but often limited to lifespan of governments.	In September 2020, the country became the highest producer of out-of-school children in the world. It has between 14 million to 16 million out-of-school children as of 2020. In addition, the country presently has increasing cases of child malnutrition, child mortality and morbidity, family dysfunction, pedophiles, international child trafficking, prostitutions, early marriages, etc.
Basic education.	Nomadic Education Decree 41 of 1989. UPE legally became Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 2004.	Since 1979, UPE policy covers the whole country (in public and private schools).	Nomadic education (both the UBE and/or the Almajiri's) for children in transit, but not effective enough.
Primary health care.	Nigeria's basic health services scheme was initiated in 1975 and reinforced by the Ama Ata declaration of 1978.	Nationwide policy (public healthcare agencies). Also, there are private hospitals for those who can afford it.	Healthcare system seemingly not effective enough.

For references, see [5,19,48,50–55]. *+ Meta Effects = inferences made in the matrix by the researcher.

Table 4 contains, chronologically, the core legal frameworks and intervention instruments for responding to juvenile delinquency and childcare problems in Nigeria to date. The meta effects of those interventions are also included. Paradoxically, both the current Nigerian president, who refused assent to the 2018 social work bill, and a previous president, who raised alarm in the news media that Nigeria presently has approximately 16 million out-of-school children, have ruled Nigeria as military heads of state and as

two-term civilian presidents between 1976 and 2020. While General Olusegun Obasanjo served as Nigeria's military ruler (1976–1979) and, as a civilian, as president (1999–2007), Muhammadu Buhari served as Nigeria's head of state in 1984–1985 and as president of the country from 2015 to the present. Both men have contributed to the dragging social work bill and vacillating social development policy at one time or another since 1976.

Therefore, the cogwheel affecting the sustainability of social welfare in Nigeria includes persisting professional rivalries, ethnocultural diversity, infiltration of Nigeria by non-indigenous worldviews, colonialist legacies, vacillating post-colonial social policies, and conceptual ambiguities in foreign social welfare terminologies. Akintayo [5] and Odiah [56] posited that Nigerians, other Africans, and still others worldwide seem to have conceptual ambiguity problems with such concepts as social welfare, social policy, social services, social security, social work, and social development, because they are foreign and cannot be connected semantically to their familiar traditional and cultural welfare practices. In particular, while scholars globally have argued that the concept of social development seems difficult to define [5,19,50,51,57–59], the lack of culturally rooted social development has been attributed to Nigeria's underdevelopment [50]. Hence, modern functional concepts of childcare, i.e., child development, child protection, and family service, must be culturally rooted in the various, ethnoreligious, ethnolinguistic, ethnocultural, and sociopolitical units in Nigeria and the rest of Africa to ensure the sustainability of their childcare practices.

Nigeria's government practices federalism, and since the 2003 Child Rights Act was promulgated into law at the federal level, it has been appropriate for state assemblies to adopt the same. However, as of 31 December 2020, only the federal capital territory of Abuja and 27 states out of Nigeria's 36 have appropriated the legal framework for seemingly consolidated laws for child welfare, which is Children's Survival, Development, Protection and Participation in the decision-making process (abbreviated as CSDPP). The 9 out of 12 Sharia-implementing states that have yet to domesticate or pass the bill into law are Sokoto, Bauchi, Kano, Kebbi, Borno, Niger, Gombe, Yobe, and Zamfara, where an Islamic-order worldview is dominant [48,60,61]. Unfortunately, some of these states presently produce the highest numbers of out-of-school children in Nigeria. In other words, out-of-school children can be found in all parts of Nigeria. This is the scenario that international organization models of childcare met on ground and are making efforts to remedy.

7. What International Organizations' Models Are Currently Influencing the Nigerian Child Welfare System?

The United Nations (UN) and its intergovernmental agencies have played crucial roles in Nigeria's child welfare system since Nigeria became an independent sovereign state. In reality, Nigeria has a United Nations Country Team, coded as UNCT Nigeria in the United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework 2018–2022 (see United Nations System in Nigeria [62]). In particular, the provision of an international legal framework, the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), for the social welfare of children is the nucleus of the UN's intervention [47], and it seems to be in harmony with the African Union (AU) Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (CRWC). More specifically, aside from the International Labor Organization's (ILO) International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC, often referred to as ILO-IPEC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been at the forefront of improving the Nigerian child welfare system, both in research and practice.

Approximately three decades ago, UNICEF proposed a remedial integrative approach to the imbalance between population and resources prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa to modify the Population–Poverty–Environment (PPE) in favor of social welfarism, in hopes of achieving a reasonable level of childcare [2]. Somewhere, however, it seems that successive econometric modeling with regard to social development in Nigeria went wrong, considering that the country produced the highest number of out-of-school children in the world by 2020. Social welfare and social development, particularly child welfare in this

case, are multidisciplinary. Professional rivalries that accosted the 1989 Social Development Policy for Nigeria would have been unwarranted if the concept of social development had been rightly conceptualized by the stakeholders from 1989. While economic development in Nigeria must not become the focus as a substitute for social development [5], the latter can subsume the former. Hence, as a key player in social welfare as is the case in all the developed world, the social work profession must not be denied its rightful legal status as it presently is in Nigeria. In addition, the profession should not be left stagnant or underdeveloped as in some countries of sub-Saharan Africa if the sustainability of child welfare in the continent is to be guaranteed. In Cameroon for instance, Dankoff [63] (p. 13) highlighted that “according to multiple informants, the government’s reasoning for cutting back on trainings for social workers is that the profession does not help grow the national economy.” Whereas in Botswana, the Minister for Local Government and Rural Development advocated that government should leverage the profession to help Botswana’s children grow with dignity [64]. Unfortunately, in addition to Nigeria, Cameroon is also having political and social welfare challenges affecting childcare.

UNICEF in Africa has approached the issue assertively, despite the apparent governmental lapses regarding child welfare systems. UNICEF Nigeria is tackling the problems head-on with child survival programs such as neonatal care, appropriate nutrition, clean water and sanitation, and necessary healthcare to advocate for and facilitate child development programs, i.e., child education, child protection, and child rights. In evidence-based practice, UNICEF and several other econometric studies (for example, Okpukpara, et al. [65], Ojelabi and Oyewole [66], and Popoola and Adeoti [67]) have advocated for the holistic implementation of childcare programs. In advanced countries, these programs are realized through social work with families and children, school social work, and social work services in national social security organizations, particularly for physically and socially disadvantaged children. Also, several studies on Nigeria’s social development, child abuse, and social work, for instance, Jinadu [60], Kazeem [20], Olaleye [41], and Uzuegbu [68], have argued for a culturally relevant approach to social welfare programs in Nigeria considering the multicultural nature of the country. Perhaps in response to these necessities, according to Akintayo [5], UNICEF joined forces with the Nigerian Association of Social Workers (NASoW) to facilitate the social work professionalization bill to which President Muhammadu Buhari denied assent in 2018. Hence, the vast gap still remains. Despite the gap, UNICEF has continued to implement and exercise nationwide coverage of childcare through two main but defective channels, as follows:

- ✓ Implementation of UNICEF Nigeria’s programs despite defective or inefficient federalism in the country. In particular, social services delivery at the local government levels is deprived of infrastructure, funding, and other resources [69]; riddled with political greed, nepotism, and ethnic and religious bigotry [70]; lacks culturally rooted service delivery that connects the leader and the led [71], and lacks holistic social policy directions devoid of department rivalries [72].
- ✓ Implementation of many UNICEF programs through some non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which, according to Rt. Rev. Timothy Yahaya of the Diocese of Kaduna Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion [73], are allegedly defrauding international organizations and diverting funds and materials meant for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Therefore, critical issues among all the social welfare lapses in Nigeria impact the sustainability of the country’s child welfare system.

8. Assessment: How Effective Is Nigeria’s Present Child Welfare System?

As previously indicated, UNICEF Nigeria’s model includes child survival programs and development programs. Hence, the following core areas of children’s needs and development—food, shelter, health, education and housing—are used to highlight the existing unfit state of Nigerian children in the 21st century. The examples in each of the

core areas below are just some of the many hidden negative pictures of the current child welfare lapse in Nigeria.

8.1. Health

In recent years, Nigerian and the foreign news media [74,75] have been filled with news of orphanages in the country being run by medical professionals, who lack legal, moral, and professional ethics, or immoral religious leaders cutting across indigenous, Islamic, and Christian faiths by selling children or operating baby factories. Some exploit children for monetary rewards or sell their organs. The perpetrators of these evils are seemingly crazy about money; to them, everything is about trade or business. However, their quest for money may simply be pathological rather than cultural.

8.2. Education

Approximately seven years ago, UNICEF [76] raised an alarm that between 10.5 million and 13.2 million children were out of school in Nigeria, the highest rate in the world. In 2019, this number grew to 16 million under Adamu Adamu, a former education minister; in 2020, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a former Nigerian president, confirmed that this number was over 14 million [77,78]. The majority of these children are presently in the northern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, where Boko Haram, an Islamic terrorist organization, has disrupted academic activities. The out-of-school children also include those in current Almajiri practices.

Housing or homelessness among urban children and food or nutrition challenges also exist for children in Nigeria. Poverty and child prostitutes, for instance, are prevalent. Furthermore, child abandonment is rampant [79]. This includes babies being abandoned shortly after birth, sometimes because they were branded as witches by their parents and abandoned to die or because the parents lacked the wherewithal or resources to care for a newborn. Presently, this scenario in Nigeria is being replicated in most African countries.

Professional social work is a natural concomitant of modernity or industrialization and urbanization. Africa is no longer agrarian as before. If the social work profession had been accorded its rightful role in Nigeria and many African countries, child and family social work would have been able to reduce many of the challenges encountered in their child welfare systems and practices. Even one of the approaches of the profession is social development or developmental social work, which can transform the rural areas. In particular, the cultural diversity of Nigeria and the declaration by Ambassador Symington [10] that the country is an idea, and its challenges reflect problems the world is facing today, agree with Akintayo [5] (p. 31) that “our global system is inherently multi-ethnic and culturally diverse.” Consequently, the logical solutions and/or recommendations arising from this discussion for the country’s or the continent’s child welfare challenges amid the heterogeneity of ethnoreligious, sociocultural, political, and economic orientations as barriers to sustainability of social welfare and child welfare systems, are stated below.

9. What Are the Options for the Sustainability of the Nigerian Child Welfare System or of Most African Countries in the 21st Century?

According to Salonen [80], transformative response is social change. It is used in this article as a transformative approach to each of the problems challenging child welfare systems in Nigeria and beyond.

First, an approach aimed at the sustainability of child welfare models in Nigeria and other African countries must embrace not only cultural relativity with regard to child maltreatment, but also good political culture such as true federalism [70], etc. Similarly, culturally specific and religious freedom approaches in social policies must be increased to prevent ethnocultural and/or ethnoreligious hostility, particularly in multicultural contexts. Akintayo et al. [81] found that religious and cultural factors are vital to the well-being of senior adults in multicultural countries. This concept agrees with one proposed by Lai [82], who suggested cultural identity as an indispensable factor for the well-being of the elderly. In particular, Bernard and Gupta [83] suggested the following to manage the

tension inherent for professionals working with culturally diverse African families in the United Kingdom:

Reconciling different beliefs and behaviors concerning child-rearing; affirming the parenting practices of these families in the engagement process; adopting a strength-based orientation whilst at the same time safeguarding and promoting the welfare of vulnerable children (p. 476).

Even an ethnoreligious socioeconomic focus, such as Islamic economics, [45] is presently debated in Nigeria's secular state. Culture and religion will continue to play influential roles in people's lives, irrespective of population groups. In addition, social research exploring how culturally and religiously inclusive interventions can be used to develop a sustainable child welfare system are vital in modern states.

Second, multicultural and developing countries like Nigeria must leverage the transformative and expanded mandates of the social work profession to intervene in the social welfare of families and children for the development of effective and sustainable child welfare systems. Thus, institutionalization of the profession must include a solid legal framework and relevant institutional intervention documents (such as social policy), as this is the practice in many developed countries around the world. Irrespective of the political ideology and economic theory orientation of the state, social work must be allowed to play its dignifying roles in the implementation of child welfare policies and programs. At this juncture, this paper acknowledges that some African leaders and/or governments have problems with understanding the scope and clarity of professional social work. Therefore, two types of definitions are stated in this paper as follows:

- A precisifying definition of social work defines it as the art and science of the welfare or well-being of individuals, families or groups, and communities or societies. That is, social work is a social welfare service system or a research-based professional activity geared towards the prevention and alleviation of individual and social problems [84]; and
- a performative definition of social work argues that it is anchored on the deficiency of every social system [85]. The profession responds to everyday personal and social problems emanating from society's barriers, inequalities, injustice as well as to crises and emergencies in personal and social relationships [86]. Hence, Akintayo et al. [13] and Akintayo [5] define social work as a body of knowledge, skills, and ethics applied in the planning, delivery, administration, and evaluation of social welfare services, and in the development of innovative or renewable social programs for the attainment of collective social well-being.

See also the international definition of social work in 2014 by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). It is available online at <https://www.ifsw.org/global-definition-of-social-work/>. It reveals additional insight into why social work is indispensable in contemporary societies.

Third, social research and systems thinking, i.e., perceiving the varied ethnocultural or religious childcare practices in Nigeria as a systemic whole, have been posited as drivers of transformative responses, for example, see Salonen [80]. Professional rivalries, which have been present in Nigeria since 1970, should be stemmed and transformed into a multidisciplinary approach to social welfare, not only in Nigeria or Africa, but in countries with similar problems around the world.

10. Conclusions

In conclusion, this article attempts to describe and discuss the sustainability of African child welfare systems by focusing on the diversity that constitutes modern Nigeria and its childcare practices. The attempt is geared to reflect the characteristics of childcare mal-treatments and contradictions in Africa and thereby highlights the numerous challenges surrounding the sustainability of the continent's child welfare systems. The discussion highlights the following identifiable challenges: ethnocultural or, more specifically, eth-

noreligious diversity; infiltration of Nigeria by non-indigenous worldviews (or aspects of foreign civilizations); colonial legacies; vacillating post-colonial social policies; conceptual ambiguities in foreign social welfare terminologies; and persistent professional rivalries. If these challenges were extrapolated to a continent-wide scope, they could be recategorized under three major headings: varied ethnocultural diversity, past and present socioeconomic and political upheavals, and present input of international organizations in political environments unfavorable to the social work profession. Hence, there are apparent similarities in the characteristics and challenges facing child welfare systems in African countries, perhaps owing to the partition of Africa and the shared colonial experience, which make the options for sustainability suggested in this paper appropriate and applicable continent-wide.

However, lack of systematic review techniques of relevant literature may be considered as a limitation to the reliability of the evidence in this discussion. The connections among the trends support the justification of the discussion method that information technology for systematic review is not yet fully operational. Notwithstanding, Nigerian multiculturalism is indeed unique. The country's diversity, with respect to indigenous religious orientations, Islamic orientation, Judeo-Christian orientation, ethnocultural groupings, languages, laws, and preferences for housing design based on religious inclinations, must be considered when researching and developing a sustainable child welfare system. For other developing countries with similar characteristics, particularly in Africa, these factors must also be considered when implementing a transformative response to their existing and unsustainable child welfare systems.

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