

## **Prioritizing Quality Education in Nigeria: a Commitment to Sustainable Development Goals**

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### **Abstract**

**E**very country seeks to achieve development. The extent to which a government can develop its country depends on factors such as good governance, competence, accountability, availability of funds and educated citizens. Thus, the people in developed countries are able to enjoy quality education, good health services, economic opportunities and modern infrastructure. Unlike their counterparts in the industrialized world, most of the people in Sub-Sahara Africa, South-East Asia and South America are plagued with the effects of underdevelopment which manifest as poverty, inequality, poor healthcare, poor education and dilapidated infrastructure. Nigeria, with a population of 170 million people, is among the countries that are still struggling to develop. Majority of Nigerians face the indecent consequences of underdevelopment. Therefore, this paper seeks to provide a reliable guidance for the country as it sets to implement the sustainable development goals. The paper focuses on goal number four which is tagged 'Quality Education' on the list of Sustainable Development Goals. Secondary data obtained from reliable sources were utilized in analyzing and presenting what Nigeria has achieved in the area of education. The paper comes up with the unassailable fact that quality education can help reduce poverty and inequality in Nigeria. In addition, quality education is a major driver in the achievement of all the SDGs in Nigeria by 2030. Thus, the paper provides the government with policy measures that will make quality education achievable within the stipulated timeframe.

**Keyword:** *Development, Growth, Poverty, Inequality, Education, Opportunity*

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## **Background to the Study**

Nigeria is a resource-rich country located in Sub-Saharan Africa. The country had an estimated population of 182.2 million in 2015 according to the World Bank so she is the most populous nation in Africa. Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa with a Gross Domestic Product of \$486.79 billion documented by the World Bank in 2016. Obviously, this West African country has a huge potential for growth and development. Aligning with the aspirations of all Nigerians, development has always been the focus of electioneering campaigns of politicians seeking executive positions and legislative seats. Politicians are aware that people desperately need development in all its ramifications and they promise to perform better than previous governments if they are voted into office. Unfortunately, Nigeria's underdevelopment has not witnessed significant improvement under successive governments.

Many countries in Africa, Asia and South America share the disappointing experience of underdevelopment with Nigeria. The governments of the affected countries are yet to build modern infrastructure for education, health and transportation. Hence, their hapless citizens suffer from human degradation emanating from poverty, hunger, inequality, illiteracy, poor healthcare and poor sanitation.

The Nigerian case is very pathetic when the state of education in the country is considered. UNESCO reported in 2015 that Sub-Saharan Africa was the region with the highest number of out-of-school children. The report stated that the world had 61 million out-of-school children of primary school age and 33 million or more than half of the children lived in Sub-Saharan Africa. Global Partnership for Education stated in 2016 that Nigeria had approximately twenty percent of the total out-of-school children in the world.

Underdevelopment and its negative effects are considered a global challenge. It is no longer a problem that will be left for poor countries to tackle. The spillover effects of underdevelopment have far-reaching consequences for the entire world. Thus, the global community was prompted to provide a holistic approach to development by putting the Seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) together in 2015. The SDGs, which came after the Millennium Development Goals, are expected to bring development to all nations of the world by 2030.

This paper is prepared with a view to helping Nigeria achieve quality education which is the fourth item on the list of Sustainable Development Goals. The paper used secondary data obtained from reputable global institutions to present the dismal performance of Nigeria in the area of education. The paper brought to the fore how Nigeria occupies a low position on the scale of development. It closes with the articulation of policy measures that will help raise the quality of education as well as advance the overall development of the country.

### **Perceptions on Growth and Development**

Economic growth is achieved when a country records an increase in the volume of goods and services produced in a particular year when compared with the figures of previous year. This is normally measured using the country's Gross Domestic Product, GDP. Development is broader than economic growth as the former entails improvement in the complete well-being of the people. Thus, scholars and policy makers consider improvements in yardsticks such as life expectancy, poverty rate, inequality, literacy rate and adequacy of infrastructure when evaluating a country's level of development.

Murphy et al (1989) noted that 'countries needed to jump from one stage of development to another through a virtuous cycle in which large investments in infrastructure and education coupled with private investments would move the economy to a more productive stage, breaking free from economic paradigms of lower productive stage'. It is important that governments consider education as a catalyst for development.

Aghion (2002) corroborated Joseph Schumpeter's postulation that innovation was crucial to economic growth. He posited that there must be creativity that will lead to technological progress; this will encourage entrepreneurs to continually create new products that will enable them to capture markets. It is imperative to acknowledge that innovation, technology and entrepreneurship are products of good education.

Acemoglu, et al (2001) observed that "Europeans adopted very different colonization policies in different colonies with different associated institutions. In places with high tropical diseases, they could not settle permanently, and they established extractive institutions which persisted after independence. In places with favourable climate where they could settle permanently, they established institutions modeled after those in their European homelands. In these 'neo-Europes', better institutions produced better development outcomes". This vividly demonstrates that strong institutions are needed for development. A forward-looking country must have a rational legislature, an impartial court system, an unbiased electoral commission, an effective civil service, and a sophisticated financial system in order to develop.

Ranieri and Ramos (2013) explained the concept of inclusive growth, "If inclusiveness is conceived in terms of equity, and thus considered as entailing equitable sharing of growth, it signifies that the benefits of growth must be evenly distributed." In their view, growth is inclusive or pro-poor if it increases social opportunity in a way that ensures that poverty is reduced, inequality is reduced, equality among genders is guaranteed, jobs are created, infrastructure is provided, basic social services are available, and there is good governance.

Todaro (1982) established a positive correlation between savings and economic growth. According to him, "one of the principal tricks necessary for take-off into self-sustaining growth is the mobilization of domestic and foreign savings in order to generate sufficient investment to accelerate economic growth."

Developing countries are advised to mobilize more domestic savings for investment in modern infrastructure to accelerate economic growth. In addition, funds should be obtained from foreign and multilateral institutions to increase domestic growth and development. Foreign assistance must come with concessional terms to make repayment easy.

### Quality Education and Development

Quality education is vital to development. A country which is able to achieve quality education will, in turn, make progress in other areas of development. In this section, relevant data are used to assess the state of education in Nigeria with a view to determining the country's progress in her pursuit of development.

### Literacy Rate

Nigeria had a literacy rate of 59.6 per cent in 2015 according to the United Nations Development Program. This implies that two out of every five Nigerians are illiterates. This is distressing when compared with the impressive achievements of countries like Singapore, Italy and Spain. See Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Literacy Rate**

	Country	Literacy Rate
1	Nigeria	59.6%
2	South Africa	94.3%
3	Egypt	75.2%
4	Russia	99.7%
5	Italy	99.2%
6	Spain	98.1%
7	Argentina	98.1%
8	Singapore	96.8%
9	Portugal	95.7%
10	Turkey	95.0%

**Source:** Human Development Report 2016

### Primary School Dropout

According to the 2016 report of the United Nations Development Program, the rate of primary school dropout in Nigeria was 20.7 per cent. This indicated that less than four out of every five children enrolled actually completed their primary education in Nigeria. The outlook is worrisome when compared with the performance of developed nations. See Table 2.

**Table 2: Primary School Dropout Rate**

	Country	Primary school dropout rate
	Nigeria	20.7%
	South Africa	Not available
	Egypt	3.9%
	Singapore	1.3%
	Sweden	0.4%
	South Korea	0.4%
	Denmark	0.5%
	United Kingdom	Not available
	United States	Not available
	Germany	3.5%

**Source:** Human Development Report 2016

### Availability of Qualified Teachers

The statistics obtained from the Human Development Index of 2016 revealed that Nigeria did not have sufficient qualified teachers in primary schools. Only 66 percent of teachers in Nigerian primary schools were trained to teach. That is, about two out of every five teachers in Nigeria were not qualified to teach pupils. Education is in disarray as people without requisite skills are being employed to transfer knowledge to hapless children. See Table 3.

**Table 3: Percentage of Trained Primary School Teachers**

	Country	Percentage of Trained Teachers in Primary Schools
1	Nigeria	66%
2	Botswana	99%
3	Egypt	73%
4	Mauritius	100%
5	Cuba	100%
6	Thailand	100%
7	Malaysia	99%
8	Mexico	96%
9	Hong Kong	96%
10	Singapore	94%

**Source:** Human Development Index 2016

### Pupils per Teacher

Nigeria has one of the highest numbers of pupils per teacher in the world. In the country, a teacher is attached to 38 pupils in primary school. The high ratio indicates that school infrastructure is inadequate and teaching personnel are overstretched. This scenario is unhelpful as it reduces the quality of education in Nigeria. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) members like Sweden, USA, UK have better pupil-to-teacher ratio of 10, 15 and 17 respectively. See Table 4.

**Table: Pupil-teacher Ratio**

	<b>Country</b>	<b>Pupil-teacher Ratio</b>
1	Nigeria	38
2	South Africa	32
3	Egypt	23
4	Brazil	21
5	UK	17
6	USA	15
7	Finland	13
8	Germany	12
9	Austria	11
10	Sweden	10

**Source:** Human Development Index 2016

### **Gender Inequality Concerning Education**

In Nigeria, the average years that a woman spends in school is given as 6.77 years. This signifies gender inequality against women. If women account for about half of Nigeria's population and majority of them barely go beyond primary school, then it will be difficult for the country to achieve development. Again, countries like USA and UK offer women better opportunities in education as average years spent in school are 15.06 and 14.9 respectively. See Table 5.

**Table 5: Women's Average Years in School**

	<b>Country</b>	<b>Women's Average Years in School</b>
1	Nigeria	6.77 years
2	South Africa	11.48 years
3	Egypt	9.06 years
4	India	5.79 years
5	Brazil	9.60 years
6	Malaysia	11.93 years
7	France	14.04 years
8	South Korea	14.62 years
9	UK	14.9 years
10	USA	15.06 years

**Source:** Social Progress Index 2017

### **Globally Ranked Universities**

The terrible performance of Nigeria in the area of education is brought to the fore as globally ranked universities are reviewed. Out of the 153 universities in Nigeria, only one is globally ranked. Two other African countries namely South Africa and Egypt have thirteen and ten globally ranked universities respectively. The OECD countries presented on Table 6 have impressive performance: USA has 329 globally ranked universities, UK 147 and France 75.

**Table 6: Globally Ranked Universities**

	Country	Number of Globally Ranked Universities
1	Nigeria	1
2	Egypt	10
3	South Africa	13
4	Malaysia	14
5	Brazil	34
6	India	40
7	South Korea	42
8	France	75
9	UK	147
10	USA	329

**Source:** Social Progress Index 2017

### Education and Development

Does a country's quality of education have effect on its development? There appears to be a connection between education quality and healthcare quality. Similarly, countries that experience quality education also tend to record high standard of living among their people. In its 2016 report on perception of wellbeing, the United Nations Development Program stated that only 55 per cent of Nigerians were satisfied with the country's education quality, 48 percent were satisfied with its healthcare quality, and 36 percent were satisfied with the standard of living. The perception of wellbeing is much better in countries that have much higher quality education. For instance, 83 percent were satisfied with the education quality in Singapore, 88 percent were satisfied with her healthcare quality and 84 per cent were satisfied with the standard of living. This report demonstrates that quality education can influence other indicators of development, a lesson for Nigeria and other countries in similar circumstances. See Table 7.

**Table 7: Perception of Wellbeing**

	Country	Education quality	Healthcare quality	Standard of living
1	Nigeria	55	48	36
2	Egypt	52	43	78
3	South Africa	74	59	42
4	Germany	62	89	90
5	Sweden	63	82	87
6	USA	68	77	74
7	UK	70	77	84
8	Australia	73	87	86
9	Denmark	75	88	91
10	Singapore	83	88	84

**Source:** Human Development Report 2016

### Impediments to Quality Education

Education is yet to be placed on a smooth path in Nigeria. A number of impediments have continuously halted its advancement. The major obstacles that impair the quality of education in Nigeria are these:

Underfunding is an albatross to the provision of quality education in Nigeria. The national budget in 2017 allocated N455.4 billion to education out of a total expenditure of N7.4 trillion; that is 6.1 percent. The 2018 budget proposal allocated N605.79 billion to education out of a total expenditure of N8.6 trillion; that is 7.04 percent. The funds allocated to education fell short of the minimum of 25 percent recommended by UNESCO.

Secondly, Nigeria has been experiencing underwhelming development amidst overwhelming corruption. Education is not insulated from this malaise. Corruption allows a high percentage of the funds allocated to the sector to get diverted into the private accounts of public officials. Hence, the amount being spent on education is much lower than the figure in the budget. The Corruption Perception Index 2016 revealed that Nigeria had a score of 28. The score ranges from 0 for the highly corrupt to 100 for the least corrupt. The country occupied the 136th position among the 176 countries ranked. Concerted efforts are required to tackle corruption so that development will not elude Nigeria.

Thirdly, the insurgency masterminded by Boko Haram has persistently taken peace away from north-eastern Nigeria. The problem singly accounts for over 60 percent of 10.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria. Majority of the affected children live in the hotbed of the crisis. Next, inadequate school infrastructure results in the high number of school children allocated to each teacher. The current ratio of 38 pupils per teacher creates an atmosphere that is not conducive for learning. This is a deviation from global best practice.

Finally, a large number of untrained teachers are employed to teach. Available statistics regarding primary education show that 34 percent of the teachers at that level were not trained to teach. Lack of teaching proficiency always has negative impact on children's learning process. Moreover, a weak foundation at the early stage goes further to distort the academic progress of the affected children as they attempt to go higher in learning.

### **Delivering Quality Education by 2030**

The Nigerian government must prioritize education in its drive towards the achievement of sustainable development goals. Plans must be succinctly outlined and effectively implemented with the objective of bringing education in Nigeria to a global standard. The following measures are expedient in the country's drive towards quality education.

Funds allocated to education must be raised to a minimum of 15 percent of total expenditure at the federal level. Also, the 36 state governments must be ready to commit 15 percent of their states' annual expenditures to education. Libraries must be stocked with the newest editions of books. School laboratories must be properly equipped. Funds must be adequately provided for research by the country's universities. Nigeria is currently being underserved by its 153 universities. Private sector organizations should be incentivized to establish more universities to absorb qualified students that are unable to get university admissions because of limited space. The Federal Government is advised to monitor standards as the number of institutions increases.



Vocational training is essential for the youths who are not intellectually endowed to go to the university. Institutions should be established to train people in this category. The scheme will provide employability skills for vocational trainees.

The public procurement system must be strengthened so that fraudulent practices of public officials are effectively nipped in the bud. Corruption must attract heavy penalties. A transparent society will ensure that developmental projects receive value for every naira spent.

Special attention must be given to the education of the girl-child. Parents in northern Nigeria must be encouraged to allow their daughters to go to school. State governments should introduce incentives, such as lower fees, that will encourage parents to send female children to school. Child marriage must be outlawed so that girls can spend a minimum of 14 years in school. Gender inequality will be reduced as increasing number of girls receive good education. Besides, education will give female citizens greater access to opportunities within the economic space. The Government must enforce standards across all institutions of learning. Minimum qualifications must be specified for teachers employed to teach in primary and secondary schools. Continuous training programmes are essential for all teachers to keep them abreast of new developments in their subjects.

The country's information and communication infrastructure needs to be expanded. All Nigerians deserve unhindered access to the Internet. This will enable the youths and adults to enroll for online courses offered by well rated institutions in Europe and North America. In our quest for development, the authorities overseeing the education sector must review and update school curriculums periodically. The demands of modern society should determine what students are taught in school.

### **Conclusion**

Quality education is capable of transforming Nigeria from a resource-driven market to a knowledge-driven economy. Education, to all intents and purposes, influences development. With good education, requisite skills are transferred to medical practitioners and nurses for quality healthcare; engineers are properly trained to build and maintain modern infrastructure; agriculturists are able to acquire necessary knowledge for successful crop farming and animal husbandry; proficiency in ICT is gained; and entrepreneurial talents are honed. In addition, quality education leads to the sufficient provision of skillful manpower for organizations in the public and private sectors of the economy.

In a nutshell, quality education will empower all Nigerians, male and female, to create income-earning opportunities for themselves. Thus, the majority of the population will be able to escape the web of poverty and hunger. Educated parents will not hesitate to allow their children to be vaccinated against preventable diseases. Gender inequality between men and women will be reduced significantly. All these gains will result in high standard of living and improved wellbeing for all citizens.

Implementation of development plans must be consistent until the goals are achieved. No resource should be spared in the drive to lift the country out of the indignity of underdevelopment. Collaborations with development partners are essential. The government must ensure that Nigeria is not left behind when the scorecards of Sustainable Development Goals are released in 2030.

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