

Accessibility to Social Services and Human Capital for Sustainable Development Goals SDGs Attainment in Nigeria: A Statistical Review

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Abstract

With a definite goal, the study aimed to empirically assess the significance of social services and human capital towards the attainment of the SDGs program by capitalizing on the statistical review of the performance of the SDGs program in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023. These are aimed to be achieved by focusing on the performance in the education and health sectors, gender equality, poverty reduction including accessibility to clean water and sanitation within the period under review. Findings from the study suggests monumental under performance in both the education and health sectors, respectively from 2015 to 2020. Also, the statistics on accessibility to clean water supply was not encouraging as the study revealed that by 2020 only 21.67% of Nigerians have access to clean water and about 40.1% of Nigerians' daily survival is not up to the internationally agreed minimum income of \$2.15. Against this, the study recommends a robust policy implementation to transform human capital and increasing budget allocations to meet global benchmarks as a necessary condition for SDGs attainment before the terminal year of 2030. Moreover, for the realization of the SDGs target by 2030, stakeholders within the Nigerian government should liaise with her foreign donor bodies to ease implementation in all aspects of the program

Keywords: MDGs, SDGs, United Nation, Human Capital, Nigeria

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Background to the Study

Global poverty rate and economic inequality has been on the rise since the second world war of 1945, which necessitate the quest for achieving accelerated economic performance through globalization thereby leading to institutional establishment by the United Nations of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) program in the early 1990s with a central target of reducing poverty across nations by at least 50% on or before the year 2015 (Wais, 1992). Ten years after launching the project (1990-2010) it was reported to have met success in mitigating global poverty significantly, especially in the emerging economies such as china and India despite their poverty records.

However, the MDGs project recorded a huge setback in some other poverty laden economies largely in the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) including Nigeria that revealed a rising poverty trend in most part of the years. This among other socio-economic reasons necessitates the rolling over of the plan to Sustainable Development Goals SDGs. (USAID, 2017). Therefore, SDGs Agenda is part of the United Nation effort to remedy the shortfalls of MDGs and come up with a more comprehensive global plan for development, with a specific project that objectively focused on yet to be completed businesses of the MDGs that left many economies in the SSA and beyond unsuccessful before its terminal period of 2015.

In this regard, the UN member nations comprising of 194 including Nigeria participated in the adoption and signing of the agenda for SDGs for 2030 titled 'Transforming our World', after which the agenda for the SDGs was formalized, signed and adopted on September, 25, 2015 following a thorough review by the entire member states. Globally, the SDGs has 17 main aims sub-divided into 169 targets with its top most priorities being: poverty and hunger elimination, women empowerment, equality of all genders, Universal Basic Education (UBE) achievement, the minimization of infant, child and neonatal mortalities including maternal healthcare (USAID, 2017).

By 2030, the SDGs program of the UN is expected to be institutionalized in developing nations (such as Nigeria) with much achievements. Central to this pursuit is the role of social service accessibility, encompassing healthcare, education, clean water, and sanitation, and its impact on the development of human resource. In the quest for achieving minimum poverty rate in Nigeria, the SDG1 is largely a function of increasing accessibility of social services such as education, health and access to clean water to the over 203 million citizenries. Social services are instrumental to enhancing quality of life and healthy living as well as improvement in human capital efficiency. This analogy is strong enough to buttress the fact that the significance of human resource input in economically changing the fortunes of Nigeria and other nations through access to social service cannot be over emphasized.

Enrollment rates in education which is critical in the development of middle and high-level manpower in the SSA are comparatively low, globally. As recently reported by UNESCO, the total enrolment in the region is only 6.0% (UNESCO, 2023). A number of countries domiciled in Africa finds it difficult in maintaining school enrolment levels with a minimum research finding in comparison to their counterparts across the globe. This tragedy is owing to

the notion of prioritizing basic schooling above tertiary education in aiming to curtail the rate of poverty.

At a global scale, growth in the health sector is comparatively faster over economic growth in fifteen years. Ranging from the periods of 2000 to 2015, health economy in the world grew with a mean annual rate of 4.0% in real terms as against only 2.8% for the world economy. Countries of the world classified as low- and middle-income earners has their health economy statistics going faster above 6.0% at a mean rate (Kinross et al. 2020). Furthermore, statistics from 31 selected low-income nations across the world in 2015 suggests that; on average, external resource to health expenditure stands at 30% as compared to some 50 selected lower middle and 57 upper middle-income economies which stood at only 3% and less than 1%, respectively (WHO, 2017).

The availability of hygienic water is essential for human health and wellbeing which is critical element for economic prosperity and a long-term development. The WHO in 2017, suggests that the availability of safe and hygienic water is difficult for about 2 billion lives across the world which is responsible for the deaths of over 500,000 people each year. Waterborne ailments like cholera, typhoid, and dysentery are common in many parts of the world, and they pose a significant public health threat. Access to clean water is also critical for economic development. Lack of access to clean water can limit agricultural productivity, hinder economic growth, and increase healthcare costs (WHO, 2017).

Like in most parts of the Sub Saharan African, the demand for water in Nigeria, especially in rural areas for agricultural and domestic purposes is by far more than the supply of it. Statistics from WHO have shown that 71 million Nigerians finds it difficult to get clean and hygienic water, moreover, 130 million do not have the essential sanitation. Only 61% of individuals have access to clean water which is by far more than the supply of it (WHO, 2023). Therefore, ensuring access to clean water is a crucial step towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

It is against this, the study seeks to give a statistical trend review of social services parameters (education, Health and Clean water) expenditures and examine how instrumental they are in attaining the SDGs in Nigeria through human capital development. The study also seeks to reveal the nexus between quality human capital and social services accessibility as well as how a relationship between the variables led to the attainment or otherwise of SDGs in Nigeria since 2015. To achieve this, the researchers employ the use of statistical trend analysis of the study variables from 2000 to 2022 which covers some MDGs and SDGs target years to assess the performance of the SDGs 2030 project in Nigeria and make recommendations.

Literature Review

After a critical highlight of the background, while maintaining the contents of the topic, it can be observed that this study is associated with relevant concepts, theories and empirical findings. In that regard, a brief explanation of relevant concepts, theories and empirical findings is conducted in this section of the study.

Concept of Human Capital

Human capital is an embodiment of those activities that are utilized for health improvement, education, physical skills and perceptions aimed at fostering the necessary behavior in achieving greater human competitive abilities. According to Ayeni and Omobude (2018), human capital development involves: coaching, monitoring and investing in workforce through knowledge, periodic trainings, internship and Research and Development (R&D) within an organized setting. In this regard, human capital can be seen as a necessary requirement for labour efficiency as a strategic factor of production especially in countries like Nigeria where labor intensive production technique is more desirous.

Concept of Education

Education which can be formal, informal, practical or theoretical is perceived differently by categories of people. It is often called formal or continuous learning process that includes acquiring knowledge, skills and behavior. Education also involves training peoples' thoughts in ways that results to ideal changes. The intent of education involves inculcation of values, skills, and behavior for better living and socio-economic transformation of entire society. In a concise form, United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) conceptualized and termed education as a holistic way of elevating human ability and knowledge. In light of these, scholars generally conceptualized it as the most valuable apparatus for a holistic mental improvement of societies across the world (Adesope, 2021). The foregoing suggests that no proper human capital development could be achieved without a functional educational system that is knowledge driven. Education remains the key to the development of personal and National potentials of a country and the world at large. Education brings about visionary thoughts that manifests in the forms of technological advancement with improved production techniques towards increasing productivity.

Concept of Health

WHO in 1984 defined health as a complete state of physical, social and mental well-being that goes beyond absence of disease. Also, health implies the maximum capability of a person towards self-actualization. (Ojo & Ojo, 2022). Therefore, health relatively, is a state of improved physical, social and mental function of an individual towards the achievement of his/her potentials in a given society.

Concept of Sustainable Development

The Brundtland Commission Report (BCR) defined development as the realization of necessities of current generation without compromising the needs of succeeding generation. (Onah & Vincent, 2005). In similar vein, United Nation (2022) affirmed that, the growth of an economy accompanied by opportunities and fairness across the world with a lesser harm to the limited natural endowments can be termed sustainable development.

Empirical investigations on the accessibility to social services towards the attainment of human capital (such as health and education) have been conducted in world regions, mostly with the aim of strengthening human resource and development. For example, Sampson et al., (2021) reexamined the relationship of government expenditure on health and the Nigerian

economic growth by adopting Wagner's theory of state activities that is ever-increasing. Findings from the study suggest that there exists evidence of a long-run linear relationship between government health expenditure and the growth of Nigerian economy. Moreover, the result shows no sign of causal dependency among the estimated variables. Similar to Sampson's study, Aurangzeb (2023) examined the role of government spending on education and health in fostering the economy for some OPEC countries including Iran from 2004-2016. There is a positive dependency among the estimated variables according to the results with relative improvement in economic growth.

Elsewhere, Ebhotemhen and Hezekiah (2021) examined the connection between government health expenditure and economic growth in the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region. The outcome from their study shows that government health spending has a positive and significant impact on the economy of the SSA region. Also, both government and private expenditures on health have an encouraging linkage with economic growth in the SSA. In addition, Eboh, et al., (2018) explores the interrelationship among economic growth, education and health spendings in Nigeria for the period of 1970-2013. Findings from the study did not conform to A-priory expectations as both capital and recurrent government spending reveals reducing relationship with economic growth.

Adesope, (2021), examine the causal interaction among inclusive growth and government spending on education in Saudi Arabia for the period of 1981-2013 by employing the structural Autoregressive (AR) technique of analysis. Moreover, the study adopts the HDI for inclusive growth and government spending on human resource proportionate to GDP and found that spending on education is positively related to inclusive growth.

Furthermore, Emediegwu and Clement (2016), investigated the significance of education to achieving a sustained economy in Nigeria through an extensive comparative analysis with other African nations and the adoption of ARDL estimation technique. Findings from the study suggest that college enrolment significantly brings about development in the economy of Nigeria. Furthermore, the results suggest that past economic achievements enhance current development in diverse economic sectors. Ayeni and Omobude (2018), investigated the interrelationship among sustainable development and education in Nigeria for the period of 1992-2021 and employed the ARDL method of data analysis. Findings from the study shows that education has a reducing effect on sustained development in Nigeria for the period of investigation.

Theoretical Framework

Endogenous growth model as popularly called was developed by a classical economist in an attempt to remedy the systemic shortcoming of exogenous classical model. The theory was credited to Romer (1990). The theory asserted that endogenized human capital is a necessary growth component that motivates innovation and technical progress that yields economic development. According to the theory, human capital parameters such as education, healthcare delivery, access to clean water and sanitation are a strong determinant of economic breakthrough. In this regard, the theory supports matching increasing expenditure in human

capital development and good policy initiatives for inclusive sustainable growth. The theory is significance to this study as it stressed on innate human capabilities towards productivity. Moreover, sustainable development goals, as the main theme of the study can only be achieved through the strengthening of human capital in all ramifications which are considered as the basis for the endogenous growth theory.

Statistical Trend Review and Discussions

Education Sector Statistical Review

It has been established that no nation can grow above her commitment in education industry and no developed nation is without an efficient education base all over the world (Adesope, 2021). Nations of the world showcase their commitment and priority in budgetary allocations and public spending's. Nigeria as a developing economy with the larger percentage of her population as poor (World Poverty Clock, 2018) has shown a grossly inadequate attention to education industry.

The Nigeria education spending statistics in Table 1 below revealed a single digit spending throughout the revealed period as a percentage of GDP with the highest in 2015 (9.26) and the lowest in 2023 (5.16). The smooth and upward movement of educational spending as percentage of GDP from 2010-2015 as shown in Table 1 is largely explained by increase in oil revenues within those periods. This is against the negative trend in education spending as percentage of GDP from 2016-2021 as in the same table.

The monumental decrease in oil revenues occasioned by the two back to back recessionary periods of 2016 and 2018 are largely responsible for the ugly trend other things being equal. This is further explained by the negative annual change throughout 2015-2021. This revealed to us that Nigerian economy is oil dependent and monolithic which is not healthy. Therefore, the single digit education spending as percentage of GDP in Nigeria is explained by inadequate commitment and the systemic non-diversification of the national economy. This scenario inhibits provision of the required educational structures that can facilitate teaching, learning and research as well as bring about the attainment of the SDGs Agenda by 2030.

Table 1: Nigerian Education Spending Data

Year	Educational spending (% of GDP)	Annual change
2010	6.17	1.71
2011	7.88	1.71
2012	8.55	0.67
2013	8.68	0.13
2014	9.04	0.36
2015	9.26	0.22
2016	6.65	-2.61
2017	6.12	-0.53
2018	5.94	-0.18
2019	5.86	-0.08
2020	5.13	-0.73
2021	5.14	0.01
2022	5.15	0.01
2023	5.16	0.01

Source: Extracted by the Researcher from World Bank Database, 2023

The statistical data indicates a stagnant progress in education and human capital, despite marginal increases in education expenditure between 2021 and 2023 in Nigeria. This suggests inefficiencies in resource allocation and systemic barriers to effective service provision. Also, government expenditure on education in Nigeria from 2010 to 2023 is less than 10% of the national budget, far below the UNESCO-recommended 15-20% (UNESCO, 2024). While the literacy rate in the country stood at 58%, 62% and 63% in 2016, 2018 and 2021 respectively. Initiatives like the Universal Basic Education program have expanded access, however, primary school net enrollment increased from 68% in 2015 to 74% in 2023 (UNESCO, 2024).

Data Presentation and Discussions

Health Sector Statistical Review

Health sector as a critical human capital development component has been receiving attention from governments throughout the periods under review as it receives higher budgetary per capita allocations than education industry. However, the attention and the priority attached to the sector was monumentally inadequate. The highest per capita spending of (\$106) which represents just 3.35 percent of the Nigerian GDP was recorded in 2014 as shown in Table 2. However, the per capita spending as shown in Table 2 has been on the increase though slowly from 2000 through 2015, except for the year 2009 when a negative oscillation of \$68 per capita spending is recorded. The steady increase could be attributed to the stable oil revenue Nigeria receives within those years. More so, the down turn in the year 2009 was an upshot of the epileptic oil exploration activities of 2008/2009 due to the Niger Delta civil instability that recorded an unprecedented upsurge around those years.

However, from 2015 to 2020 as the statistics on the table shows, negative oscillation was recorded throughout. This coincides with the trend in education spending within those years.

The common historic source of this tragedy is the falling price of oil in the international market which occasioned the Nigerian experience of two consecutive recessionary periods of 2016 and 2018. The corona virus (COVID-19) and post COVID-19 period witness an upward trend in health spending in Nigeria from \$70 in 2019 to \$77 in 2023, which coincide with a percent contribution to GDP from 2.99% to 3.73% in 2019 and 2023 respectively after positive trend in in previous years. The statistical evidence proved that mortality rate (Under-5) has continually declined which aligned with the perceived influence of increased in health spending. The highest mortality rate of 182.3 was recorded in 2000 however, the trend declined to 126.4 in 2015 and subsequently to 104.9 in 2023.

Table 2: Nigeria Health Care Spending Data

Year	Per capita Spending (US \$)	%GDP	Mortality Rate (Under-5)
2000	18	3.20	182.3
2001	18	3.19	176.8
2002	18	2.49	171.1
2003	39	5.05	165.4
2004	44	4.63	159.8
2005	54	4.47	154.5
2006	66	4.26	149.6
2007	69	3.91	145.2
2008	80	3.70	141.3
2009	68	3.58	138
2010	76	3.30	135.1
2011	83	3.32	132.9
2012	91	3.36	130.9
2013	101	3.42	129.3
2014	106	3.35	127.9
2015	96	3.58	126.4
2016	78	3.65	124.8
2017	73	3.78	122.8
2018	66	3.09	120.2
2019	70	2.99	117.5
2020	70	3.38	114.4
2021	73	3.44	111.3
2022	75	3.40	108.1
2023	77	3.73	104.9

Source: Extracted by the Researchers from World Bank Database, 2023

Access to quality healthcare is foundational to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). However, according to the World Bank, Nigeria's healthcare expenditure is 3.73% of GDP, significantly below the global average of 10% (World Bank, 2024). The under-five mortality rate stands at 104.9 per 1,000 live births, one of the highest globally, reflecting limited access to maternal and child health services in spite of the risen trend (World Bank, 2023). This suggest that rural areas, where most of Nigerians reside, face acute shortages of facilities, with only 20% of primary healthcare centers fully functional (Federal Ministry of Health, 2023).

Nigeria has recorded modest achievements in healthcare access as its success toward SDGs. The mortality rate of infants below the ages of five reduces from 126 /1,000 in 2015 to 104/1000 in 2023 (World Bank, 2024). As reported by Word Health Organization (WHO), the percentage of children receiving full immunization rose from 23% in 2015 to 36% in 2023 (WHO, 2024). Programs like the GAVI Alliance have supported vaccine distribution, reducing polio cases to zero since 2020. According to UN Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS), antiretroviral therapy coverage increased to 68% of people living with HIV by 2023, up from 51% in 2018 (UNAIDS, 2024). Despite progress, Nigeria accounts for 14% of global maternal deaths (WHO, 2024). Only 20% of primary healthcare centers are fully functional, with rural areas facing severe shortages due to poor funding (Federal Ministry of Health, 2023). Nigeria allocates 3.4% of GDP to health and 5.6% of its budget to education, well below global benchmarks (World Bank, 2023).

Hygienic Water Accessibility Statistical Review

Accessibility to clean and hygienic water and healthcare delivery have a direct relationship as proven by empirical studies (Sosson et al., 2023). Non-access to clean water is reported to be responsible for 70% of the ailments and diseases in Sub Saharan Africa SSA (World Bank, 2023). The statistics in Table 3 shows access to clean water as percentage of population of Nigeria and the Annual changes recorded from 2000 to 2023. The statistics was not encouraging throughout the years. The Nigeria population estimate is placed around 203 million (Nigeria Population, 2023), and her highest segment that can access clean and hygienic water is 29.55% in 2023 as shown in Table 3 which represents not more than 20 million people using the above population estimate. This is against the least statistics of 12.60 portion of the population having access to clean water in 2000.

Table 3: Nigeria Clean Water Access Data

Year	Safely Managed Drinking Water (% Of Population)	Annual Change	Safely Managed Sanitation Services (% Of Population)	Annual Change
2000	12.60	0.23	20.72	-0.03
2001	12.97	0.37	20.69	-0.03
2002	13.78	0.81	21.09	0.40
2003	14.61	0.83	21.50	0.41
2004	15.48	0.87	21.92	0.43
2005	16.36	0.88	22.36	0.44
2006	17.27	0.91	22.81	0.45
2007	18.21	0.94	23.27	0.46
2008	19.18	0.97	23.75	0.48
2009	20.17	0.99	24.24	0.49
2010	21.19	1.02	24.75	0.51
2011	22.23	1.04	25.27	0.52
2012	23.20	0.97	25.80	0.53
2013	23.79	0.59	26.35	0.55
2014	24.38	0.59	26.92	0.56
2015	24.97	0.59	27.50	0.58
2016	25.55	0.58	28.09	0.59
2017	26.13	0.58	28.70	0.61
2018	26.71	0.58	29.33	0.62
2019	27.28	0.57	29.96	0.64
2020	27.85	0.57	30.62	0.65
2021	28.42	0.57	31.29	0.67
2022	28.98	0.56	31.97	0.68
2023	29.55	0.57	31.99	0.02

Source: Extracted by the Researcher from World Bank Database, 2023

SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) remains elusive, with the highest evidence of 29.55% of Nigerians having no means of affording clean water or safely management of portable drinking water services in 2023 (World Bank, 2023). The trend indicates a marginal increase of access to clean water from 12.60 in 2000 to 29.55% in 2022 as indicated in Table 3. This suggest that about 70.45% are relying on unsafe water or contaminated water sources. Similarly, access to basic sanitation facilities rose from 20.72% in 2015 to 31.99% in 2023, with open defecation declining from 25% to 23% (WHO, 2024). This suggest that most Nigerians still lack the means of affording clean water, and basic sanitation, with the remote areas disproportionately affected. Access to clean water and sanitation has improved but remains insufficient in Nigeria.

Social service accessibility directly influences human capital, which in turn drives progress across multiple SDGs. Based on the SDG 1 (No Poverty), improved healthcare and education enhance employability, reducing poverty. However, 40.1% of Nigerians' daily survival is not up to the internationally agreed minimum income of \$2.15 (World Bank, 2023). Low

budgetary allocations to health and education limit infrastructure development and service quality. Rural-urban and gender disparities hinder equitable access to services. Conflicts in some part Nigeria disrupt education and healthcare delivery, with 1.5 million children displaced (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024). Mismanagement of funds undermines social service programs.

Conclusions

Following the outcomes of this study, some conclusions can be deduced. First, Nigeria's progress toward the SDGs is intricately tied to improving social service accessibility and strengthening human capital. Second, the statistical evidence underscores persistent gaps in healthcare, education, and water access, which stifle human potential and sustainable development. Third, low budgetary allocations to health and education limit infrastructure development and service quality. Forth, rural-urban and gender disparities hinder equitable access to services as well as mismanagement of funds which undermines social service programs, while challenges like funding shortages and inequities persist, opportunities through digital innovation and public-private partnerships present can be utilize for the success of SDGs.

Policy Recommendations

Following the conclusions of this study, it recommends that:

- i. In order to realize the SDGs by 2030, Nigeria must prioritize targeted investments, equitable service delivery, and robust policy implementation to transform its human capital into a catalyst for sustainable development.
- ii. Also, on the policy reform path, increased budgetary allocations to meet global benchmarks could accelerate progress.
- iii. Awareness campaigns on the significance of human development for self-actualization should be periodically conducted, especially among the masses.
- iv. Having in mind, the main ideas of the SDGs targets such as poverty reduction, effective sanitary services, clean water, gender equality and the provision of qualitative education, stakeholders within the Nigerian government should liaise with her foreign donor bodies to ease implementation in all aspect of the program.

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