

## THE CRISIS IN EDUCATION AND THE DILEMMA OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

This paper examines the nexus between the education crisis and the constraints it imposes on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria. The paper argues that, given the inaction in addressing the country's educational crisis and its negative long-term impact on national development goals, Nigeria may miss out on the SDGs. It points out that the Nigerian educational system falls short of all indicators measuring quality education and concludes that this poses a serious threat to achieving the SDGs, as various outcomes jeopardise each objective. To resolve the crisis in education and steer it towards promoting the SDGs, the paper recommends, among other actions, strengthening education policies, improving access and inclusivity, implementing curriculum reforms, enhancing security, and focusing on teacher recruitment, training, and motivation. Additionally, it emphasises the importance of technology and the establishment of partnerships, such as school-community relations, to improve infrastructure, training, policy reforms, and community-based collaboration for supervision, especially since formal structures have become ineffective. Furthermore, adequate funding needs to be prioritised to meet UNESCO's recommendations of allocating 4-6 per cent of GDP or 15-20 per cent of public expenditure to education, as well as initiating and implementing consistent and realistic education policies.

**Key Words:** Nigeria, SDGs, UNESCO Crisis in Education, Education Policy, Learning Outcomes

### Introduction

In 2000, the member states of the United Nations agreed on the Millennium Development Goals to address poverty, hunger, gender-based discrimination, and other issues (United Nations, 2005). The targets sought to reduce extreme poverty and hunger by half; ensure full

course completion of education by boys and girls; promote gender equality concerning education and empower women; reduce mortality of children below age five by two-thirds and improve maternal health by ensuring access to reproductive health; address the malaria and HIV/AIDS scourge; promote environmental sustainability; and develop global partnerships to combat discriminatory trade policies, debt problems of developing countries, low access to ICT and high cost of drugs (UNDP, 2015; Sachs, 2012).

The MDG goals and targets were largely not achieved, as several countries missed out due to a myriad of factors, ranging from conflicts and political instability to poor or inadequate funding, corruption, climate change effects, and poor educational outcomes (Akinbobola, 2014; Eze, 2016). The failure and subsequent reviews led to the declaration of the 17-point Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, with 2030 as the target date for their achievement (UN, 2015).

At independence in 1960, the British bequeathed to Nigeria an educational system that had the potential to drive development, provided it was further expanded and developed to meet all the ramifications of educational development and align with Nigeria's development aspirations (Fafunwa, 1974; Nwagwu, 1976). However, since the early 1980s, the Nigerian educational system has faced a negative turning point (Okebukola, 2008). This crisis has led to a high literacy rate, unequal access, examination fraud, economic stagnation, and a dissonance between educational outcomes and national development goals (Obanya, 2010; Olanrewaju & Olaniyan, 2021).

The quality of outputs has become visibly poor, as university graduates are often unemployable and lack basic communication and professional skills (Adeyemi & Uko-Aviomoh, 2004). Given the strategic importance of education to development, the type of educational outcomes in Nigeria raises concerns about achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2020).

This paper examines the nexus between the education crisis and the constraints it poses to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria. The paper argues that if the Nigerian government's inaction at all levels in addressing the country's educational crisis is not reversed, the country may miss out on achieving the SDGs. The objective is to analyse how the ongoing education crisis in Nigeria constrains the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and make appropriate recommendations to mitigate it.

## Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research thematic design to explore the relationship between the crisis in Nigerian education and the prospects for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The thematic method is particularly suited for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within a dataset or body of evidence, especially when examining complex socio-political phenomena such as education and development (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## Research Design

The research is exploratory and interpretive. It does not aim to test a hypothesis statistically, but to generate critical insights into how Nigeria's persistent educational failures are affecting its capacity to realise its goals by 2030. The study synthesises secondary data drawn from documentary sources using thematic coding and analysis.

## Data Sources

The study relies exclusively on secondary sources, including:

- National and international education policy documents (e.g., Federal Ministry of Education reports, National Policy on Education),
- Development frameworks (e.g., United Nations SDG reports),
- Scholarly publications and journal articles,
- Institutional reports (e.g., UNESCO, World Bank, UNICEF, GPE),

The selected documents were qualified based on relevance and suitability.

## Thematic Approach

The thematic analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used, and the following six steps were followed:

1. Familiarisation with Data – Reading and re-reading texts to immerse oneself in the content.
2. Generating Initial Codes – Identifying and labelling recurring issues such as “underfunding,” “policy instability,” “antisocial behaviour,” and “infrastructure decay.”

3. Searching for Themes – Grouping related codes under broader themes such as “State Policy and Educational Breakdown,” “Education and Human Capital Deficit,” and “Education as a Barrier to SDGs.”
4. Reviewing Themes – Ensuring Thematic Coherence and Relevance to the Research Questions.
5. Defining and Naming Themes – Finalising themes to capture the core narratives of the data.

## **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The study uses thematic interpretation to examine the content and implications of policies, institutional frameworks, and academic critiques. It explores how systemic weaknesses in education contribute to developmental stagnation and the undermining of specific SDGs (e.g., SDG 1 – No Poverty, SDG 4 – Quality Education, SDG 8 – Decent Work, SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). The analysis also identifies thematic intersections between education policy failure and broader governance challenges in Nigeria.

## **Scope and Limitations**

The study is limited to Nigeria and focuses on the post-2000 period, specifically the transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework. While it offers in-depth qualitative insights, it does not provide statistical, general-level empirical validation. However, its strength lies in offering a structured interpretation of existing knowledge through the framework of development policy.

## **Literature Review: State Policy and the Crisis in Nigerian Education.**

This section reviews relevant literature to situate the study within its appropriate academic and policy context. It explores foundational concepts such as the meaning, functions, and types of education, followed by a conceptualisation of what constitutes a crisis in education. The section further discusses how state policy has shaped the trajectory of education in Nigeria, with particular attention to how policy deficiencies, governance challenges, and systemic neglect have contributed to the persistent crisis in the sector. Through this review, the paper establishes the link between state action (or inaction) and the current challenges confronting Nigeria’s educational system.

### **( a ) What is Education?**

Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. It can take place in formal settings, such as schools, colleges, and universities, or informally through life experiences, family, peer interactions, and media exposure (UNESCO, 2017; Schunk, 2020). At its core, education serves multiple functions: cognitive, by developing intellectual abilities, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills (Slavin, 2012); social, by transmitting cultural norms, values, and shared identities (Durkheim, 1956); economic, by preparing individuals for productive work and economic participation (Becker, 1993); political, by fostering civic responsibility and participation in democratic processes (Freire, 1970); and personal, by enabling self-discovery, creativity, and individual growth (Rogers, 1969). There are different types of education: formal education; structured, curriculum-based learning in institutions; informal education, which involves unstructured learning from everyday experiences; and non-formal education, which involves organised activities outside the formal system, such as adult literacy or vocational training (Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; Singh, 2015).

Because education, formal or informal, seeks to transmit knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another; and this, essentially, is the basis of societal development and human existence, societies have developed formal structures within the context of formal education, to promote development and the well-being of humanity. Subsequently, the inability of an education system to achieve these fundamental goals, as measured by quality indicators, raises serious concerns.

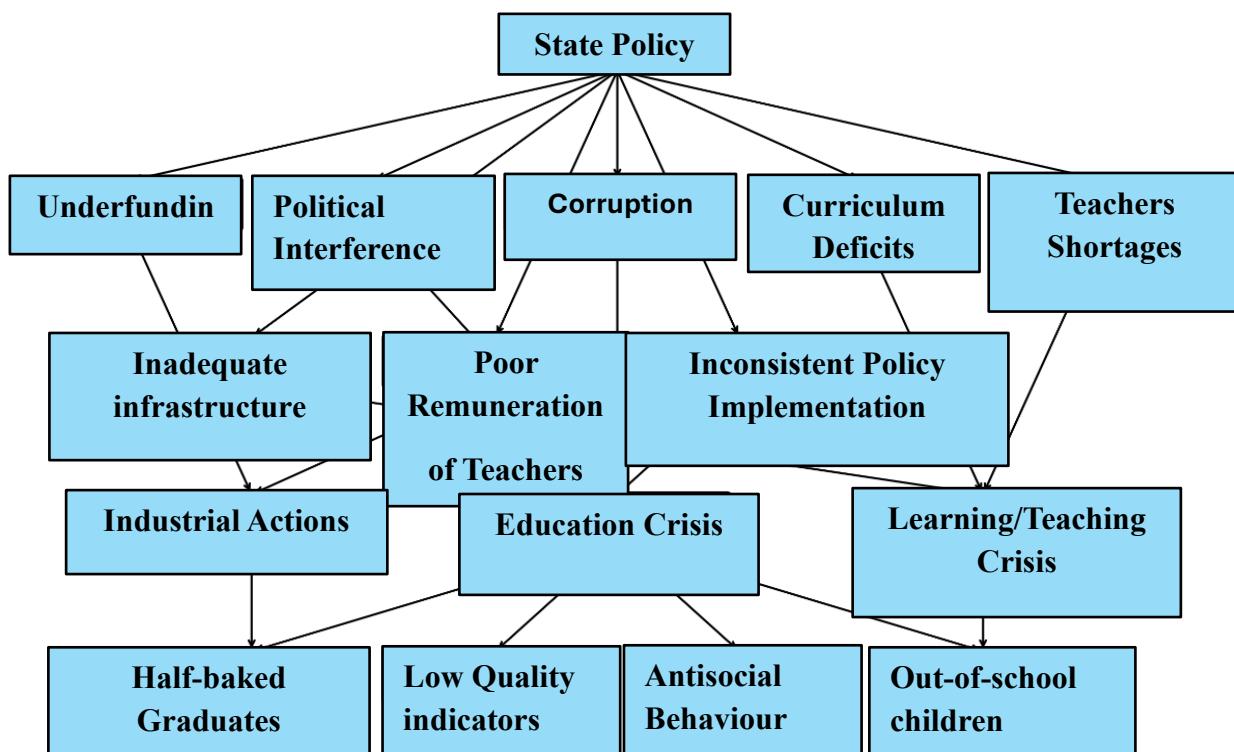
### **( b ) What is Crisis in Education?**

A crisis in education refers to a dysfunctional educational system, characterised by a critical breakdown or sustained failure that undermines the system's ability to deliver quality, equitable, and relevant learning outcomes to individuals and society. It manifests through structural, policy, pedagogical, and resource-related deficiencies that disrupt the core goals of education; namely, knowledge transmission, skills development, and societal advancement. The key dimensions of the education crisis include access and equity deficits, poor quality of education, inadequate infrastructure and resources, weak governance and policy failures, curriculum irrelevance, conflict and insecurity, and teacher crisis (World Bank, 2018; UNESCO, 2020).

### (c) State Policy and the Crisis in Nigerian Education

The relationship between state policy and educational development has been widely examined in the literature, with scholars emphasising the pivotal role of government decisions in determining the quality, accessibility, and relevance of education. The Nigerian educational system performs below all the indicators that measure quality education; ranging from equal access, enrolment rates, teacher quality, student-teacher ratio, relevance and appropriateness of curriculum, learning outcomes that are in sync with content and labour force requirements, quality infrastructure, retention and completion rates by pupils and students, educational equity for gender and other social groups, transparent and fair student evaluation systems, parental and community involvement, student well-being, life long educational attainment and effective and responsive policy and governance (UNESCO, 2020; World Bank, 2018; Ajayi, 2017).

**Figure 1: Explanatory Model for State Policy and the Crisis in Nigerian Education**



Source: Athours, 2025

One visible evidence of the crisis in Nigerian education is the pervasive antisocial behaviour. Although the school is a place to learn good social behaviour, schools in Nigeria now significantly contribute to antisocial behaviour among pupils and students. Notable causes of antisocial behaviour in Nigerian schools include: poor school administration, lack of or ineffective counselling unit and workforce, sexual abuse by teachers and students, use of vulgar language by teachers and students, overcrowded classrooms, among others. The impact of different forms of antisocial behaviour is far-reaching, as they negatively affect socioeconomic development and security.

The crisis in Nigerian education is rooted in a myriad of factors including poor funding, inadequate infrastructure, poor remuneration, incessant disruptions in the academic calendar by staff unions strikes and students protests, inadequate and poorly trained workforce; culture, religion, insecurity, learning, teaching and curriculum deficits; inadequate teaching aids, overcrowded classrooms, high out of school children, among others. However, central to these factors are state policies that are either inconsistent with reality, inefficient, or entirely out of tune with the dynamics of educational trends, or that instigate a crisis in the educational system.

One such example is the government's funding policies, which not only fall short of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) prescribed 4-6 per cent of GDP or 15-20 per cent of public expenditure allocation to the education sector, but also undermine national education development goals. Between 2014 and 2024, for instance, the highest percentage allocation to education by the Nigerian Federal Government was 10.8 per cent in 2015

This, in addition to corruption and the misapplication of funds, has been the bane of poor funding, inadequate infrastructure, low remuneration, inefficient supervision, a lack of curriculum review, and nearly all other ills in the system. For example, poor funding and the associated inability to adjust wages upward to capture economic trends and improve infrastructure significantly explain university staff unions' disputes with the government, and the resultant industrial actions that disrupt the academic calendar, shorten teaching and learning time, and subsequently produce graduates who are not fully equipped. From 1999 to 2022, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in Nigeria embarked on industrial actions that kept students at home for approximately 56 months, or nearly five years. Similar actions by staff unions at the lower levels of education, or abandonment of duties in search of second incomes have created a teaching and learning crisis; characterised by teaching and

learning time, absence or haphazard teaching, inability to cover curriculum or teaching scheme, poor pupils and students turnout due uncertainty of the school climate, among others.

At the levels of basic and secondary education, frequent policy changes, as well as the inability to provide supporting infrastructure, funding, equipment, training, and an adequate workforce, have caused decay and stagnation. Nigeria's education policy has frequently undergone changes, with policies such as Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Basic Education (UBE), the 6-3-3-4 system, and the 9-3 system, each with different philosophical underpinnings that have yet to be fully achieved. Eze (2023) and Ogunode, Akinyode, and Ayoko (2023) have emphasised in their studies that education policy instability is fundamental to the education crisis, given its adverse impacts on educational outcomes.

This paper agrees with their conclusions, which suggest that state policies have contributed to systemic failures at all levels of education. The disconnect between policy formulation and execution, along with intricate relationships with underlying funding deficiencies, teacher shortages, weak enforcement mechanisms, corruption, economic constraints, among other factors, has hindered positive educational outcomes. This makes it clear that deficits in educational policies are a key causal factor in the education crisis, suggesting that corrective interventions should not overlook them.

### **Education and the Sustainable Development Goals ( SDGs) in Nigeria**

The 17 SDGs are interconnected and are expected to have interacting relationships that will result in the improvement of human well-being (See Table 1). However, this paper focuses on goal four, which is the central point of all the other goals.

**Table 1: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and their Targets**

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Target</b>
1	No Poverty	End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2	Zero Hunger	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
3	Good Health and Well-being	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
4	Quality Education	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
5	Gender Equality	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

6	Clean Water and Sanitation	Ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
7	Affordable and Clean Energy	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
8	Decent Work and Economic Growth	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
9	Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and innovation.
10	Reduced Inequalities	Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11	Sustainable Cities and Communities	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12	Responsible Consumption and Production	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
13	Climate Action	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
14	. Life Below Water	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
15	Life on Land	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16	Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
17	Partnerships for the Goals	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the partnership for sustainable development.

Source: United Nations 2015

Education for development is not just quantitative expansion in education, but also qualitative improvements that result in the skills and capacities driving the development process (Adeosun, 2018; Federal Ministry of Education, 2019). The development benefits of education include the following:

- Makes a man moral and ethical
- Inducts the individual into the shared values of society
- Develops a commitment to societal goals in the individual
- Prepares the young members of society for the future
- Defines behavioural patterns of individuals and society
- Enhances the productive capabilities of individuals and, by extension, the society.
- Enhances human capital development, raises creativity and productivity, promotes entrepreneurship and advances technology

- Education enhances the capacity of individuals in society to collectively understand and adapt their environment for the benefit of present and future generations.
- Develops the skill, capacity, freedom, creativity, discipline, responsibility and material prosperity of individuals, which when aggregated, results in the prosperity of nations.
- Enhances a culture of tolerance, non-violent means of resolving disputes, justice, equity in resource allocation and social responsibility

Education therefore enhances skills, knowledge, and productivity, improves employment opportunities and earnings, breaks cycles of poverty by equipping individuals with skills to participate in the economy, promotes gender equality, social mobility, and empowerment of marginamarginalised, reduce discrimination and fosters a more inclusivity, increases awareness about health, hygiene, and nutrition, enhances better health outcomes and lower child mortality rates, fosters critical thinking, civic responsibility, and participation in governance leading to support for democratic institutions and human rights, supports research, innovation, and adaptation to new technologies, and indus industrialisationdernimodernisationtes environmental awareness and responsible resource management ( Adamu, 2017).

## **Education And The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) In Nigeria**

The logical question that arises is, why has education failed to improve development in developing countries like Nigeria? According to Adamu (2017, pp. 226-227), there is substantial evidence indicating that investment in education can enhance productivity. However, this raises a critical question: how can we explain the contradiction between the well-established connection between education and development, and the frequent failure of education initiatives to deliver meaningful outcomes? First, it is essential to acknowledge that there is no universal explanation for how education drives development. Second, findings from macro-level studies offer limited guidance for direct policy action. Third, the benefits of education are often tied to broader societal externalities. Fourth, numerous methodological challenges complicate the analysis of the education–development relationship, and many of these challenges remain only partially resolved. Lastly, achieving sustainable development will demand not only significant policy and attitudinal shifts but also profound changes in how education is used to shape lifestyles, economies, and worldviews.

Education, therefore, plays a pivotal role in sustainable development by promoting its key goals of poverty reduction, wealth creation, environmental protection, and the sustainable exploitation of natural resources. The WCED (1987:46) explains sustainable development to mean:

*...a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.*

Essentially, sustainable development draws attention to environmental protection, and development engagements seek to balance economic prosperity, environmental management and social responsibility (Ibaba, 2009). In Nigeria, sustainable development is a national objective captured by the National Policy on the Environment ( Federal Ministry of Environment, 2016), which seeks to achieve the following:

- (i) Secure for all Nigerians a quality of environment adequate for their health and well-being;
- (ii) Conserve and use the environment and natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations;
- (iii) Restore, maintain and enhance the ecosystems and ecological processes essential for the functioning of the biosphere to preserve biological diversity and the principle of optimum natural resources and ecosystems;
- (iv) Raise public awareness and promote understanding of essential linkages between environment and development to encourage individual and community participation in environmental improvement efforts; and
- (v) Cooperate in good faith with other countries and international organisations to achieve optimal use of transboundary natural resources and effective prevention or abatement of transboundary environmental pollution.

Education helps to achieve these goals in several ways including the following: through promotes environmental awareness, enhances economic growth, encourages social equity and inclusion, fosters good governance and citizenship, improves health and well-being, advances technological and scientific innovations, reduces poverty, promotes peace and conflict

resolution, supports gender equality, encourages sustainable consumption, and production (UNESCO, 2020; World Bank, 2022).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. At the heart of this global development agenda is Goal 4: Quality Education, which seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." However, education is not just a standalone goal; it is a foundational pillar upon which the achievement of all other goals depends.

Therefore, the full attainment of the quality indicators of education, including access, equity, relevance, teacher quality, infrastructure, completion rates, and learning outcomes, is a necessary precondition for sustainable development. These issues result in poor learning outcomes, increased dropout rates, and a growing mismatch between graduates' skills and labour market demands. When these educational failures are mapped against the broader development goals, it becomes clear that the crisis in education jeopardises multiple SDGs, highlighting the profound interconnections among them. The crisis in Nigerian education is not only a threat to SDG 4 but a systemic obstacle to achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The interconnectedness of education with health, the economy, governance, gender, and the environment suggests that no country can achieve its goals in isolation. Without urgent reforms in educational policy, financing, teacher training, curriculum relevance, and equitable access, Nigeria risks missing the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals deadline. Addressing the education crisis must therefore be treated as a national emergency and a strategic priority for development planning.

### **Making Education Work for the SDGs**

Education is not just one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4); it is a catalyst for achieving all 17 goals (UNESCO, 2020; United Nations, 2015). A functional, inclusive, and equitable education system fosters human capital development, social inclusion, gender equity, economic growth, environmental awareness, and institutional accountability, elements that are

foundational to the 2030 Agenda (World Bank, 2018). However, in Nigeria, the transformative potential of education remains untapped mainly due to systemic crises in quality, access, relevance, and governance (UNICEF, 2022; Olanrewaju & Olaniyan, 2021).

To make education work for the SDGs, a paradigm shift is required, moving from fragmented, under-resourced interventions to strategic and systemic transformation anchored in sustainability, equity, and innovation (Global Partnership for Education [GPE], 2021). The following interlinked pathways offer a roadmap:

Firstly, education planning must be deliberately aligned with Nigeria's national development strategies and SDG targets. Curricula should be restructured to equip learners with knowledge and skills in environmental sustainability, digital literacy, civic engagement, peacebuilding, health awareness, and entrepreneurship (Okebukola, 2020; United Nations, 2015). This realignment ensures that education not only transmits knowledge but also nurtures responsible citizens and productive agents of change.

Secondly, achieving the SDGs relies on robust educational foundations. Early childhood care, literacy, and numeracy must be prioritised to address lifelong learning deficits. This requires investments in teacher development, mother-tongue instruction, the provision of textbooks, and the creation of child-friendly school environments, especially in underserved and conflict-affected regions (UNICEF, 2022; Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2021).

Furthermore, no SDG can be fully realised without addressing the marginalisation of vulnerable groups. Making education work means ensuring equitable access for girls, children with disabilities, out-of-school youth, internally displaced persons, and those in rural and economically disadvantaged communities. Gender-responsive policies, school feeding programmes, inclusive infrastructure, and community mobilisation (UNESCO, 2020; Plan International, 2022).

Technology also plays a transformative role. It can bridge access gaps, enhance pedagogical effectiveness, and facilitate lifelong learning. The deployment of ICT tools for remote learning, teacher training, student assessments, and school management can improve the reach and responsiveness of Nigeria's education system (World Bank, 2021). However, digital equity must be ensured to avoid deepening existing inequalities (GPE, 2021). Teachers must also be adequately trained, motivated, and equipped with modern teaching tools and methodologies. Continuous professional development, career incentives, and improved

working conditions are crucial for attracting and retaining skilled educators (Olanrewaju & Olaniyan, 2021).

Education also intersects with other sectors, including health, agriculture, the environment, governance, and the economy. Effective partnerships between schools, communities, civil society, the private sector, and development agencies can mobilise, promote accountability, and reinforce local ownership (GPE, 2021; World Bank, 2018). Community-led monitoring and feedback can compensate for weak formal oversight structures.

Ultimately, making education effective requires robust governance, accountability, and sufficient funding. Nigeria must strive to meet the UNESCO benchmark of allocating 4–6% of GDP or 15–20% of total public expenditure to education (UNESCO, 2021). Strategic funding, transparent data systems, and strengthened monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are critical for ensuring efficiency and progress tracking (FME, 2021).

## Conclusion

This paper interrogates the critical nexus between Nigeria's education crisis and the formidable constraints it poses to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Drawing on empirical indicators and policy critiques, the paper argues that Nigeria's persistent failure to address its deep-seated educational challenges undermines not only the attainment of SDG 4, which is the goal of Quality Education, but also threatens the broader framework of the 2030 Agenda. This failure is fundamental, given its cataclysmic role in achieving all the SDGs (UNESCO, 2020; United Nations, 2015). Significantly, therefore, the crisis in Nigerian education poses a high risk of undermining the country's development objectives, and by extension, the country's commitment to global development goals.

The analysis established that the Nigerian education system consistently underperforms across nearly all quality benchmarks used to evaluate educational effectiveness. These include unequal access to educational opportunities, low enrolment and high dropout rates, poor teacher quality, unfavourable student–teacher ratios, and a curriculum that is often outdated and misaligned with national labour market demands and global competencies. Also, the infrastructure deficits reflected in inadequacy and dilapidated school buildings, high school dropout rates, limited access and increasing gender and disability disparities and non-transparent assessment methods continue to plague the system. The high level of poor community-parent involvement in school management, lack of adult and continuing, poor

counselling and low attention to pupils/students' mental health, poor governance and accountability, further worsen the crisis.

The combined impact of these deficits poses a serious and fundamental threat to achieving the SDGs. Every SDG, whether on poverty reduction (SDG 1), health (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), or peace and justice (SDG 16), relies on a functional education system to produce informed citizens, skilled labour, ethical leaders, and socially responsible agents of change. The failure of Nigeria to fix its education sector means that the multiplier effect of education on other developmental goals remains stunted. For example, poor education weakens employability and innovation, exacerbates inequality, fuels insecurity, and limits civic participation, all of which obstruct progress toward sustainable development.

In light of these challenges, the paper calls for urgent and far-reaching reforms to reposition the education sector as a strategic national priority. This includes strengthening education policies with a focus on consistency, continuity, and realism; expanding equitable access through inclusive education strategies that target the most disadvantaged populations; and comprehensive curriculum reforms that emphasise thinking, digital literacy, peace education, environmental sustainability, and entrepreneurial skills. It also highlights the importance of school safety and security, school climate, teacher recruitment, training, retraining, and motivation as core to the educational system. Additionally, the introduction of technology is recognised for serving neglected rural communities, thereby expanding access to quality education. Strengthening school–community relations and fostering public–private partnerships are essential to improving infrastructure, monitoring performance, and enhancing accountability. In the absence of functional formal structures, community-based approaches to supervision, governance, and resource mobilisation play a complementary role in sustaining education delivery at the grassroots level.

On a final note, the paper emphasises the importance of effective funding, not only by providing adequate funds, but also by ensuring that allocated and disbursed funds are utilised effectively. The country needs to work towards the UNESCO recommendation of allocating between 4% and 6% of its GDP, or 15% and 20% of total public expenditure, to education. In summary, reversing Nigeria's education crisis is not just a policy imperative; it is an existential necessity for achieving sustainable development and securing the country's future.

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