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Analyzing Barriers to Sustainable Development Goal Implementation in Nigeria: A Multidimensional Assessment of Challenges and Opportunities

¹ Kareem Musiliu Iyanda, ² Rotimi Williams Olatunji

¹ Centre for Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development (CESSED), Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria

² Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria

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Corresponding Author: **Kareem Musiliu Iyanda**

Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. It is a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges and promoting sustainable development. However, Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, like many developing countries is facing significant challenges in achieving the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations.

This paper identifies these key challenges impeding Nigeria's progress towards the SDGs and explores opportunities for overcoming these barriers and offers recommendations to accelerate progress towards sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Implementation, Challenges, Nigeria, Sustainable Development Goals, Nigeria, Governance

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 ambitious global goals and 169 targets established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. These goals aim to address various challenges faced by the world, including no poverty, zero hunger, good healthcare, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, climate action, sustainable cities. The 2024 Sustainable Development Goals Report reveals some sobering statistics that only 17% of the Global Goals targets are on track, while half show limited progress, and over one third are stalling or regressing.

Nigeria, as a signatory like many other countries, has committed to achieving these goals by 2030. According to the Sustainable Development Report, (2023) Nigeria Ranks 146th out of 166 countries subscribing to the SDGs and it scores 54.27/100. For a country with huge economic and human resources, the grading is at low ebb. However, progress towards meeting these targets has also been sluggish, and there are several gaps that need to be addressed to ensure successful implementation.

Nigeria contends with a host of challenges that impede its advancement towards the SDGs. The poverty rate of Nigeria according to the World Bank (2023) ^[24] reports is estimated to have reached 38.9% in 2023 with an estimated 87 million Nigerians living below the poverty line, with rural areas and marginalized populations extremely affected underscoring the urgency of poverty alleviation efforts. There is a critical inadequate healthcare infrastructure which repressed access to quality healthcare services that contributes to high maternal and child mortality rates. The maternal mortality rates in Nigeria remain high, with an estimated 512 deaths per 100,000 live births, according to the World Health Organization (2021) ^[27].

Despite progress in education disparities, a considerable number of children remain out of school, hampering efforts to achieve universal education. According to UNESCO (2020) ^[20] data it reveals that Nigeria has one of the highest out-of-school children populations globally, emphasizing the need for improved access to quality education. Looking at the Nigeria infrastructure deficits, the African Development Bank (2021) ^[1] estimates Nigeria's infrastructure deficit at over \$100 billion, requiring extensive investments in infrastructure development. This insufficient infrastructure in the key areas such as energy, water, and transportation hinders economic growth and human development. The lack of adequate infrastructure hampers progress towards achieving SDGs related to sustainable cities, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, industry, innovation, and infrastructure.

The rate of environmental degradation in Nigeria in the areas of deforestation, pollution, and inadequate waste management exacerbate environmental challenges, including climate change impacts. Nigeria with about 6% of its land area estimated to be exposed to extreme weather events according to the World Bank (2019) report, Nigeria is one of the top ten of the most exposed countries to the effects of CC. This was supported with the findings of Okon *et al* (2021) ^[12] that there is a lack of research that investigated the magnitude of present and potential future impacts of climate change in the aquatic environment and also absence of study investigating the effects of multiple variables of climate change at the same time to achieve sustainable development in the country.

For Nigeria to attain her Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), with the Federal Government (2023) estimates the funding requirements for the goals to be attained at about \$10 billion annually, which the government alone cannot do, as such leaders in both private and public sectors must collaborate in the implementation of the set goals.

Owing to lack of progress by the country in achieving these goals it become imperative to examine the key gaps in addressing the SDGs in Nigeria, highlighting the critical issues that hinder progress towards sustainable development.

Challenges in Achieving SDGs in Nigeria

It is a known fact that effective implementation and monitoring mechanisms are essential for achieving the SDGs in Nigeria. Though various policies and programs of the government have been aligned with the goals, there is a lack of concrete action and accountability. It is utmost importance that creating robust contexts for implementation and monitoring will be crucial in driving progress which Nigeria is lacking thus creating a challenge to achieve the goals.

Another factor is financing, despite Nigeria's huge resources and potential for economic growth, the country faces significant challenges in financing the implementation of the SDGs. One of the primary obstacles is the heavy reliance on external aid and loans to fund development projects. Reliance on external sources of financing makes the country exposed to fluctuations in the global economy and unsustainable debt burdens. Moreover, corruption and mismanagement of public funds further worsen the financing challenges in Nigeria, diverting resources away from essential development priorities. Corruption remains a significant challenge, with Nigeria ranking 145th out of 180 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (2023), indicating pervasive corruption in public institutions. More so, funding constraints limit Nigeria's ability to effectively implement policies and programs to achieve the SDGs. Insufficient budget allocation towards critical sectors, such as health and education, hampers progress. So also the solidification accountability mechanisms, enhancing transparency in public financial management, and combating corruption are fundamental steps towards mobilizing domestic resources effectively. Without improving our domestic resource mobilization and improved financial management getting availability of funds for the SDGs will be a mirage.

Furthermore, domestic resource mobilization in Nigeria remains inadequate, with low tax compliance rates and inefficient revenue collection systems. In terms of domestic resource mobilization, Nigeria's tax revenue-to-GDP ratio is

one of the lowest in the world, standing at around 6.7% in 2021, significantly which was lower than the average of the 33 African countries in 2023 (15.6%) (OECD, 2023) ^[10]. Not only that the country's reliance on oil revenue exposes it to external shocks, as oil accounts for over 50% of government revenue and 90% of export earnings. The informal economy, which accounts for a significant portion of economic activity, often escapes taxation, depriving the government of critical funds for development.

In term of data and measurement, accurate and timely data are critical for measuring progress towards the SDGs. Nigeria faces challenges in data collection, analysis, and reporting, limiting effective decision-making and monitoring efforts. In Nigeria, one of the significant gaps in addressing the key challenges of the SDGs is the availability and quality of data. Although there have been efforts to improve data collection, analysis, and reporting systems, there are still gaps in data availability and reliability. This poses a major obstacle in measuring progress towards the SDGs accurately and effectively. There is also lack of disaggregated data, particularly in terms of gender, age, income, and geographic location. Without such detailed data, it becomes difficult to identify and address disparities and inequalities in the country. In addition, there is no evidence of data utilization and integration, while there may be data available in Nigeria, there is often disconnect between data collection and its application for policy-making and decision-making processes.

Lack of coordination and collaboration among data stakeholders in Nigeria is another significant gap in addressing the challenges of the SDGs. There is a need for improved coordination among government agencies, civil society organizations, academia, and the private sector to harmonize data collection efforts, also avoid duplication, and streamline data dissemination processes. Improved collaboration can lead to more comprehensive and reliable data for monitoring progress towards the SDGs.

There is a need to strengthen the capacity of government agencies, policymakers, and other stakeholders to effectively integrate data into their planning and implementation processes to ensure that evidence-based decisions are made to advance the SDGs.

In terms of building the capacity of data professionals and leveraging technology for data collection and analysis, Nigeria faces challenges. There is a need for investments in training programs, infrastructure, and digital tools to enhance data skills and improve data management practices. Reinforcement of data capacity and technology uptake can enhance the quality and timeliness of data for monitoring the SDGs in Nigeria.

Another area is inequality and poverty, inequality and poverty are persistent challenges that hinder Nigeria's progress towards achieving the SDGs. According to the World Bank (2021) Nigeria has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world, with the top 10% of the population accounting for 38% of national income, while the bottom 40% only have 11%, making it one of the poorest countries in the world. This high level of poverty is due to a combination of factors, including low economic growth, high unemployment, and inequality. Nigeria faces significant challenges in addressing poverty and inequality. According to the World Poverty Clock (2023), Nigeria has one of the largest populations of 71 million of people living in extreme poverty, and a total of 133million people classed

as multidimensionally poor according to National Bureau of Statistics data (2023) Multidimensional poverty is higher in rural areas, where 72% of people are poor, compared to 42% of the people in urban areas. Approximately 70% of Nigeria's populations live in rural areas, yet these areas are home to 80% of poor people.

Disparities in access to basic services are also evident, with only 17% of rural households having access to clean water compared to 46% in urban areas, aggravating socio-economic inequalities. The country continues to experience high levels of income inequality, with disparities in wealth distribution widening between the rich and the poor. In rural areas and marginalized communities, poverty rates remain alarmingly high, depriving individuals of access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and clean water.

Gender disparities further aggravate inequality in Nigeria, with women and girls facing discrimination and limited opportunities for socio-economic advancement. The lack of access to quality education, healthcare, and economic resources extremely affects women, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization. This affects the country's ability to achieve SDG 1 (No Poverty). According to Pachauri *et al*, 2014, environmental destruction, biodiversity loss and dwindling water supplies, have all negative impact on food security. This direct impact agriculture production, and definitely will draws a setback to the U N sustainable development goals on hunger which WFP (2023) ^[31] report that Nigeria hunger score was 28.3% placing it 109th out of 125 countries in the Global Hunger index.

Access to quality education and healthcare services remains a challenge. Nigeria has one of the highest rates of out-of-school children globally. According to UNICEF (2023) ^[15], estimated 20.2 million children in Nigeria were not in school, primarily due to factors such as lack of access, poverty, and insecurity with the majority coming from poor households and rural areas, highlighting the disparities in access to education. This situation is exacerbated by the high dropout rate, particularly among girls. These challenges have resulted in low levels of educational attainment, with only 61% of children completing primary school and just 36% completing secondary school. The lack of access to quality education for all children hinders progress towards achieving SDG 4 (Quality Education) which aims to ensure inclusive and quality education for all. The country education curriculum is often outdated and does not adequately prepare students for the demands of the modern workforce.

Nigeria's healthcare system faces challenges in infrastructure, funding, and human resources, resulting in limited access to quality healthcare services for the population. Nigeria continues to struggle with high rates of maternal and child mortality, as well as a high prevalence of communicable diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis. These health challenges hinder progress towards achieving SDGs 3(Good health and well-being), which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. The country has a high maternal mortality rate, with 917 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, reflecting gaps in maternal healthcare services and access to skilled birth attendants.

Environmental degradation and the impacts of climate change pose significant threats to Nigeria's progress towards the SDGs. The Climate Change Performance Index report (2024) indicates that Nigeria is low in Climate Policy and

very low in Renewable Energy. According to the Global Climate Risk Index (2021), Nigeria ranks 23rd in the list of countries most affected by extreme weather events between 2000 and 2019, highlighting the country's vulnerability to climate change impacts.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) estimates that outdoor air pollution contributes to approximately 150,000 premature deaths in Nigeria annually, emphasizing the health risks associated with poor air quality. Air pollution is a major environmental concern in Nigeria, particularly in urban areas with high levels of vehicular emissions, industrial pollution, and open burning of waste. Poor air quality can have detrimental effects on public health, contributing to respiratory diseases and other health issues. In addition, inadequate waste management practices result in the accumulation of solid waste in landfills, water bodies, and open spaces, further polluting the environment. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2021) notes that Nigeria generates over 32 million tons of solid waste per year, with little or no segregation and, with less than 20% of this waste properly managed, highlighting the country's waste management challenges.

Furthermore, the impacts of climate change, with frequent droughts, floods, and other extreme weather events affecting agricultural productivity and food security. This proffers a significant threat to the achievement of SDG 13 (Climate Action). Limited infrastructure, including power supply, transportation, and communication networks, negatively impacts various sectors, hindering progress towards the SDGs.

Other vital key challenges of the SDGs are connected to climate change and environmental sustainability is the country limited capacity for climate change adaptation and mitigation. Nigeria is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events, sea-level rise, desertification, rising temperatures, and changing precipitation patterns, which pose risks to agriculture, water resources, and public health. However, there is a lack of adequate resources, policies and strategies to effectively adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change, hindering progress towards the SDGs. The widespread environmental degradation and pollution, which create significant threats to public health, ecosystems, and sustainable development is of critical challenge in Nigeria. Nigeria has experienced high rates of deforestation and land degradation, primarily due to agricultural expansion, logging, and urbanization. The loss of forests and degradation of ecosystems contribute to biodiversity loss, soil erosion, and reduced resilience to climate change impacts. Deforestation also contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, aggravating global warming.

Water scarcity and pollution are pressing environmental challenges in Nigeria. The country's water resources are under increasing pressure due to population growth, urbanization, and industrial activities. Poor water management practices, inadequate infrastructure, and pollution from industrial effluents and agricultural runoff further deteriorate water quality, leading to health risks and environmental degradation.

Achieving gender equality and empowering women are essential aspects of the SDGs. According to OECD (2014) ^[11] report, Nigeria is among the 10 percent of countries that exhibit the highest levels of gender discrimination. Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental

prerequisites for achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. Women make up 47% of the labor force in Nigeria but are disproportionately represented in low-paying and informal sector jobs, with limited access to resources and decision-making roles. Also the gender-based violence remains a prevalent issue, with 30% of Nigerian women aged 15-49 experiencing physical or sexual violence from a partner.

It is evident that only 42% of women in Nigeria have a secondary education compared to 54% of men, highlighting disparities in educational opportunities for women and girls. Despite some progress in advancing women's rights and gender equality, significant gaps persist in addressing the unique challenges faced by women and girls in the country. The World Bank estimates that closing the gender gap in labor force participation could increase global GDP by \$28 trillion by 2025 (World Bank, 2023) ^[24]. We need to stop accepting the problem and focus on solving it. At the current rate of progress, full parity will not be reached for another 130 years, according to the World Economic Forum's latest Global Gender Gap Report (2023) and will specifically affect achieving SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

Furthermore, cultural norms, religion belief, discriminatory practices, and limited access to resources continue to inhibit women's full participation in economic, social, and political spheres.

Effective stakeholder engagement and partnerships are crucial for the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria. Engaging a diverse range of stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector entities, academia, and local communities, is essential for driving collective action, fostering collaboration, and achieving sustainable development outcomes. A study by the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (2019) ^[3] found that countries with strong multi-stakeholder data ecosystems, including diverse partnerships between governments, private sector actors, civil society, and academia, are better positioned to collect, analyze, and utilize data for development planning and monitoring. The report help to monitor the progress towards achieving SDGs target 17. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2020) reports that sustainable development outcomes are more likely to be achieved when governments collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, private sector actors, and local communities, to co-create solutions, leverage resources, and build consensus on development priorities. The World Bank Group (2021) also highlights the role of public-private partnerships in driving sustainable development initiatives, citing success stories from various countries where collaborations between governments and private sector entities have led to increased investments in infrastructure, improved service delivery, and enhanced economic opportunities for marginalized populations.

In Nigeria, the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms can facilitate knowledge sharing, dialogue, and coordinated efforts among various stakeholders to address complex development challenges. These platforms bring together representatives from different sectors and backgrounds to collaborate on prioritizing SDG targets, developing joint initiatives, and monitoring progress towards the goals. So also Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) play a key role in leveraging resources, expertise, and innovative solutions to

advance the SDGs in Nigeria. Collaborations between the government and private sector entities can drive investments in sustainable infrastructure, promote inclusive business practices, and enhance service delivery in key sectors such as healthcare, education, and renewable energy. While the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a fundamental role in advocating for policy change, monitoring government actions, and elaborating the voices of marginalized communities in Nigeria. Engaging with CSOs can help ensure greater accountability, transparency, and inclusivity in the implementation of SDG-related initiatives, while also fostering community ownership and empowerment.

Opportunities for Addressing the Gaps in Achieving SDGs in Nigeria

Despite these challenges, there are several opportunities for Nigeria to make progress towards the SDGs. One of the key opportunities is the presence of a large youth population, which can be harnessed to drive innovation and entrepreneurship in key sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, and renewable energy. Empowering youth through quality education, skills training, and employment opportunities can help drive progress towards the SDGs.

Additionally, Nigeria has made significant progress in recent years in improving governance and combating corruption, which is essential for effective implementation of the SDGs. The government has also adopted a National Development Plan that aligns with the SDGs, which provides a roadmap for achieving the goals by 2030. At the same time strengthening institutional capacity to enhance policy implementation and coordination is very fundamental.

Furthermore, Nigeria has a vibrant civil society and a strong network of non-governmental organizations that can play a key role in advocating for and monitoring progress towards the SDGs. These organizations can also pull their expertise and partnerships together to mobilize resources and implement innovative solutions to address the challenges faced by the country. It is also important in promoting community engagement and participatory approaches to ensure inclusivity and sustainability of development interventions.

In addressing the gaps in achieving SDGs, economic diversification is essential, Nigeria has the potential to diversify its economy beyond oil and gas through its agricultural, manufacturing, and service sectors. This can create employment, reduce poverty, and support sustainable development.

Nigeria should embark on technological innovations due to the fact that advancements in technology offer opportunities for leapfrogging traditional development pathways. Digital technologies and promoting innovation can help address development gaps and enhance service delivery.

It is essential for the government to prioritize economic growth and job creation. This can be achieved through investments in infrastructure, agriculture, and manufacturing. Additionally, policies that promote inclusive growth and reduce inequality are needed. For example, the government could introduce social protection programs to support the poorest members of society.

Addressing these climate change and environmental sustainability challenges requires coordinated efforts to enhance climate resilience, promote sustainable land management, improve water resource management, reduce

air pollution, and strengthen waste management practices in Nigeria. Collaboration among government, civil society, private sector, and communities is essential to achieve environmental sustainability and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

The government should increase investment in social services such as education and healthcare to provide access to quality services for all citizens. This will help bridge the gap in achieving the relevant SDGs.

In addition, corruption continues to be a major challenge in Nigeria, and addressing corruption can free up resources for development projects and ensure that resources are allocated efficiently towards achieving the SDGs.

Promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls can help address the disparities in access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. This will contribute significantly to achieving several SDGs related to gender equality, poverty reduction, and quality education.

Nigeria need to improve data collection and monitoring mechanisms which can help track progress towards achieving the SDGs and also identify areas where interventions are needed. Embarking on this will help to ensure that resources are targeted towards areas with the greatest need.

Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing the significant gaps in achieving the SDGs in Nigeria requires a coordinated and multi-dimensional approach. There are opportunities for progress if key stakeholders work together to address the gaps. By investing in critical areas such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, leveraging the country's youth population and civil society, and building on recent governance reforms, Nigeria can make significant strides towards realizing the SDGs by 2030. The paper recommends that prioritizing education, innovation, and maintains partnership will go a long way to drive progress. Improving financing strategies and shifting gradually from fossils fuel to renewables energy. The government should regularly measure and report progress by using a robust data, and adjust strategies where needed. Nigeria can accelerate progress towards sustainable development and the realization of the SDGs.

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