

NIGERIA'S PURSUIT OF SDGS 1-4: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

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Abstract

This paper evaluates Nigeria's progress on sustainable development goals (SDGs) 1 to 4: No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health/well-being, and Quality Education, using the Sustainable Development Goals framework as its theoretical framework. The study draws on qualitative data from Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) (2022), Voluntary National Review (VNR), peer review journals and other available data to show that despite the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, Nigeria is facing huge challenges as 63% of Nigerians are multidimensional poor, 25.5% of Nigerians do not get enough nutrition, while 26.4% suffer from severe levels of food insecurity, maternal mortality stands at 512 per 100,000 live births; over 10 million children are out-of-school. These underscore the effects of poverty and poor governance in heightening systemic obstacles to development. The paper concludes that Nigeria is off the track in pursuit of the goals, hindered by systemic governance failures and socio-economic disparities, and that only a holistic, multidimensional approach can accelerate achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Recommendations for achieving this include expansion of social protection and rural finance, investment in climate-smart agriculture and SMEs, Improve healthcare, education and teacher training. Governance reforms aligned to Vision 2050, the integration of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) in key sectors, and prioritization of rural development to accelerate sustainable development. These will be key in further expediting the progress of Nigeria and other Low-Income Countries toward the 2030 Agenda.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, good Health, quality Education, no Poverty, infant mortality, development indicators.

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent the most comprehensive global framework for addressing poverty, inequality, health, and education. Evolving from earlier initiatives such as the Brundtland Commission of 1987, Agenda 21 of 1992, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2000-2015, the SDGs were formally adopted in 2015 with 17 goals, 169 targets, and 232 indicators (United Nations, 2015; Meschede, 2020). This evolution underscores the global consensus on the need for a multidimensional approach to sustainable development, integrating social, economic, and environmental priorities. Nigeria's pursuit of the SDGs must therefore be situated within this global trajectory, highlighting both its opportunities and persistent challenges.

Research has demonstrated that issues of poverty, hunger, health, and education continue to persist in developing and underdeveloped countries across the globe (World Bank, 2022). These are, however, not standalone issues since they tend to overlap and reinforce each other, particularly in

developing countries with weak governance standards and systems. Nigeria, for instance, mirrors the real-life scenario with both development challenges and socio-economic differences. As Africa most populous country and a country that carry over its unmet MDGs, Nigeria ranks low in the SDGs Index, and continues to grapple with multidimensional poverty and related development barriers. With over 226 million people and a ranking of 147 out of 167 countries on the SDG Index (Sachs et al., 2022; Sustainable Development Report, 2025). Nigeria's development challenges remain very serious. According to the 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index, 133 million Nigerians are poor (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022; UNDP, 2022). The data shows the level of deprivations in Nigeria, where poverty influences food security and nutrition, health and wellbeing, and quality education.

In Nigeria, the indicators for health, education show persistent gaps that hinder sustainable development. 25.5% of Nigerians are threaten by lack of adequate nutrition, while 26.4% are consumed by severe levels of food insecurity, maternal mortality is still high at 512 deaths per 100,000 live births, while more than 10 million children are out of school and literacy rates among Grade 2 pupils stand at just 41% (OSSAP-SDGs, 2025). These are some of the indications of how bad health, weak education systems, spur poverty and hunger. These interconnected struggles must be challenged if Nigeria is to ensure its progress on SDGs 1-4.

Research has clearly highlighted issues, such as corruption, low distributive capacity, and low levels of investments in health, education, issues of ungoverned spaces, poverty reduction programmes and social security as significant impediments in the achievement of the SDGs under study. Without a solution to governance inefficiency, therefore, Nigeria is likely to remain off-track in its quest for SDGs attainment by 2030. Therefore, this study adopts the SDGs framework, focusing on the achievement of goals 1-4, to critically evaluate the means through which poverty reduction, elimination of hunger, improving health and wellbeing and providing quality education, systemic governance reforms, can advance sustainable development in Nigeria. The present study focuses on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 3, and 4, as they capture the most salient issues in the domain of human development in underdeveloped countries, especially Nigeria. These five development objectives are interconnected in the sense that poverty and hunger are the major barriers to the achievement of health and education outcomes. Limiting the scope of the present study to the achievement of the four development objectives allows a more in-depth analysis of the most vital development issues in Nigeria, while at the same time acknowledging that the achievement of the four development objectives will pave the way for the achievement of the overall SDG framework.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives are to:

- i. To analyze the multidimensional nature of poverty (SDG 1) and its interaction with hunger and food security (SDG 2), and how these jointly affect health and education outcomes.
- ii. To evaluate the connections between poverty reduction strategies, health outcomes (SDG 3), and educational achievement (SDG 4), particularly in rural Nigeria.
- iii. To investigate how improvements in health and education can reinforce poverty reduction and food security, creating a virtuous cycle across SDGs 1-4.

Literature Review

Poverty and Hunger: Cross-Cutting Barriers to Development and Food Security

There is hardly a universal way of defining poverty because it affects many aspects of human conditions. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2022), sees poverty as a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. Hence it means a lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society; it also entails insecurity, powerlessness, and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. This study focuses on the conventional definition of poverty by Taiwo and Agwu (2016) who defined it as a condition in which people live below a specified minimum income level and are unable to provide the basic necessities of life needed for an acceptable standard of living. Therefore, poverty can be viewed as a situation whereby individuals or communities lack basic necessities of life such as adequate health system, decent shelter, and adequate food. It is the inability of individual(s) not being able to meet or provide for their needs as when needed.

No Poverty is the basis for fulfilling all other SDGs. Poverty not only affects the availability of health care and education but also fuels a cycle of poverty. Research carried out by Nwambuko et al. (2023) and another one conducted by Kabari & Nwogo (2021) highlights that poverty causes avoidable deaths and holds children back from attending school. This scenario easily transitions to nutrition and health issues, thus establishing that eradicating poverty is essential for fulfilling SDG 2, SDG 3, and SDG 4. According to Oleribe and Taylor-Robinson (2016), the reasons for the failure of Nigeria to meet the MDGs include governance issues such as corruption, accountability, and institutional challenges, rather than the MDGs themselves. This assertion implies that Nigeria could be in for a repeat of the same mistakes with the SDGs, thus the significance of addressing systemic governance deficit.

The conceptual underpinnings of hunger issues remain the cornerstone of the discussion in the context of SDG 2. Uvin (1994), for example, identified food shortage, food poverty, and food deprivation, which indicate that hunger extend beyond the availability of food to issues of access, utilization and stability. The arguments, therefore, resonate with the perspectives of Gil et al. (2019), which indicate that the indicators of the goals must address the four pillars of food security, which include food availability, access, utilization, and stability, while addressing the "triple burden" of malnutrition, which includes under-nutrition, micronutrient, and obesity; they argue that poor alignment between the goals and the indicators limits the operationalization of the goals. Otekunrin et al. (2019) build on this idea by utilizing data from the Global Hunger Index (GHI) to illustrate that the hunger situation in Nigeria is not only a product of food production deficits but also a result of poor governance, conflict, and climate change, positioning Nigeria as the poverty capital of the world. These studies collectively highlight the complexity of hunger and the need for indicators to look beyond food production to address systemic inequalities and resilience deficits.

A body of literature is now exploring Nigeria's special weaknesses in achieving SDG2, shifting from abstract understandings of hunger to the practicalities of governance and policy. For instance, Ayoola et al. (2018) demonstrate the insufficient state-level policy processes and therefore the unrealistic nature of the zero hunger goals without professionalised food and agriculture systems. Ariyo (2025) brings these issues together in a synthesis of hunger as a development and

humanitarian crisis, as many Nigerians live below the poverty line and many children are stunted. The key point of this literature is the interconnectedness of hunger to other SDGs, poverty reduction (SDG 1), health (SDG 3) and the need for Nigeria to achieve its zero hunger goal through an interrelated approach to sustainable agriculture, climate change, social protection, and good governance. This body of literature creates a picture of Nigeria's hunger challenge as a crisis of access and equity and therefore a technical and institutional challenge to achieve SDG 2.

Health and Education Outcomes: Interlinked Foundations of Human Development

Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) aims at ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all at all ages. Child survival is the major indicator of SDG 3 and entails the reduction of neonatal, infant, and under five mortality rates (Adeyinka, 2020). In the case of Nigeria, however, the pace of development in this sector is slow.

Social determinants of health such as maternal education, wealth, and gender equality strongly influence outcomes, with mortality rates higher in northern states. Adeyinka (2020) has demonstrated that factors such as maternal education and contraceptive use significantly impact child mortality, and that regional disparities in infrastructure contribute to this. The gender inequality situation also adds complexity to Nigeria's progress towards SDG 3. Gender inequality in child survival is defined as the differences in survival risks between boys and girls. This inequality is usually caused by various social, cultural, and economic factors. Using artificial neural network analysis, it is projected that female child mortality rates will exceed male child mortality rates come 2030 (Adeyinka et al., 2021). In rural northern Nigeria, female child mortality is caused mainly by low maternal education and limited access to healthcare. In urban southern Nigeria, however, gender inequality is experienced differently.

Collectively, this literature indicates that Nigeria's journey towards achieving SDG 3 is gradual and unequal, emphasizing child survival rates, maternal health, and equitable access to health care as key issues for the country. The data also implies that the health outcomes of people in the country do not only depend on the health care services received, but also depend on other social determinants such as education levels, gender, poverty levels, and food security levels.

Education has increasingly been viewed in academic literature as a multi-dimensional process that equips the individual to cope with the complexities of the modern world. Carneiro and Draxler (2008) stress that education in the 21st century needs to be seen as going beyond the conventional literacy and vocational skills that have traditionally characterized it, to include the challenges of globalization, technology, and inequality. Similarly, Sachs et al. (2022) emphasise in their report that education is the foundation for the achievement of many other SDGs because of the role of education in building human capital and enhancing the capacity of people to withstand and participate in the economy and society. Collectively, these perspectives positioned education as a lifelong learning process that encompasses formal, non-formal, and informal learning in a holistic manner, equipping the learner not just for the workforce but also for society at large, hence education is seen as an outcome and driver of sustainable development.

Lawrence *et al* (2020) investigated the crucial factors affecting Nigeria's pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which include inadequate funding, out-of-school children, and under-

prioritised school infrastructure; they found that funding is the root cause of the problem, affecting all the other issues, and that the problem of low school enrollments is exacerbated by insecurity and the Almajiri issue in the North. They concluded that there must be concerted effort through budget allocation and ensuring that no funds are misappropriated, for Nigeria to achieve SDG 4. Hence there is a need for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that will enable the individual to take part in sustainable development.

The pillars and indicators of education converge in terms of a holistic approach that promotes the quality and relevance of education. At the heart of the pillars and indicators of education is the emphasis on access and equity in terms of inclusive opportunities for all learners; the quality of learning in terms of the curriculum and pedagogy; and the relevance of education in terms of societal and labor market demands (Carneiro & Draxler, 2008; Biesta, 2015; González-Salamanca *et al*, 2020). Overall, the pillars highlight education as a dynamic, multidimensional process that is essential for human development and global progress.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework as the theoretical background for the analysis. The SDGs have become a universally accepted structure with pre-determined goals providing a paradigm for greater coherence, accountability, and sustainability in the implementation of policies (United Nations, 2015). The framework allows for a review of the topic through the assessment of selected goals, specifically SDGs 1. No Poverty (SDG1) 2. Zero Hunger (SDG2) 3. Good Health and Well-Being (SDG3) and 4. Quality Education (SDG4), providing a context of inter-dependency among the above themes such that a review of one informs the others.

The analysis specifically targets SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well Being), and SDG 4 (Quality Education), while also acknowledging the cross-cutting nature of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). Similarly, the analysis operationalises the outcomes through the existing set of SDG indicators and their equivalent national indicators, including poverty headcounts (SDG 1. National Poverty Lines), stunting or underweight prevalence or undernourishment (SDG 2.), or maternal and under 5 mortality or effective service coverage (SDG 3.), and primary or secondary completion or learning outcome proxies (SDG 4. National Examination or Learning Assessment Scores).

The SDG framework is appropriate for use as the theoretical anchor of the study because it links normative and operational elements while encouraging systems thinking. To begin with, the SDG framework offers globally agreed targets and measurement tools that enable the process of benchmarking and comparison of results over space and time (Sachs *et al*. 2022). In the second place, the SDG framework acknowledges the interdependence of the social, economic, and environmental systems of the world. This is particularly relevant in the analysis of the interdependencies between poverty, hunger, health, and education-these being the focus of the research. In the third place, the SDG framework is particularly relevant in the context of the study because the country of focus, Nigeria, has already committed itself to the 2030 agenda and has developed national strategies for the SDGs.

While primarily normative and programmatic in nature, the SDG framework also serves effectively as a theoretical guide for the present research in that it structures development as inherently multidimensional, suggests a set of hypotheses at the systems level about the causal linkages between different variables (e.g., education- human capital-income; nutrition- cognitive development- schooling), and grounds the study's underlying normative values in equity and accountability.

However, in addition to the advantage of global comparability, several concerns have been raised that it might overlook local challenges, such as issues with budgets, infrastructure, or the capacity of institutions (Nwambuko *et al.*, 2023; Lawrence *et al.*, 2020). While this framework encompasses several shortcomings, it is useful in a Nigerian setting when adapted with a strong institutional capacity to provide a framework to address local issues. It enables setting a framework to incorporate a wide array of data sources, ranging from Nigeria.

Methodology

This study will employ a qualitative, interpretive research methodology to investigate how SDGs 1-4 influence sustainable development in Nigeria. The study will benefit from the interpretive paradigm also referred to as interpretivism, the overall purpose of this method is to investigate how people understand their social setting and how they give meaning to it (Schwandt, 1994). It is based on the assumption that the way people behave is dependent on the context in which they behave and the way they construct the reality of the situation through language and norms (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015).

Some of the main sources of data for this study will be Nigeria's own Voluntary National Reviews, the MPI for Nigeria in 2022, World Bank Poverty & Equity Brief for Nigeria in 2025, UNICEF reports, peer-reviewed journals, reports on the education sector, and sector specific policy reports. The thematic content analysis used in this content helps in the detection of patterns and challenges. Moreover, the method facilitates reliability through ensuring cross-referencing among the various sources. The method is in line with the SDG framework.

The limitations of this approach include a lack of grassroots views and bias within governmental reports. However, it is the richness and validity of the texts that ensure the analysis will be strong and morally ethical.

Result Of The Findings

SDG 1 (No Poverty): Policy Implementation and Outcomes

Nigeria's poverty reduction policy has over the years developed from a series of all-inclusive policy packages aimed at reducing extreme poverty and aligning with international poverty reduction and development agendas. The country, for instance, launched the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in 2004, as well as the State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS), which is a state-specific policy, and the Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS), which is applicable to local governments, all aimed at poverty reduction and development (Ataire, 2020). This was followed by the launch of the Vision 20:2020, which outlines strategic objectives aimed at eliminating extreme hunger and poverty, improving access to healthcare services, ensuring access to potable

water and sanitation, as well as building human capacity for sustainable livelihood (Nwanmereni et al., 2020). The National Development Plan, on the other hand, has come to be seen as a policy framework aimed at creating 21 million full-time jobs while lifting 35 million people out of poverty by 2025 (Anam et al., 2023).

Despite all these policy initiatives, Nigeria's poverty reduction results show an ambiguous trend. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, there was a reduction in poverty rates in Nigeria from 69% in 2004 to 40% in 2019. The statistics showing that 41.8% of the Nigerian population is living below the \$3/day poverty line as of 2022/2023 (World Bank, 2025), coupled with the fact that 63% (133 million) of them are considered multidimensionally poor, underscore that poverty is an issue of great concern. Further still, the fact that there is a regional dimension to poverty in Nigeria, such that while 57.4% of the population in poverty is found in the North, only 21.2% of that population is found in the South, in addition to the fact that 65% of this impoverished population is made up of children less than 18 years old (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022; UNDP, 2022), emphasises how critical this problem is. Poverty levels have increased between 2018/19 to 2022/23 driven by insecurity, inflation and weak social protection programmes. Institutional frameworks such as the Conditional Cash Transfer Program to cater to the needs of the poor population in Nigeria, but weak GDP growth and structural challenges undermine progress. Without stronger interventions in critical areas, Nigeria risks missing the SDG 1 target (Ejiogu et al., 2024). The implication is that without proper increase in interventions in critical areas, Nigeria will not be able to achieve SDG 1 target.

Records have proven that there exists a statistically significant difference between the planning and implementation of the SDG 1 programmes, especially in the employment generation and policy execution phases. Government expenditure on the SDG 1 policies has contradictory effects on poverty in the short and long run, reducing it in the short run and increasing it in the long run (Osuji & Nwani, 2020). This indicates that the government lacks the capacity to achieve the SDG goals in the context of poverty reduction. The major challenges facing the implementation of the SDG 1 policy include the inadequate domestic water supply, energy supply, human capital development, transportation infrastructure, and environmental conservation (Davies et al., 2019). Nigeria must triple its efforts towards eradicating poverty, which has a strong bearing on most of the SDGs.

SDG 2 (Zero Hunger): Agricultural Policies and Food Security

Nigeria's pathway to the accomplishment of SDG 2, which is to achieve Zero Hunger, has focused on the overall agricultural policy reforms to transform the agricultural sector to enhance food security. Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) (2010-2016) and Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP) (2011 to date), which were meant to reduce extreme poverty, food insecurity, and hunger (Egberi, 2023). However, these policies have not yielded the desired results, with the problem of food insecurity being an all-pervading challenge. As to the World Bank (2025), an estimated 35 million people in Nigeria are seriously food insecure due to the conflict in the North East, where 2.3 million people were displaced. The above was corroborated by the VNR 2025, which noted an increase in the number of persons who were food insecure from 17.01 million in late 2022 to 25 million in 2024. Currently, statistics indicate that 25.5% of Nigerians do not get enough nutrition, while 26.4% suffer from severe levels of food insecurity (Ejiogu et al., 2024). Nigeria has made significant efforts towards achieving SDG 2 by facilitating over ₦70 billion in

agribusiness financing and providing approval for credit guarantees of over ₦100 billion through the Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL), in 2025 (NIRSAL, 2025). However, Asuquo and Ajah (2026) observe that the level of participation is low at 15.76%, there are also gender and infrastructural barriers. Therefore, millions remain in poverty and hunger; requiring recalibrated approaches to achieve SDG 2 by 2030.

Rural road connectivity is a major challenge in the country, as improved infrastructure is required to provide farmers with easy access to markets, health services, and education, which can help reduce poverty by improving agricultural productivity, enhancing the profitability of businesses, and increasing employment (Ejiogu *et al.*, 2024). Insecurity in the northern part of the country has also negatively impacted on agriculture through displacement and loss of farmlands (Ayoola *et al.*, 2018; Otekunrin *et al.*, 2019)

Nigeria is still off-track in achieving SDG 2, hunger and malnutrition levels continue to deteriorate in Nigeria; in addition, there is an increase in levels of food insecurity in Nigeria. Even though the policies put in place by the government are very ambitious, the level of insecurity and systemic issues are affecting the progress of these policies. Therefore, Nigeria is most likely not achieving Goal 2, which automatically leads to the non-achievement of Goal 1, Goal 3, and Goal 4.

SDG 3 - Good Health and Well-being: Challenges and Progress in Nigeria's Healthcare System

Nigeria has fundamental structural problems in its health system that have greatly affected its ability to achieve the SDG3 targets. Nigeria was unable to achieve any of the health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and its ability to achieve health-related Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets has been modest at best (Abubakar *et al.*, 2022). Investment in health has been critically low in Nigeria at only 4% of its GDP in 2018. Universal Health Coverage (UHC) can be regarded as one of the key aspects of Nigeria's SDG3 implementation strategy, with primary healthcare system and insurance schemes as the main bottlenecks (Alonge, 2020). Primary healthcare is crucial in the realization of the health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are in turn inextricably linked to the attainment of the other SDGs such as the elimination of poverty, inclusive education, work and economic growth, inequality reduction, and climate action

The situation in Nigeria concerning SDG 3 remains fragile, especially in rural areas where health infrastructure and diseases affect the population (Jalingo *et al.*, 2025; Adomi *et al.*, 2024). Poverty further worsens health care access, with many rural people resorting to traditional medicine (Adomi *et al.*, 2024). In the Third Voluntary National Review reports that only 34.6% of the indicators under SDG are improved, while health indicators are stagnant because of funding and international crises (OSSAP-SDGs, 2025). Maternal deaths are high, standing at 512 deaths per 100,000 live births, and antenatal care attendance is lower at 63% in 2023-2024, down from 67% in 2018. Skilled attendance at births is slightly improved from 45% to 46%, and child health indicators are grim, with a slight reduction in under-five deaths from 132 to 110 deaths per 1,000, while neonatal deaths are now higher at 41 deaths per 1,000, up from 39 deaths, making Nigeria, the second largest contributor of under-five mortality cases in the world, with India being the largest contributor. Child stunting also drastically increases from 36.8% to 40% (OSSAP-SDGs, 2025).

Nigeria is currently off-track to achieving SDG 3, as investment in health is critically low at 4% of the country's GDP, maternal and child mortality rates are among the highest in the world, and the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the country's health vulnerabilities. The current annual reduction is below the levels needed to achieve the 2030 targets, thereby cascading to the other Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 2 (hunger), and SDG 4 (education). Unless the country improves its health infrastructure and governance, the country will not be able to achieve Good Health and Well-being by 2030.

SDG 4: Quality Education - Access and Implementation Gaps

Nigeria's strategy for implementing SDG 4 is based on all-inclusive educational reform through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and access to quality education. This goes beyond mere enrollment levels to consider proficiency levels, trained teachers, provision of school facilities, and disparities in educational outcome. The Federal Republic of Nigeria has pledged to achieve SDG 4 through "acquisition of foundational and higher-order skills; greater and more equitable access to technical and vocational education and training and higher education; training throughout life; and the knowledge, skills and values needed to function well and contribute to society" (Edokpolor & Dumbiri, 2019).

While Nigeria has demonstrated commitment to the realisation of SDG 4, there are still major challenges in the sustenance and retention of the girl-child in basic schools (Nwozor & Okhillu, 2022). This can be done through Strategies like expanding girls' access to schooling and addressing cultural attitudes that perpetuate discrimination. School feeding programs positively impact education by encouraging attendance, though poor outcomes persist due to governance deficits (Azugbene & Ogbomor, 2026). The Third Voluntary National Review, 2025, reported that it witnessed an increase in the number of children attending primary school, which reached 68.4% in 2021, while the rates of attendance in secondary schools fell slightly to 46.7%. Inequality between genders is still present, as there are less than a GPI of 1 in six states, notably in Zamfara State (OSSAP-SDGs, 2025).

However, the Nigerian education system confronts numerous significant realities that hinder the achievement of SDG target 4, especially in rural areas that suffer from a lack of resources to invest in infrastructure and finance. In addition, poverty contributes to pupil dropout in and out of school because of economic reasons and child labour. The NER was 69.9% in 2019, which means about one-third of school-aged children are not enrolled in any form of schooling. Learning achievements are particularly low; NEDS 2020 showed that only 41% of Grade 2 students were able to read at least a single word, and 44% could solve a single-digit addition problem, while the latter exhibited numeracy competency that had declined by 10 percentage points from 2015.

Currently, Nigeria is not on track to attain SDG 4. More than 10 million children are still out of school, with gender gaps, lack of facilities, funding gaps, insecurity in the North, poor governance, and corruption also affecting the situation. Marginalised children, such as girls, children with disabilities, and those living in rural areas, still remain neglected. The failure to achieve the SDG 4 has a cascading impact on the other goals, including SDG 1, which is poverty, SDG 2, which is hunger, and SDG 3, which is health, as the lack of quality education impacts the country's human capital and the level of resilience of the people.

Conclusion

This study has examined how the pace of Nigeria in achieving the SDGs 1-4 is challenged and marred by structural and socio-economic issues related to poverty, hunger, health and education. The use of the SDGs as a paradigm has made it possible for it to be viewed in a holistic perspective and how it is connected with each other. Results from the Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI 2022), the World Bank Poverty & Equity Brief 2025, the UNICEF/MICS data, and the Nigeria Voluntary National Review 2024, and peer review articles indicate the prevalence of poverty, the prevalence of food insecurity, the prevalence of maternal and children's mortality, weak and inadequate learning infrastructure, disparities, lack of institutional capacity, lack of funding, as well as periodic threats like inflation, insecurity,

The results clearly indicate that the country is off-track in the achievement of SDGs 1-4 by the year 2030. For instance, the achievement of SDG 1 on poverty reduction is undermined by the high levels of poverty headcounts and the absence of robust social protection systems. Similarly, the achievement of SDG 2 on zero hunger is undermined by issues of food insecurity, insecurity, low agricultural productivity. In the same vein, the achievement of SDG 3 on health is undermined by low levels of maternal and child health indicators, uneven resource distribution, and the absence of enough workforce. Finally, the achievement of SDG 4 on education is undermined by low literacy and numeracy levels and the exclusion of disadvantaged groups. The above results underscore the point that poverty reduction cannot be addressed in isolation from the achievement of hunger reduction, health improvement, and education goals.

Yet, the significance of the study remains valuable in integrating different information sets, framing universal goals in line with information on the Nigerian context, and providing targeted policy information, among other benefits. The data provided highlights the need for holistic goal achievement in sustainable development for Nigeria, stated succinctly: ending poverty is impossible without reducing hunger, providing adequate health and education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended the following;

- i. SDGs 1 and 2: the government should expand conditional cash transfer, increase rural financing, and climate-smart farming, strengthen small and medium-sized enterprises to create more employment opportunities and reduce poverty, particularly in rural Nigeria.
- ii. SDG 3: Adequate investments in the healthcare system, maternal and child healthcare, workforce development, and even distribution of healthcare resources across the country will hasten the attainment of the goal.
- iii. SDG 4: The government and development partners should strengthen literacy and numeracy foundations, invest in teacher recruitment and training, and promote inclusive education for disadvantaged Nigerians.
- iv. Technology and Education: The integration of technology, more mobile schools and scholarships, and youth engagement for education reform can be enhanced IN Nigeria.
- v. Systemic Alignment: Governance issues of poverty, food security, health, and education should be tackled, while aligning Vision 2050 of Nigeria with the global SDGs.

- vi. Nigeria should also leverage Artificial Intelligence (AI) in fast-tracking its progress towards attaining the SDGs by using AI in agriculture, healthcare, education, energy, and governance.
- vii. Rural development should be prioritised as a key driver in attaining SDG goals through deliberate heavy investing in rural infrastructure and by ensuring fiscal autonomy.

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