

EVALUATING NIGERIA'S NATIONAL PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Oge Samuel OKONKWO¹ 

Abstract

Previous studies have analyzed development plans and strategies for achieving national objectives, but often need comprehensive assessments integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability. This study examines critically Nigeria's national planning efforts towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), identifying key challenges and proposing holistic solutions. Employing a qualitative case study approach, it analyzes government reports, development plans, and scholarly publications through the lens of the 2030 Agenda's integrated principles. Findings show that structural problems, poor governance, and sectoral shortcomings are slowing down progress towards the SDGs. These problems show up as persistent poverty, inequality, insecurity, and poor infrastructure. The study underscores the need for institutional capacity building, policy coherence through constitutional reforms, emphasis on sustainable infrastructure and technology, and investment in human capital through quality education and health services. By providing a multi-dimensional evaluation of Nigeria's development planning, this research contributes to the discourse on effective implementation of the SDGs, particularly in developing countries.

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¹ University of Ghana, College of Humanities, Department of History, Legon, Accra – Ghana, ogesamuelokonkwo@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of national development in countries like Nigeria encompasses a broad spectrum of objectives spanning socio-economic, political, cultural, and administrative domains. Since its independence, Nigeria has implemented a series of development policies and initiatives aimed at accelerating its progress. This endeavor began with the formulation of its inaugural national plan in 1960, driven by the aspiration to catch up with developed nations. Subsequently, Nigeria has devised numerous long-term, medium-term, and short-term development strategies to propel its growth. Additionally, the country has committed to various regional and international agreements and development agendas, including NEPAD, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Vision20:2020, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) introduced by the United Nations. The SDGs, comprising 17 overarching goals, 169 specific targets, and 230 key performance indicators, offer a framework for addressing multifaceted challenges impacting economies, livelihoods, peace, and the environment globally by 2030. To operationalize these aspirations, Nigeria has established institutional and legal frameworks, implementing diverse policies and programs aligned with the SDGs. These initiatives aim to address the country's development needs comprehensively, tackling a myriad of challenges it faces.

Nigeria continues to grapple with significant socio-economic challenges, including high levels of hunger, poverty, unemployment, inequality, illiteracy, diseases, infrastructure decay, environmental degradation, and a heavy debt burden. Recent statistics reveal that half of the population lives in poverty, while unemployment affects 40% of Nigerians, exacerbating existing inequalities. Critical sectors such as healthcare, education, housing, power, and transportation remain severely underdeveloped. The agricultural sector struggles to achieve self-sufficiency, leading to dependency on imports due to limited industrialization. Despite ongoing efforts, past development plans have fallen short, and the implementation of SDGs, now in its fifteenth year,

has yet to yield significant progress. This paper aims to explore the challenges hindering Nigeria's SDG attainment, examine government initiatives, identify major obstacles, and propose potential solutions to address them. Key questions include the nature of government efforts toward SDG realization, the primary impediments to SDG achievement and national development plans, and potential strategies for overcoming these barriers.

This study aims to investigate the obstacles that may hinder the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their impact on Nigeria's national development. Specific objectives include assessing government initiatives toward SDG achievement and identifying potential barriers to their realization. Additionally, the study seeks to propose strategies for addressing these challenges effectively.

Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, this research relies exclusively on secondary data sources such as journals, books, newspapers, magazines, and official documents from governmental and non-governmental organizations. Data analysis entails content analysis, which involves summarizing and examining relevant information related to the research topic.¹

2. THE EVOLVING IDEA OF DEVELOPMENT: NIGERIA'S PERSPECTIVE

In Nigeria, there exists a conceptual debate surrounding the notion of development. In its essence, development encompasses a wide array of dimensions, impacting both individual lives and national trajectories. Within the discourse on development, Dudley Seers introduced a notable perspective, posing three pivotal inquiries regarding development within developing nations like Nigeria. Seers' first question pertains to the state of poverty, probing into its trends and changes over time. The second query addresses the issue of unemployment, delving into its evolution and impact on societal progress (Seers, 1969).

The third aspect concerns the issue of inequality. A country is considered to be developing if these three indicators are low. Conversely, if one or more indicators are high, it suggests regression. This

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scenario is applicable to many developing nations, including Nigeria, where poverty, unemployment, and inequality persistently afflict the populace, hindering an improved standard of living despite observed economic growth.

Hence, development is an ongoing process characterized by positive changes, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative enhancements in productive capacity and human welfare. It manifests through the amelioration of overall human well-being and a fairer distribution of increased goods and services among the population.

The need for national planning spurred the emergence of development administration and government interventionism, prompted by historical events such as the Great Depression, World War II, and post-war reconstruction. Initially observed in industrialized nations, this approach was later adopted by post-colonial states as a means to achieve developmental goals. Development administration entails the adoption of innovative, action-oriented administrative systems aimed at facilitating modernization and industrialization in developing countries (Riggs, 1965). The concept of development administration involves executing programs and initiatives aimed at addressing the specific needs of citizens and advancing national progress. It serves as a method to bolster the operational effectiveness of public bureaucracies in developed nations.

A development plan serves as a roadmap for realizing a nation's developmental goals, outlining strategies, programs, and projects designed to facilitate progress. In Nigeria, these plans are integrated into annual budgets, detailing the financial and human resources required for implementation, along with clear institutional and legal frameworks.

Sustainable development was initially introduced in the 1987 Brundtland Report by the United Nations, which cautioned against the environmental repercussions of economic growth, globalization, industrialization, and population expansion. The report defined sustainable development as the pursuit of progress that fulfills present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own (Brundtland & Khalid, 1987). Sustainability entails achieving

development that meets the needs of the current generation without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves maintaining a balance between economic progress, environmental preservation, and social welfare. In essence, sustainable development aims for a lasting enhancement in the overall quality of life. Su suggests that it encompasses various aspects including materials, aesthetics, ecological systems, agriculture, forests, and human health (Su, 2002).

Briggs defines sustainable development as a socio-ecological process that meets human needs while safeguarding both quality of life and the natural environment indefinitely. It emphasizes considering human welfare and the long-term impacts of present actions, requiring global cooperation for enduring solutions. Sustainable development involves responsible resource utilization to ensure they are not depleted, aiming for longevity and positive impacts on present and future generations. Moreover, sustainable development is linked to principles of human solidarity, environmental preservation, democratic governance, supportive technologies, and non-violence, while violence poses a significant barrier to development (Briggs, 2008).

However, human productive and consumptive behaviors contribute to the planet's non-sustainability, impacting the environment and society's well-being. This leads to substantial human-induced threats to sustainable development, particularly concerning the future of life on Earth, such as those stemming from adverse effects of science and technology and gender inequality (Büscher & Ufer, 2022).

Various indicators have been developed to gauge global progress toward sustainable development, aiming to raise awareness about the risks of planetary non-sustainability. These indicators categorize sustainability levels as sustainable, nearly sustainable, poor (almost unsustainable), and destructive (unsustainable). Such assessments are intended to prompt nations to address alarming trends and restore Earth to a state of environmental sustainability, preserving humanity from potential extinction.

Indicators of sustainable development encompass measures like the Index of Sustainable Economic

Welfare (ISEW), Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), Human Development Index (HDI), Environmental Development Index (EDI), Sustainable Development Index (SDI), Wellbeing Index, and Ecological Footprint (EF) (Lozano & Gutiérrez, 2008). Among these, the Human Development Index, crafted by the United Nations, is widely recognized for its assessment of socio-economic welfare and quality of life at both individual and national levels.

National Development Plans in Nigeria trace back to the colonial period, initially serving as a tool for efficient resource allocation by the colonial administration. The first plan, spanning from 1945 to 1955, aimed to distribute development and welfare funds across the country but was interrupted by a new constitution dividing Nigeria into three regions, each responsible for its planning. However, implementation issues, including overlaps and a focus solely on public sector expenditures, led to the plan's failure, which was perceived as favoring colonial interests over indigenous Nigerians (Ejumudo, 2013).

Upon independence in 1960, the need for an indigenous development plan became apparent, resulting in the 1962-1968 National Development Plan, the first conceived and implemented by Nigerians. Despite its recognition of regional diversity, interregional rivalry hindered its success, exacerbated by the constitutional structure favoring regional power over the central government. The plan also faced challenges due to political conflicts and the Nigerian Civil War from 1966 to 1970 (Anger, 2010).

The Second National Development Plan (1970-1975) aimed at post-war reconstruction and achieved significant infrastructural development. However, corruption, particularly among military rulers and public servants, hindered the plan's full realization. The subsequent Third National Development Plan (1970-1980) expanded objectives to include economic revitalization and social welfare, yet faced obstacles like political instability, corruption, and global economic downturns (Akintoye & Opeyemi, 2014). Despite these challenges, the development plans underscore Nigeria's efforts to navigate socio-economic complexities and achieve national progress, albeit with varying degrees of success and hindrances.

Initiating yet another strategy to tackle Nigeria's multifaceted challenges, the fourth national development plan emerged as a medium-term initiative spanning from 1980 to 1985. Launched in 1981, its objectives encompassed augmenting the real income of the average citizen, fostering income distribution, curbing unemployment, and promoting diversification and balanced development across various economic sectors and geographic regions. Noteworthy was the emphasis on Indigenous participation in enterprises, self-reliance in food and technology, skilled workforce enhancement, work ethic improvement, and environmental preservation. Unlike pre-independence plans, these were crafted by Nigerian professionals. However, corruption, waning political commitment, revenue decline, and implementation issues plagued the plan's execution (Ejumudo, 2013).

The underperformance of preceding plans prompted the adoption of three-year rolling plans, tailored to meet immediate development needs. Launched in series from 1990 to 1998, these plans aimed at addressing short-term objectives. However, corruption, lack of political will, and inadequate planning undermined their effectiveness (Lawrence, 2018).

The failure of the rolling plans prompted a shift towards medium and long-term strategies. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), initiated in 2003, aimed at domestic development to alleviate poverty, reduce unemployment, and enhance welfare. Despite its ambitious goals, NEEDS faced criticism for its foreign origins and cosmetic implementation. This setback led to the inception of Vision 20:2020 in 2007, envisioning Nigeria among the world's top 20 economies. Yet, lack of political will, policy inconsistency, and inadequate poverty reduction strategies marred its progress, culminating in its abandonment without substantial success. Additionally, the NEEDS approach's "trickle-down" nature, diverging from internationally recognized rights-based methods, further compounded its shortcomings. The pattern of successive governments abandoning their predecessors' plans without evaluating their efficacy perpetuated the cycle of failure (Commission et al., 2007).

In 2017, the government launched the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), spanning from 2017 to 2020, aimed at revitalizing the economy after the 2017 recession and the subsequent global economic downturn caused by Covid-19. Its objectives included fostering sustained inclusive growth, enhancing national cohesion, and driving structural economic transformation. Additionally, it aimed to boost efficiency in both public and private sectors, elevate national productivity, diversify production sustainably, and ensure food and energy security. However, the plan fell short of expectations due to various economic challenges plaguing Nigeria, including corruption, inappropriate policies, currency depreciation, insecurity, infrastructure decay, and global economic shifts (Anam et al., 2024).

Currently ongoing is the National Development Plan 2021-2025, designed as a medium-term successor to the ERGP. This plan prioritizes economic growth, infrastructure development, public administration, human capital enhancement, and regional progress. With a target of 5% annual GDP growth, the government aims to broaden the tax base, empower the private sector through investment opportunities, and engage in strategic policy interventions to achieve this goal.

However, the plan faces significant hurdles stemming from the country's economic and political landscape. Financial constraints, such as exchange rate volatility, low revenue generation, hefty debt commitments, substantial petroleum subsidies, reduced economic activity, insecurity, and widespread corruption, threaten its successful implementation (Okitasari & Katramiz, 2022). These challenges cast doubt on the feasibility of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria.

3. BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: NIGERIA'S SDGS

In Nigeria, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have gained considerable attention and relevance. They represent a global agenda aimed at addressing various socio-economic and environmental challenges. Nigeria, like many other countries, has committed to achieving these goals by aligning them with national development priorities. However, despite this commitment, several challenges hinder the effective

implementation of the SDGs in Nigeria. These challenges include inadequate infrastructure, political instability, corruption, and a lack of adequate financial resources. Additionally, there is a need for improved data collection and monitoring mechanisms to track progress towards the SDGs. Overall, addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring the successful attainment of the SDGs in Nigeria and improving the well-being of its citizens. The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) during its 70th session on September 25, 2015, replacing the expiring Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals, built upon five pillars known as the 5Ps - People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership - aim to eradicate global poverty, address environmental challenges, and promote peace and prosperity worldwide by 2030. Consisting of 17 goals, including poverty eradication, gender equality, climate action, and sustainable cities, each SDG has specific targets to be achieved by 2030, with the UN establishing indicators to track progress (Modibbo et al., 2021).

Nigeria became a signatory to the SDGs in 2016 and has since implemented various institutional and legal frameworks to align with these goals. The government established the Office of the Senior Special Adviser to the President on SDGs to coordinate and monitor their implementation nationwide, collaborating with international partners like the UNDP. Despite these efforts, Nigeria's performance in achieving the SDGs, as highlighted in the Voluntary National Review (VNR) report, presents significant challenges (Oleribe & Taylor-Robinson, 2016).

The VNR report, focusing on priority SDGs such as poverty eradication, health, education, gender equality, and peace, paints a concerning picture of Nigeria's progress. Health indicators remain poor, with maternal and child health posing significant challenges. Healthcare delivery has deteriorated, reflected in low life expectancy rates compared to developed countries. Despite being Africa's largest economy, the majority of Nigerians still live in poverty and hunger, leading to the country being labeled the "poverty capital" of the world. Despite economic growth, this has not translated into improved well-being for the population, with

millions still living below the poverty line (Balogun, 2022).

The youth unemployment rate remains high, with an estimate of 55.4% or approximately 24.5 million individuals, according to recent reports from the National Bureau of Statistics. This increase is evident in the statistics provided by the NBC, showing a rise in Nigeria's unemployment rate from 33% in 2020 to 35% in 2021, encompassing 23.2 million of the working-age population. Moreover, youth unemployment constitutes a significant portion, standing at 53.4% of the total unemployed population (Oluwole, 2022).

The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) necessitates a strong and diverse economy to support their implementation and sustainability. However, Nigeria's economy heavily relies on crude oil as its primary revenue source, making it vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices. Additionally, the lack of industrialization renders the economy import-dependent, limiting its resilience and growth potential despite fluctuations in GDP.

Over the past decade, Nigeria has faced escalating insecurity, driving away foreign investors due to the prevalence of criminal activities perpetrated by terrorist groups, bandits, and other criminal elements. The country's ranking in global peace and terrorism indices reflects this reality, with Nigeria ranking poorly in both the Global Peace Index and the Global Terrorism Index. For instance, in 2021, Nigeria ranked 21st out of 163 countries assessed in the Global Peace Index (Asaju & Yohanna, 2022).

The Sustainable Development Report offers further insights into Nigeria's situation, ranking the country 139th out of 163 countries in terms of SDG performance. Nigeria's performance index score of 53.6 indicates below-average progress, particularly in SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 16. Although the country fares slightly better in SDGs 2, 6, 8, 10, and 14, there is room for improvement. Notably, Nigeria scores highly in SDGs 12, 13, 15, and 17, underscoring areas of relative strength and areas requiring further attention (Sachs et al., 2022).

4. HURDLES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A CLOSER LOOK

The attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) faces various challenges that hinder

its achievement. These impediments arise from several factors within different contexts. They include economic constraints, inadequate infrastructure, political instability, social disparities, environmental degradation, and insufficient resources. Overcoming these barriers requires concerted efforts from governments, civil society, and international organizations. Additionally, addressing these challenges demands innovative solutions and sustainable policies that prioritize the well-being of people and the planet. Despite the complexities involved, finding effective strategies to mitigate these obstacles is essential for advancing progress toward achieving the SDGs globally. In contrast to the apparent strides made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria, conflicting evidence suggests that the country falls short of its expected achievements. This prompts the inquiry into the factors contributing to the underperformance of SDGs in Nigeria.

Firstly, the lack of accurate data stands as a significant hurdle. Reliable information is indispensable for informed decision-making and effective planning. Unfortunately, Nigeria often grapples with the issue of unreliable data, leading to flawed developmental strategies and policies. The reliance on international institutions for data exacerbates this challenge, as the data provided may not accurately reflect the country's realities.

Moreover, a deficit in expertise further compounds the problem. Nigeria's educational system lacks adequate emphasis on science and technology, hindering progress in crucial sectors. The country's failure to prioritize indigenous scientific advancements exacerbates this issue, as evidenced by the neglect of homegrown innovations and products.

Additionally, Nigeria's overreliance on its petroleum sector has stifled diversification efforts and weakened other sectors of the economy. The lack of a robust industrial base perpetuates dependency on imports, undermining economic sustainability and hindering overall development efforts.

In essence, addressing these multifaceted challenges is imperative for Nigeria to unlock its full developmental potential and make substantial progress towards achieving the SDGs. The

challenges hindering the achievement of the SDGs in Nigeria are multifaceted and encompass various aspects.

Firstly, the lack of adequate infrastructure poses a significant obstacle. Nigeria grapples with a deficient transportation and communication system, including deteriorating roadways, railways, and airports. Additionally, the power sector faces inefficiencies, leading to unreliable electricity supply and high production costs.

Furthermore, the educational system's inadequacies impede development efforts. The mismatch between educational curricula and market demands renders many graduates unemployable, undermining the country's human capital development.

Neglect of research and innovation exacerbates these issues, as scientific advancements are pivotal for sustainable development. The absence of a conducive environment for research stifles innovation and hampers progress.

Moreover, ineffective policy implementation undermines developmental initiatives. Despite well-formulated policies, poor execution, often due to corruption and lack of political will, results in project failures and unrealized goals.

Additionally, policy discontinuity and corruption by government officials exacerbate the situation, with frequent policy shifts driven by political motives and rampant corruption hindering national development efforts. Addressing these systemic challenges is essential for Nigeria to realize its developmental aspirations and achieve the SDGs.

5. UNLOCKING NIGERIA'S SDGS: PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

The Nigerian government's commitment to achieving the SDGs amidst political, social, and economic challenges is crucial. Despite the daunting task ahead and the limited time frame, which is less than eight years, success is possible with sincere efforts and collective action. To this end, several strategies are proposed:

Firstly, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, including government bodies, civil society organizations, and the private sector, is crucial. This collaborative effort can leverage diverse expertise and resources to address the multifaceted

challenges hindering SDG attainment. Additionally, the government must demonstrate purposeful leadership, commitment, and sincerity in mobilizing adequate and timely resources for SDG implementation. Political, ethnic, and religious sentiments should not influence project execution.

Good governance is imperative, requiring elected officials to exhibit integrity and deliver the benefits of democracy. Attitudinal change is necessary, shifting from self-interest to serving the nation's interests. Addressing insecurity is paramount, as frequent attacks disrupt economic activities and instill fear among citizens. A sincere and committed approach to combating criminal elements, including bandits and terrorists, is essential to restore investor confidence.

The public service plays a vital role in SDG achievement and should be equipped for 21st-century challenges through capacity building, value reorientation, and merit-based recruitment, placement, and promotion. Corruption remains a significant obstacle to development and must be vigorously prosecuted, with offenders held accountable across all sectors.

Investing in education, particularly in science and vocational training, is crucial. Curriculum adjustments emphasizing practical knowledge application and providing adequate support for teachers and research facilities are essential for overall national development. Additionally, investing significantly in research and innovation is crucial for Nigeria's development. Breakthroughs in science and technology are essential for progress, and the outcomes of such research must be effectively implemented. Digitalization of all sectors is necessary for meaningful development in today's world, emphasizing the importance of ICT and indigenous technological advancements.

Addressing infrastructure deficits is paramount for economic growth. Critical infrastructure like power, transportation, housing, and healthcare is essential for achieving the SDGs. While the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) approach is commendable, the government must create a conducive environment for its success. Combatting insecurity is vital as it directly impacts economic activities, investment, and entrepreneurship. Insecurity disrupts daily life, deters foreign investors, and hampers economic progress.

Finally, diversification of the economy is imperative, requiring the government's sincere commitment to sectors like industry, mining, agriculture, and transportation. Nigeria's economy must move away from reliance on oil and imports towards a more sustainable and diversified model for meaningful development.

6. CONCLUSION

Development administration encompasses the holistic pursuit of socio-economic, political, cultural, and administrative goals for national advancement. Many developing nations, Nigeria included, have implemented various development strategies over time to accelerate progress. Unfortunately, these strategies have often fallen short of their intended outcomes. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a global

initiative aimed at addressing fundamental challenges faced by developing countries. The overarching aim is to improve global welfare by tackling issues such as poverty, hunger, illiteracy, health crises, unemployment, environmental degradation, insecurity, and gender disparities. The objective is to create conducive conditions for human existence, peace, and prosperity worldwide. Nigeria has pledged commitment to this initiative, implementing institutional frameworks, financial investments, and partnerships to realize the SDGs. However, significant challenges threaten these efforts, including data inaccuracies, governmental reluctance, economic instability, infrastructure deficiencies, inadequate education systems, workforce inefficiencies, and pervasive corruption.

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