

Education: An Imperative Tool For Achieving Shared Prosperity In Nigeria⁷

NESG Research



⁷ For an expanded discussion on this subject matter, refer to the NESG mini-report series, retrievable via: https://nesgroup.org/download_resource_documents/Education%20An%20Imperative%20Tool%20for%20%20Achieving%20Shared%20Prosperity%20in%20Nigeria_1686066322.pdf

Abstract

As a complex and multifaceted challenge, achieving shared prosperity in developing countries like Nigeria requires a comprehensive and structured approach. The poor and deteriorating socioeconomic outcomes over time have shown that the country's shared prosperity agenda must be reviewed. This cannot be done in isolation of a functional and inclusive education system. However, Nigerian education faces perennial challenges, such as low funding, out-of-school children crisis, and outdated school curricula, among others. This paper examined the central role of education in achieving shared prosperity in Nigeria, identified the key challenges confronting the Education sector, and proffers measures geared at revamping the deplorable state of education as part of efforts towards achieving shared prosperity in Nigeria.

Introduction

Achieving shared prosperity has become increasingly crucial as country experiences show that economic growth does not always translate into lower inequality and poverty reduction. A country that has achieved shared prosperity could be said to have made significant investments in human capital development, with the outcome being a more inclusive society. However, this is not the case in Nigeria with low human capital index stood at 0.36 points, corresponding to its ranking of 168th out of 174 countries in 2020⁸. This could be attributed to inadequate funding of education, limited capacity to harness citizens' human capital potential – resulting in brain drain, high level of school drop-outs and child labour. Consequently, weak human capital development in Nigeria has contributed to poor socio-economic outcomes. For instance, approximately 133 million Nigerians were estimated to live in multidimensional poverty in 2021, a 36 percent increase from 97.8 million in 2019 (World Bank, 2022; NBS, 2022).

Meanwhile, the NESG, in the 2023 Macroeconomic Outlook Report, proposed a Shared Prosperity Agenda tailored to the nation's specific development needs. The agenda focuses on four (4) strategic thrusts, including concentric economic diversification and transformation, a thriving private sector, functional social programmes and human capital development. As one of the critical components of human capital development, quality education is critical to achieving shared prosperity as it constitutes an important ingredient required to raise living standards, reduce poverty and narrow income gaps. To this end, achieving shared prosperity without quality and fundamentally relevant education is nothing but a mirage.

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF EDUCATION IN ACHIEVING SHARED PROSPERITY

Education is essential for inclusive growth and development, raising a nation's average standard of living and developing a skilled youth population. Below is the critical importance of education in achieving Shared Prosperity.

- **Pivotal to economic development:** Education is essential for economic development and shared prosperity. It positively impacts economic prosperity and is linked to other aspects, such as employment, health, and innovation.
- **Central to human capital development:** Investment in education is pivotal to achieving improved human capital development. It enhances productivity, technological advancements and economic growth, thereby contributing significantly to economic prosperity for individuals and the country.

⁸ See <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/HD.HCI.OVRL?locations=NG>

- **Important for poverty reduction:** Education is one of the fastest routes out of poverty. This is because educated individuals make informed decisions about financial management, health, earnings potential, and escaping the cycle of poverty.
- **Essential in harnessing the demographic bulge:** Education as an engine of growth is essential to harness the expected demographic bulge as the country's population rises.
- **Critical to achieving a fair and equitable society:** Education is a prerequisite for equal opportunities, gender equality, civic activities engagement, and social cohesion.

CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA'S EDUCATION SECTOR

Nigeria's education sector has faced several perennial challenges which require urgent redress to improve education outcomes. Some of these critical challenges include but are not limited to the following;

- **Low Investment:** Low investment in education is linked to many challenges, such as poor remuneration, lack of quality teachers, low-quality technical and vocational education and training programmes, poor quality education, and outdated curricula. In 2023, about 8.2 percent of the FGN budget was allocated to the Education sector (see Budget Office of the Federation, 2023). This is far from UNESCO's 25 percent benchmark (Adeleke & Alabede, 2022).
- **Outdated Curricula:** The state of the Nigerian education curricula has been identified as a prominent factor contributing to high youth unemployment. Outdated curricula have produced graduates without the necessary knowledge and skills for gainful employment. The youth unemployment rate stood at a colossal 42.5 percent in 2020 (NBS, 2021).
- **High incidence of out-of-school children:** In 2019, about 7.1 million children aged 6-17 had not attended school, and 5 million had dropped out, resulting in an estimated 12.1 million out-of-school children in 2019 (World Bank & IIEP-UNESCO, 2021). The headcount of out-of-school children has grown to 19.7 million in 2020, with Nigeria having the world's third largest population of out-of-school children after India and Pakistan (UNESCO, 2022).
- **Challenges with policy formulation and implementation:** The education sector needs help with policy formulation, implementation, and duplication of policies, leading to poor educational outcomes.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigeria is currently the world's poverty capital after surpassing India in 2018. Education as a pivot for improved human capital development is essential for Nigeria to achieve shared prosperity, reduced poverty and better living standards. Poor education lowers employment opportunities and negatively affects the transition to high social status. Therefore, the government and policymakers must prioritise education by undertaking the following measures:

- **Expand resources to the education sector:** Investment in specialised fields such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) would promote an adequately prepared young population. The Technical and Vocational Training (TVET) scheme and teacher training initiatives would also benefit from increased investment in promoting skill acquisition.
- **Empower youths with skills:** The TVET programmes are critical to skill acquisition and job creation. One such programme launched by the Federal government in 2022 is the Project T-MAX scheme, which aims to equip Nigerians with technical and vocational skills. TVET

programmes can also be supported by equipping attendees with entrepreneurial skills needed for self-employment.

- **Revamp school curriculum to reflect industry needs:** There is a need to reform the school curriculum to reflect industry needs and develop competencies valuable to the private sector. There is also a need for internship schemes to be tied to specific skills to improve youths' employability potential.
- **Need to embrace digital learning:** Digital learning supports a broader reach in providing educational services and promotes independent learning. In addition, it can be pivotal in educating the out-of-school population and promoting literacy and numeracy among this group supporting inclusive education.
- **Influence socio-cultural norms for inclusive education:** There are still wide disparities in school enrolment for boys and girls. Cultural beliefs about gender roles hinder girls from receiving an education. These beliefs could be reversed through regular public sensitisation and rolling out of scholarship opportunities to outstanding male and female students at different levels of education.

References

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