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Nigeria, Education

Nigeria's Educational Crisis Can Indeed be Saved

Background

As of 2020, Nigeria reigns as the richest country in Africa, generating a GDP of \$404.65 billion (*Richest African Countries 2020*). Hearing this, one would automatically assume that among the various countries residing in Africa, Nigerians are typically better off and guaranteed accessibility to fundamental resources such as food, water, healthcare, education, etc. This assumption is certainly not the case, since Nigeria has encountered various social and economic problems pertaining to the listed resources above (Kalau).

Amidst all the problems Nigeria is facing, education seems to be the most current, severe, and critical; some even noting that “Education in Nigeria is in a mess from top to bottom” (Ekundayo).

Nigeria is located on the western coast of Africa (klaus). With the largest population in Africa and the seventh largest in the world, Nigeria is home to 206 million individuals (Varrella, “Nigeria: Population 1950-2020”). As of 2019, 51.16 % of Nigeria's total population lives in urban areas and cities whereas 48.84% of Nigeria’s total population lives in rural areas (Varrella, “Nigeria: Population 1950-2020”). Nigeria is a Federal Republic, with elected President Muhammadu Buhari as the leader of the country (“Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria”). It operates as a “Presidential system of Government” with an Executive, a Bi-cameral Legislature and a Judiciary, each participating in the checks and balance system (“Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria”). 76 million acres — accounting for 33% — of Nigeria's land is currently cultivated with major crops including rice and cassava (Pines). Looking at Nigeria’s exportation, major exports include crude petroleum, petroleum gas, refined petroleum, cocoa beans, and gold (Pines). Climate in Nigeria typically varies depending on regional location; Nigeria overall has a tropical climate with rainy and dry seasons (“Nigeria| National Geographic Kids”). From a geographical standpoint, Nigeria’s distinctive regions include deserts, plains, swamps, mountains, and steamy jungles (“Nigeria| National Geographic Kids”).

Average Family

Considering the fact that Nigeria is a highly populated country, the average family size is larger than many other countries. As of 2018, the typical household family size counted on average is 4.7 members (Varrella, “Nigeria: Household Structure, by Area”). Households in rural areas are also larger than those in urban areas, “more specifically, rural households had on average five members, whereas urban households registered 4.3 people” (Varrella, “Nigeria: Household Structure, by Area”). The dwellings in which a typical Nigerian family resides vary depending on the family's economic status. Common homes families dwell in range from mud houses to mansions (Middlechaseblog). A typical family diet in Nigeria consists of a combination of carbohydrate, proteins and small quantities of fat. The specific diets all depend on the regional area families reside in; families in the northern region have diets based on beans and rice while families in the southwest and central regions have diets based on cassava, okra, and spinach in stews or soups (“Food in Nigeria”).

Working class families in Nigeria usually acquire jobs in sales, healthcare, advertising etc. (Okoronkwo). The average hourly wage Nigerian families obtain is 2687.56 Naira, which amounts to \$7.06 (Olayemi). On that account, it is salient to note that many families in Nigeria are in poverty and do not have adequate funds to finance necessities such as healthcare and education. A 2019 Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria report released by The National Bureau of Statistics highlighted that “40 percent of the total population, or almost 83 million people, live below the poverty line of 137,430 naira, \$381.75, per year” (“Nigeria Releases New Report on Poverty and Inequality in Country.”). According to UNICEF, about 10.5 million children in Nigeria are not in school; many children do not have access to education due to economic barriers (UNICEF). Additionally, though healthcare access has greatly improved in recent years, there are still tremendous barriers for many families to access adequate healthcare in Nigeria (Adedini et al). Along with the current education crisis Nigeria is facing, the country is also facing a food insecurity crisis. Many families have limited access to assistance, and food remains a major need in various regions (“Nigeria | Hunger Relief in Africa.”).

Current Situation

Today, for millions of children around the world, education remains an elusive right (Humanium). In particular, Nigeria currently has over 10 million children out of school (UNICEF). This high amount is not only one of the highest out-of-school rates in Africa but it is also top ten in the entire world (“In 10 Countries with Highest out-of-School Rates”). Among the Nigerian students in school, a growing 27 million students are doing very poorly (Ekundayo). Nigeria's statistical trends in lack of access in education are not improving, but rather in recent years have significantly gotten worse, especially recently because of the pandemic. April Amorighoye, a curator of Global Shapers Lagos Hub, commented of the recent issues the pandemic brought for Nigerian children, “many children in rural and underserved communities in Nigeria, are being left behind as they are not equipped to adapt or transition to the new methods of learning.” (Amorighoye).

Many factors contribute to Nigeria’s overall “inaccessibility to education” trend, some include economic status, regional location, gender, cultural norms, and overall lack of funding from the Nigerian government (BBC). Moreover, Nigerian students who are able to access education are primarily abandoned and left to deal with the poor educational environments, inadequate classrooms, and under-qualified teachers.

Although all parts of Nigeria are facing lack of access to education, the current crisis is disproportionately affecting the rural population than the urban population. A large percentage of the rural population are lower class and unfortunately more do not have sufficient funds to afford adequate children schooling (Kazeem et al). Of the many children in Nigeria who are currently out of school and lack access to education many come from the Northern part of Nigeria. Families of these children are predominantly Muslim and don't believe in the “western style education” but instead receive Qur’anic education, which does not include basic skills such as literacy and mathematics (Finley).

Nigeria’s educational crisis commonly affects many marginalized populations, these marginalized populations include women, ethnic & religious minorities, and citizens with disabilities (Amoo). There are no resources that fully support these groups when it pertains to education and the government is doing little to nothing. According to IMF’s economic data for Nigeria, there is substantial inequality in access to education between girls and boys. Young men have a greater

percentage in accessing education than young women in Nigeria (IMF Blog). This discrepancy certainly has to be abridged because equality should be a vital standard in all educational systems.

While Nigeria's education system is failing their students, the Nigerian diaspora is doing extremely well in other foreign countries. In countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, Nigerians are one of, if not, the most highly educated of all groups. According to the Financial Times, "In the US, Nigerians are the most highly educated of all groups, with 61 percent holding at least a bachelor's degree compared with 31 percent of the total foreign-born population and 32 percent of the US-born population..." (Jackson-Obot). Due to this indicated fact, it can be reasonably assumed that Nigerian students are capable of achieving high in the academic area, but Nigeria's poor educational system is restricting their capabilities and not bringing out the best in their students.

At core, Nigeria's education system leaves millions of Nigerians uneducated and more susceptible to poverty. This continuous cycle will surely progress if effective actions are unimplemented. The presented statistics are increasingly becoming more worrisome, change indeed has to be prominent.

Solutions

Some of the best and direct ways to solve Nigeria's education crisis relies on the government to act and essentially take initiative. For starters, Nigerian political leaders can bind together and increase national funding in the education sector. The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recommends that 15-20% of the total spending of any country should go to the education sector (webmaster). As of Nigeria's 2020 Federal Budget, only 6.48% of the total budget was apportioned to education (webmaster); this actively demonstrates that Nigeria falls short of the recommended spending percentage. Sufficient amounts of money should be allocated to education when Nigeria comes up with their yearly federal budget. In order to get enough funding for this policy initiative, government officials should take some funds away from non-essential spending sectors and add it to the education sector.

Another solution the Nigerian government should consider to remedy the current crisis, is to make secondary school officially free of cost. Just as the Nigeria government previously made primary education free, the government should also make this true for secondary education. This implementation is in the same manner of their neighboring country of Ghana, which allowed many underprivileged students to access education by implementing its Free Senior High School policy (Winthrop). Subsequently, by doing this, numerous disadvantaged Nigerian children will be enabled to receive an education. Which can ultimately lower the amount of out-of-school children in Nigeria.

As previously mentioned, Nigerians students who already have access to education are inadequately being taught by under-qualified teachers (BBC). Since many teachers in Nigeria lack qualifications and training to effectively instill academic knowledge and values into their students, the Nigerian government should look to resolve this problem. To remedy this, Nigeria should implement training guidelines and specific qualification regulations all teachers and schools must adhere to. This action will lay the foundation to building a stronger curriculum for Nigerian students.

The worrisome statistics should be more than enough for the Nigerian government to actually be assertive and take action in the country's educational crisis. Nevertheless, to entice Nigerian leaders to do so even more, they should be reminded that children are indeed their future and how closely

education relates to economic development. Education should be seen as a major government priority and investment. In the future, these proposed solutions helping to resolve the urgent need for the country's children to be educated would benefit the country's economy. The more educated a country is, the more productive it is as well; Nigeria leaders should also be reminded that education can be a solution to all the other problems the country is facing, such as food insecurity. As already stated, education can lead to economic prosperity which can ultimately increase opportunities in accessing nutrient dense foods. José Cuesta, a World Bank development economist, informed that “more educated individuals mean more resources to buy food, better access to nutritious foods, and more options to cope with price shocks and food shortages...” (Cuesta).

Finally, the greatest way to potentially save Nigeria's children from their neglectful educational system and see extensive change will be to establish charter schools. The establishment of charter schools across the various regions of Nigeria will ultimately be the best solution for the educational crisis the country is facing. Charter schools will be a great alternative to government funded public schools. Charter schools are objectively known to be independent of school districts and their rules and regulations (“What Is a Charter School”). Since charter schools are indeed independent, the schools operate under their own conditions. Establishing charter schools in Nigeria will offer Nigerian students tremendous opportunities, a high quality, innovative educational experience, and a personalized education to fit their needs.

Funding these charter schools in Nigeria will not be a straightforward task but it is certainly achievable. Funding can be provided by many nonprofit organizations and foundations that are passionate about granting education access for all children in the world. The Gates Foundation is a great foundation to partner with when creating and implementing this project. The Gates Foundation’s Global Education Program aims to “provide education systems around the world with better information, evidence, tools and approaches that can help improve primary and secondary education...” (“Global Education Program”).

The charter schools can also be partnered and sponsored by huge companies and organizations like Amazon, UNICEF, and even oil companies like Exxon Mobil, Shell, etc. Nigeria, being a petroleum industry, produces a lot of petroleum oil for these oil companies (Ibenegbu). It is fair these companies give back to the communities they take from through humanitarian work. To attract companies like Exxon Mobil and Shell to this project, they should know that their reputation is tarnished in Nigeria since their companies frequent oil spills pollute communities (Mbachu); their partnership in this initiative will help promote a better image for their companies. As for Amazon, their role in this project can create great international publicity. In order to secure funding for this agenda, pro bono transactional attorneys can represent and draft agreements among all partnered organizations and companies. This effort will allow these schools to be loaded with more than enough resources [computers, textbooks, school utensils, books, etc.] to effectively carry out a great educational experience for students who previously have been deprived from doing so.

For this project to run smoothly, it should be managed and led by an on site civic organization plus partnerships with non-profit organizations. That way, all established charter schools will be well administered by a home based organization. Community members can overall be supportive of this initiative and express their opinions on how the schools can best support their children. The government can also be supportive and work in favor with leaders of the project. This project can be sustained by yearly fundraising efforts; there can be websites, and several social media platforms that display the current progress of the charter schools and their achievements, milestones in testing,

outlook, etc. The lead organization can even host events centered around gaining funding for continuing years.

All of these various recommended solutions do meet all the needs of the population affected by Nigeria's current educational crisis. If these solutions are implemented, it can significantly change the problem in Nigeria and tremendously benefit and impact the lives of millions of children in Nigeria and their families.

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