Socio-Cultural Challenges to the Achievement of SDGs in the North Eastern States of Nigeria

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Abstract: The scale of violent conflict in some regions of Nigeria in recent years is unprecedented and the impact of such conflict on teaching and learning is unquantifiable. It is no longer news that pupils and teachers feel insecure with incessant school raids leading to kidnappings, schools vandalized, and some communities displaced. These amongst other political and socio-economic issues impact on the learning experience of students and the education sector. This article examines the influence of conflict on teaching and learning with particular emphasis on the achievement of sustainable growth objectives in Nigeria in the North-Eastern States. This research is qualitative in nature and secondary data relating to the Boko haram crisis was collected from textbooks, journals both online and print, documented interviews, and the broader historical narratives in the region over the last eleven years (1991-2022) was reviewed and content analysis method of data analysis was employed for data analysis. The findings revealed that there has been no appreciable change in the level of western education received by students in the region. For the narrative to happen, all the three tiers of the government- the federal, state and local government needs to take a proactive and collaborative approach towards resolving the conflict in the region so that school enrollment including the general standard of education in the north east Nigeria can be improved considerably.

Keywords: Violent Conflict, Basic Education, Boko Haram, Millennium Development Goals,
Sustainable Development Goals, School Enrollment, Nigeria, Primary School Education

1. Introduction

In recent times, violent conflict has swept through many nations of the world in a terrifying manner with devastating consequences. Incidences of violent conflict have been documented in the Middle East, the United States of America (USA), The United Kingdom, Africa-especially in Ethiopia, Sudan, Chad, Cameroun and Nigeria. In Nigeria, particularly in the North Eastern states of the country, the 2009 insurgence of Boko Haram have led to a significant upsurge in violent disagreement in the north east and central parts of Nigeria [12] The annihilation of innocent victims and the total destruction of their property by religious extremists has been one of the principal barriers to the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria. Research by [33, 13, 34, 26], revealed that violent conflict is an obstacle to the achievement of justifiable development, fiscal development, partisan stability and overall socio-economic development.

In Nigeria, vehement crisis is regarded as a key factor hindering the process of learning. This is because violent conflict leads to a decline in school enrollment and educational achievement. The negative effect of this is greater for those children and teenagers who are older than the set school-age. This the major reason why 78% of children in the South Western states of Nigeria are literate while only about 17% of children in the North Eastern States of Nigeria possess the same ability [23].

The objective of this article is to answer the question, is the achievement of the SDGs possible in the North Eastern States of Nigeria? In line with this aim, the following objectives were set- to examine how violent conflict began in north east Nigeria, the second objective was to review how the sustainable development goals (SDGs) were formed from the millennium development goals (MDGs), the third objective was then to study the role of education and the achievement of sustainable development in the north eastern states of Nigeria, the data collection method is explained, data findings and results are then discussed, recommendations are made and a conclusion follows at the end.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Boko Haram: Western Education Is Forbidden

Conflict is defined as any activity which takes place when individuals or groups have opinions and beliefs that are mutually inconsistent with the general beliefs of group and can cause a rift between them which can turn violent their wants, needs or obligations [3, 4, 16]. It may also be defined as a disagreement where the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests or concerns [39]. There are different types of conflict [31], but the focus of this article is violent conflict and its effect on the achievement of sustainable educational development in the north eastern states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Since 2009, Boko Haram has besieged the Nigerian educational system in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states [6, 8, 9, 14]. Their attacks have been depicted by the vandalization of schools, killing of students, and teachers resulting in fear, mistrust, economic decline and displacement of communities [41, 5]. Boko Haram began in North East, Nigeria it was founded in 2002 by Muhammad Yusuf in Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno State in north-eastern Nigeria [32]. The North Eastern region of Nigeria is predominantly Muslim, having poor educational achievements relative to the southern part of Nigeria. The group was officially called Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, which when translated from the Arabic language means *"People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad"* [5]. The philosophy of Boko Haram's creator, Mohammad Yusuf, openly condemned Western education as well as Nigeria's egalitarianism and its constitution. Boko Haram's emphasis on the abolition of western education is inimitable among peer jihadist movements [36].

From April 2011 to June 2017, Boko Haram deployed 434 bombers and successfully carried out 238 suicide-bombing attacks on 247 different targets [40]. Over 2.1 million persons have also been exiled as a result of the violent conflict. Research by Bertoni et al. [11, 25] revealed that the states in the North-East most affected by Boko Haram's attacks are: Borno, Adamawa and Yobe. About 84 percent of inhabitants were compulsorily exiled, while 8 percent moved to Northern or Central Nigeria; and the remaining 8% fled to Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

According to the information published on the United Nations website, Nigeria's 2017 Voluntary National Review defined the official scope for the creation of an enabling policy environment for the enactment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through its Economic and Recovery Growth Plan (ERGP) (2017-2020). This policy is to ensure development in the following key areas- poverty alleviation, education, an inclusive economy, health and wellbeing, gender equality, an enabling environment for peace and security and partnerships. However, the attainment of progressive growth and development in these key areas has been met with the following challenges the Coron virus,

collapse in crude-oil value and the violent and religious crisis in particularly in north east Nigeria.

Research on Boko Haram insurrection revealed that poverty, religious philosophy, and the historical north-south identity fractionalization have been exacerbated [41]. Whilst other research studies have focused on Nigerian politics as the main cause of the insurgency and have equally analyzed how corruption have created economic poverty and inequality which have brought about grievances in northern Nigeria [41].

2.2. The Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria So Far
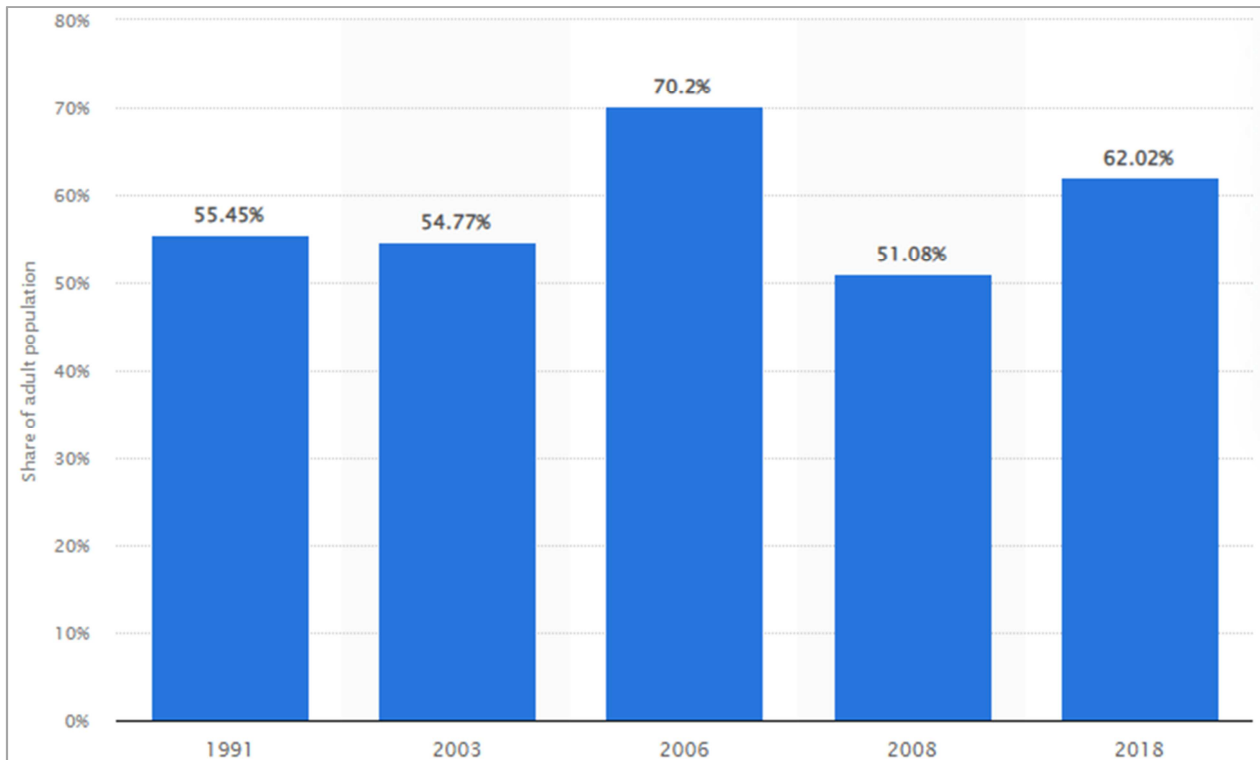
Nigeria as a developing nation has a lot to achieve when compared with other nations around the world. Many Nigerians continue to live in abject poverty and the crime rate is very high. Nigeria joined the congregation of 185 countries across the globe that were in attendance at the Millennium Summit which held in New York, United States of America in September 2000 to endorse the Millenium Declaration. The Summit was organized as an attempt to combat and reduce poverty and human deprivation especially in developing nations of the world such as Nigeria [20-22]. Thus, the establishment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The primary aim of the establishment of the Millenium declaration which led to the formation of eight Millenium Development Goals, was to ensure that by 2015. The table below shows how much development has been achieved by Nigeria in the area of education.

From the data presented in the figures below, 40 percent of children drop out of school after obtaining the Junior Secondary School Leaving Certificate [27-30]. The implication of this is that the illiteracy rate will continue to grow. This is a problem which requires urgent attention if Nigeria is attain sustainable development in the area of education by the year 2030. Many Nigerians continue to live in abject poverty and the crime rate is very high. Nigeria joined the congregation of 185 countries across the globe that attended the Millennium Summit in New York, United States of America in September 2000 to endorse the Millenium Declaration. The Summit was organized as an attempt to combat and reduce poverty and human deprivation especially in developing nations of the world such as Nigeria. Thus, the establishment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The primary aim of the establishment of the Millenium declaration which led to the formation of eight Millenium Development Goals, was to ensure that by 2015, most if not all developing countries would have achieved an appreciable level of development.

From these eight millennium development goals, 17 sustainable development goals were formed. They are the eradication of poverty, hunger, the establishment of good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, the provision of clean water and sanitary facilities, affordable and clean energy, the provision of decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, the reduction of inequalities between the different groups in the society, the

design of sustainable cities and communities, the responsible production and consumption of food, climate action, the preservation of life below and above water, the establishment of peace, justice and formidable social and political institutions, the formation of partnerships between various countries for the achievement of these goals [35].

Source: Statista, 2022

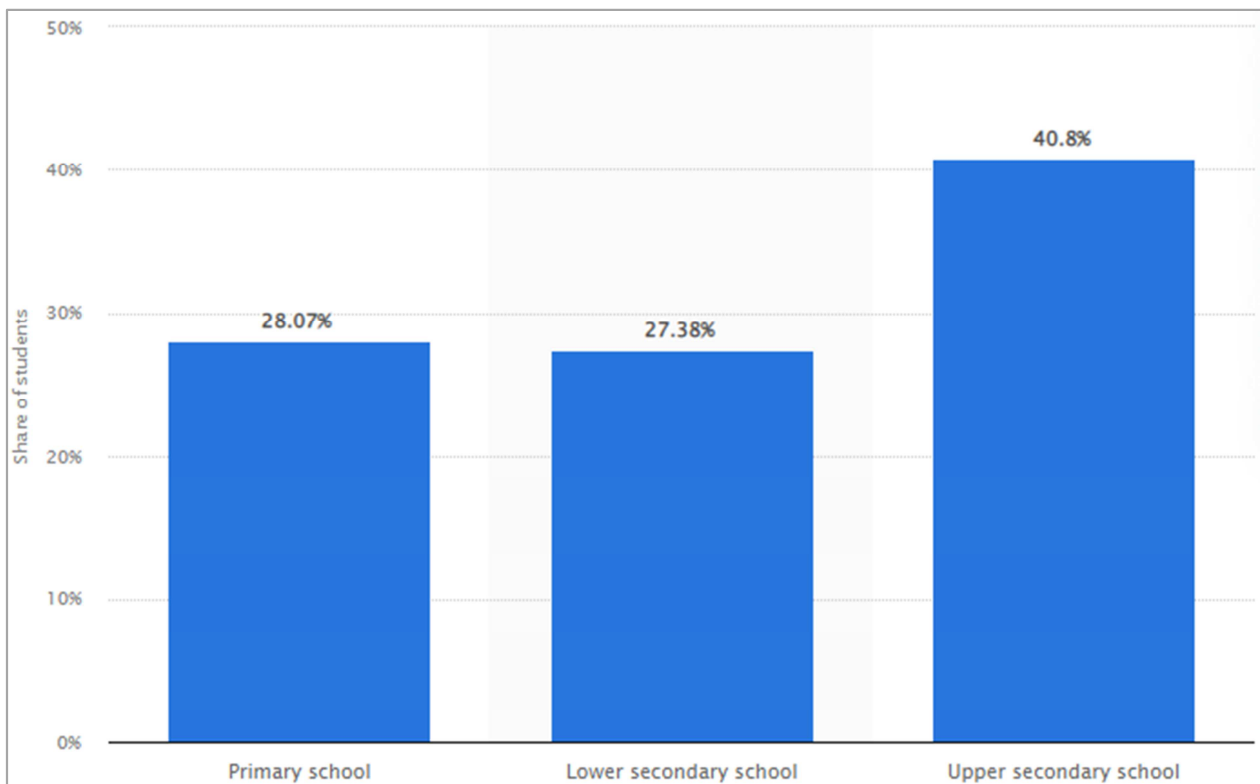***Figure 1.*** *Literacy rate in Nigeria in selected years between 1991 and 2018.*

Figure 2. *Out-of-school rate in Nigeria in 2018, by educational level.*

With reference to MDG 2, Education is crucial to the achievement of the Millenium Development Goals (MDG 2). Therefore, Nigeria as a nation has put policies and programs such as public policy to provide free public education (in place to ensure that all children finish primary school or be enrolled in a primary as soon as they are able to go to school [11]. However, the net enrolment in basic education especially in the North Eastern region of Nigeria has dropped significantly.

Boko Haram has overwhelmed the Nigerian education system attacking schools, students, and teachers in North-East Nigeria [37]. A key constituent of Boko Haram's philosophy is the antagonism towards western education which the group perceives to be secular education. The group is notorious for carrying out recurrent attacks on colleges and campuses, educators, managers, and students, inflicting destruction on an already delicate education system [17]. Boko Haram has slain an estimated number of 2,295 teachers, and another 19,000 teachers have been expatriated by the conflict. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that more than 1,400 schools have been demolished, and looted in the northeast, and more than 600,000 children no longer go to school. Boko Haram also recruits children in Nigeria [1]. The United Nations reported that about 3,909 children (1,428 boys, 1,021 girls and 1,460 unknown sex) killed and 7,333 children (2,101 boys, 1,459 girls and 3,773 unknown sex) were injured during 474 conflict-related incidents between 2013 and 2015 [8].

3. Data Collection Method

This research is qualitative in nature and secondary data relating to the Boko haram crisis was collected from textbooks, interviews, and the broader historical narratives in the region over the last five years was reviewed and content analysis method was employed for data analysis. Content analysis was chosen to answer the question presented by the research study which is, "is the achievement of the SDGs possible in the North Eastern States of Nigeria"?

Content analysis is used extensively in qualitative research. There are three different approaches used to interpret meaning from the framework of text data and, hence, in adhering to the naturalistic paradigm. Qualitative data analysis can be analyzed using the conventional approach, directed or summative technique [19, 18]. The data used for the study was collected over a five-year period from 1991-2022. It was then analyzed to see how many children have been out of the school within this time frame and if there has been any increase in/reduction in the number of children who have been enrolled in school during this period.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. The Effect of Violent Disagreement on Schooling in Northern Nigeria

Violent conflict is a socio-cultural issue impacting the achievement of sustainable development in north eastern Nigeria. In 2012, 23,000 students which is an approximate number had to drop out of school because of the violent crisis in the region. By 2014, a total of 500,000 students were out of school and in most cases the classrooms had been destroyed and some children and teachers had died as a result of the crisis which had taken a very deadly turn and continued to disrupt peaceful coexistence in the region. By January 2015, 254 schools had burnt down, and 276 schools had been destroyed [10]. A total of about 952,029 age children have fled the violence and more than 600,000 more children have lost access to learning as a result of these Boko Haram attacks.

According to a report published by the United Nations (UN) in 2015, out of the 2.5 million who have been displaced as result of the insurgency, 2.2 million have been internally displaced. The impact of this is that access to learning in a stable violent free environment cannot be achieved. 10 percent of children who are of school age were able to gain access to education at the primary and secondary levels in internally displaced camps (IDPS) where provision was made for teaching and learning to continue.

However, in other camps, no provision was made for learning to take place. The direct implication of this is that about 29,094 out of over 980,000 displaced school-age children were able to access education in the northeast [2]. Figure 1 above shows that in the year 2018 in Nigeria, less number of students were moving from primary school to secondary school and so the rate of out-of-school children in upper (senior secondary schools) across the country was high. This implies that with time there is going to be a wide gap between skilled workers in the country and the unskilled workers. Many Nigerians would be able to take up menial jobs to earn a living; while for positions that require skilled personnel, the country may have to recruit from outside its shores. Furthermore, for Nigeria as a nation to be able to meet the needs of its present generation without endangering the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, the violent conflict in the north eastern states of the country must be resolved.

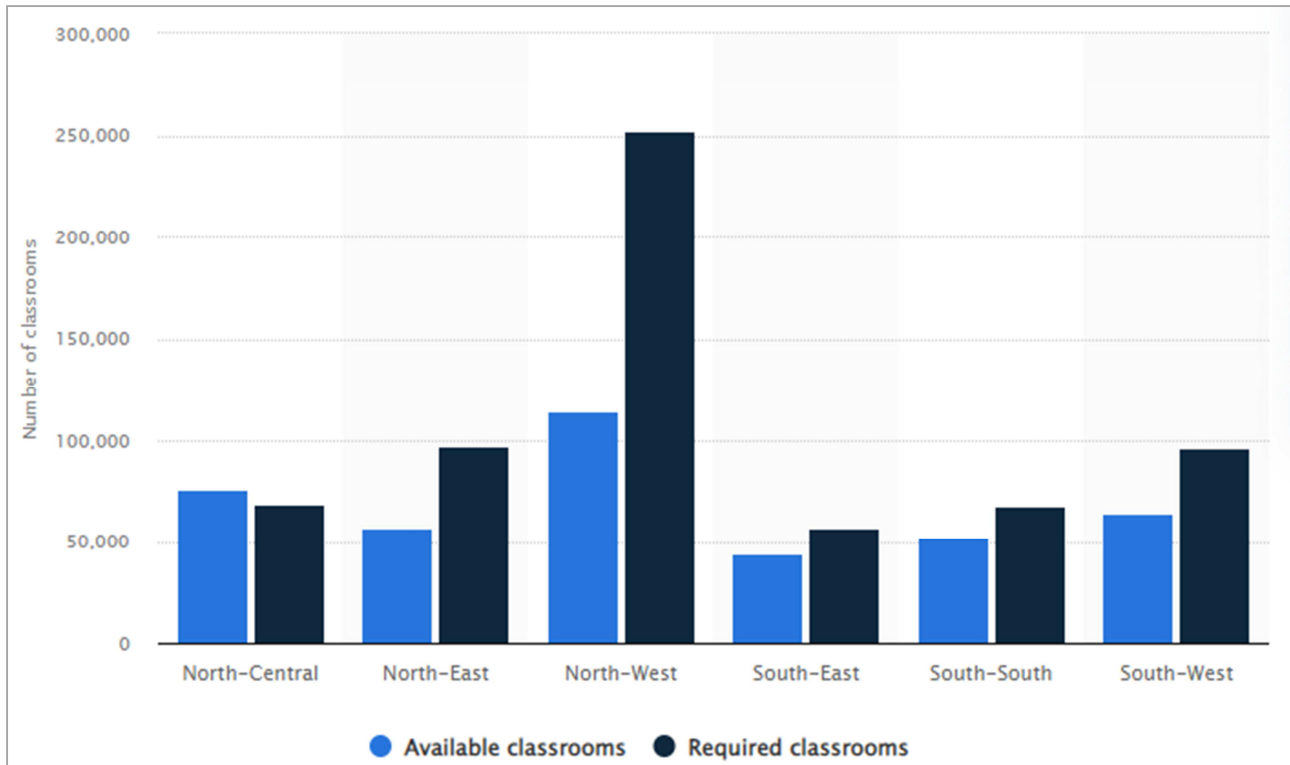## 4.2. The Role of Education and the Achievement of Sustainable Development in North East Nigeria

In 2021, around 10.2 million children in Nigeria were not enrolled in school and 2.8 million of these children live in northern Nigeria [23]. Education as a basic human right is preserved in numerous international treaties ratified by Nigeria [7]. However, the educational system in north-eastern Nigeria existed in a fragile state before the beginning of the insurgency in that part of Nigeria [24], with large numbers of children having never attending school and many of those who were in junior secondary school dropping out before completion of secondary school [23].

Another major factor responsible for low enrollment is the high rate of poverty. Many parents cannot afford to send their children to school because of the cost of education, which includes school fees, dresses, and the purchase of

schoolbooks. Many parents are farmers nd with the crisis, it is difficult to earn a living and send their children to school. In addition, another group of parentages were resilient to sending their children to formal institutions of learning long before the rise of insurgency.

The conflict has also equally had a negative effect on teaching and learning education, particularly for the female gender [32]. Poverty has also been an impediment to learning in north-eastern Nigeria, and the conflict has further worsened access to education in the northeast. Poverty continues to be the greatest obstacle to education in the region for children of school age.

Source: (Statista, 2022)

Figure 3. Number of classrooms available and required in public elementary schools in Nigeria as of 2018, by zone.

5. Recommendations

Primary education is central to the achievement of success at the secondary and university levels of formal education. Therefore, there is the fundamental need for all stakeholders in this case, the local, state and federal government of Nigeria to do everything to ensure its sustainability. In addition, the Nigerian government needs to seek for foreign aid in the development of counter terrorism strategies and approaches that will ensure the restoration of peace and tranquility in the region as these violent attacks continue to undermine not just the pursuit of education in the region but the growth, development and advancement of the region. By actively seeking new ways to curb violent conflict in the region, it will prevent it from spreading to other states of the country. Furthermore, [23] maintains that the major challenge faced by Nigeria in the achievement of sustainable education is the poor funding of education by the Nigerian government, prolonged neglect of learning environments and facilities. On the contrary, even if the government were to increase educational funding, build more schools and equip them with state-of-the-art learning facilities, as long as

violent crisis persists in the north east, all this will be for nothing. As they will be destroyed by Boko Haram insurgents, therefore the first step in the achievement of the fourth sustainable development goal which is ensuring the attainment of inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, is ending violent conflict.

6. Conclusion

This article has examined the impact of Socio-Cultural Challenges to the Achievement of SDGs in the North Eastern States of Nigeria. This research has shown that the elimination of negative sociocultural challenges and negative influences is key to facilitating peaceful coexistence and boosting teaching and learning in the north eastern states of Nigeria. The results of the findings indicates that Nigeria as a nation has a lot to do in developing strategies to curb violent conflict and prevent it from destroying the whole nation altogether. In addition, to tackle socio-cultural challenges that represent an obstacle to the achievement of SDGs in the north eastern states of Nigeria, requires collaborative action. Where the federal government and nongovernmental

organizations will work together to correct the negative perception regarding the acquisition of western education as this is a widely held belief. More needs to be done to end the crisis in the region as those states have become a shadow of their former selves.

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