

**T.C.  
ISTANBUL GEDİK UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**



**UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR  
NIGERIAN YOUTH TO CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) IN NIGERIA**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

**Natenin Tielman COULIBALY**

**Department of Political Science and International Relations  
International Relations Master's Program with Thesis in English**

**FEBRUARY 2025  
ISTANBUL**

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**Thesis Advisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Selim SEZER**

**Istanbul 2025**



**T.C.**  
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Bu çalışma 13/02/2025 tarihinde aşağıdaki jüri tarafından Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Anabilim Dalı, Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler İngilizce (Tezli Yüksek Lisans) Programı Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

**TEZ JÜRİSİ**

**Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Selim SEZER**

Danışman

İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim Üniversitesi

**Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Elif TÜRK**

Üye (İmza)

İstanbul Gedik Üniversitesi

**Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Munise Nur AKTAN**

Üye (İmza)

İstanbul Esenyurt Üniversitesi

## **DECLARATION**

I, Natenin Tielman Coulibaly, hereby certify that this thesis is the work from me; I do this work in the department of International Relations for the Award of Master of Science in International Relations with thesis. This work has not been submitted to any University for a similar or other degree award and will not be presented to any university in the future. (13/02/2025).

Natenin Tielman COULIBALY



## **DEDICATION**

To Allah is the Glory great thing He has done. I thank him for His love and for been my sustainer. This thesis is devoted to my father, Dramane Coulibaly as he was my strength in everything I do.



## **PREFACE**

I owe a unique and sincere debt of appreciation to Allah, the Supreme Being who is above all of us, for answering my prayers and giving me the willpower to do all this arduous labor despite all of the difficulties I encountered. Thank you. Through the direction and aid of numerous people, who in various ways contributed and extended their valued assistance in the planning and completion of this study. Their assistance towards this study makes this thesis feasible. First and foremost, I would like to extend sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor: Assist Professor Selim SEZER I am especially appreciative of his persistent efforts in providing me with insightful and helpful counsel toward this study. His openness, sage advice, and persistently positive comments made this effort possible. I greatly appreciate, my colleagues for their words of encouragement and support. For bringing me into the world and shaping who I am now, I would want to thank my parents Dramane and Sara Coulibaly, as well as my sibling, I'm grateful for your support.

February 2025

Natenin Tielman COULIBALY

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# **UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR NIGERIAN YOUTH TO CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) IN NIGERIA**

## **ABSTRACT**

Youth represent a vital demographic for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria, given their energy, innovation, and potential to drive transformative change. This study explores the barriers and opportunities Nigerian youth encounter in contributing to the SDGs, drawing insights from qualitative responses and aligning findings with existing research. The study reveals that systemic issues, including an outdated education system, socio-economic challenges, limited access to resources, and cultural constraints, hinder youth engagement. Urban and rural youth perspectives differ, with urban youth focusing on technological and policy advocacy solutions, while rural youth prioritize agriculture and community development. Despite these challenges, numerous opportunities exist for youth participation, including innovations in agriculture, technology, renewable energy, and policy development. The study underscores the importance of tailored interventions to address regional disparities and provide inclusive platforms for youth involvement. To harness the potential of Nigerian youth, the study recommends comprehensive educational reforms to modernize curricula, promote practical skills, and integrate sustainability subjects. Additionally, it advocates for financial support, equitable digital access, and inclusive governance structures that prioritize youth engagement. By investing in these areas and fostering collaboration across sectors, Nigeria can empower its youth to become active agents of change, advancing the SDGs and ensuring a sustainable future. This research highlights the urgency of addressing systemic barriers while leveraging opportunities to enable Nigerian youth to contribute meaningfully to global sustainability efforts.

**Keywords:** *Sustainable development, Nigeria, Innovative transformation*

## NİJERYA'DAKİ GENÇLERİN SÜRDÜRÜLEBİLİR KALKINMA HEDEFLERİNE (SDGS) KATKIDA BULUNMALARININ ÖNÜNDEKİ ENGELLERİ VE FIRSATLARI ANLAMAK

### ÖZET

Gençler, sahip oldukları enerji, yenilikçilik ve dönüştürücü değişim yaratma potansiyelleri göz önüne alındığında, Nijerya'da Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Hedeflerine (SKH'ler) ulaşılması için hayati bir demografiyi temsil etmektedir. Bu çalışma, Nijeryalı gençlerin SKH'lere katkıda bulunurken karşılaştıkları engelleri ve fırsatları araştırmakta, nitel yanıtlardan içgörüler elde etmekte ve bulguları mevcut araştırmalarla uyumlu hale getirmektedir. Çalışma, modası geçmiş bir eğitim sistemi, sosyo-ekonomik zorluklar, kaynaklara sınırlı erişim ve kültürel kısıtlamalar gibi sistemik sorunların gençlerin katılımını engellediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Kentsel ve kırsal kesimdeki gençlerin bakış açıları farklılık göstermekte; kentsel kesimdeki gençler teknoloji ve politika savunuculuğu çözümlerine odaklanırken, kırsal kesimdeki gençler tarım ve toplumsal kalkınmaya öncelik vermektedir. Bu zorluklara rağmen, tarım, teknoloji, yenilenebilir enerji ve politika geliştirme alanlarındaki yenilikler de dahil olmak üzere gençlerin katılımı için çok sayıda fırsat mevcuttur. Çalışma, bölgesel farklılıkları gidermek ve gençlerin katılımı için kapsayıcı platformlar sağlamak için özel müdahalelerin önemini vurgulamaktadır. Çalışma, Nijeryalı gençlerin potansiyelinden yararlanmak için müfredatı modernize edecek, pratik becerileri teşvik edecek ve sürdürülebilirlik konularını entegre edecek kapsamlı eğitim reformları önermektedir. Ayrıca, gençlerin katılımına öncelik veren mali destek, eşitlikçi dijital erişim ve kapsayıcı yönetim yapılarını savunmaktadır. Nijerya, bu alanlara yatırım yaparak ve sektörler arası işbirliğini teşvik ederek gençlerini aktif değişim ajanları haline getirebilir, SKH'leri ilerletebilir ve sürdürülebilir bir gelecek sağlayabilir. Bu araştırma, Nijeryalı gençlerin küresel sürdürülebilirlik çabalarına anlamlı bir şekilde katkıda bulunmalarını sağlamak için fırsatlardan yararlanırken sistemik engelleri ele almanın aciliyetini vurgulamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Sürdürülebilir kalkınma, Nijerya, Yenilikçi dönüşüm*

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of Study

Sustainability as a concept addresses the growing concerns about how technology and increasing human activities have negatively impacted the natural environment over the past two centuries. After the Second World War, development became a key focus for countries worldwide (Khataybeha, Subbarinia, and Shurmana, 2010). Nations quickly adopted modern scientific and technological advancements without fully considering their long-term effects on the planet. Defra (2011) highlighted how issues such as pollution, biodiversity loss, human rights abuses, inefficient energy use, global warming, and the widening gap between the rich and poor have resulted from humanity's pursuit of material comforts. These environmental challenges pushed global leaders to find solutions aimed at preserving natural resources, promoting equitable opportunities, and alleviating poverty. Significant summits, from Stockholm in 1972 to Rio de Janeiro in 2012, emphasized the need for everyone to achieve a decent standard of living without jeopardizing future generations' ability to do the same (Drexhage and Murphy, 2010).

Sustainability aims to solve issues related to the negative influence of technology and human actions on the natural environment over the past two generations. Following World War II, countries globally prioritised development (Khataybeha, Subbarinia, and Shurmana, 2010). Nations have swiftly absorbed modern scientific and technical breakthroughs without contemplating their long-term impact on the globe. According to Defra (2011), the pursuit of material luxuries has led to pollution, biodiversity loss, human rights violations, wasteful energy use, global warming, and a growing wealth disparity. Global leaders are addressing environmental concerns to preserve natural resources, promote equity, and alleviate poverty. Summits from Stockholm in 1972 to Rio de Janeiro in 2012 emphasized the importance of achieving a decent quality of life without compromising future generations' ability to do so (Drexhage and Murphy, 2010). The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro highlighted the

concept of sustainable development. The summit was the first major global attempt to formulate strategies and plans of action for sustainable development. Over 100 heads of state and delegates from 178 nations attended, along with civil society organizations. The 1987 Brundtland Commission report, *Our Common Future*, established sustainable development as a viable solution to environmental degradation (Dresner, 2008).

The Brundtland Report examined environmental challenges caused by human activities in previous decades, drawing on works such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), Garret Hardin's *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968), *Blueprint for Survival* (1972), and the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* report (1972). Although the term "sustainable development" was not used during the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, the international community recognized that growth and environmental conservation may strengthen each other (Dresner, 2008). The term "sustainable development" was popularized by *Our Common Future*, which defines it as "development that complies with present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own" (Brundtland and Khalid, 1987).

Sustainable development did not become a global focus until the Rio Summit in 1992. In 2002, the Johannesburg Summit convened 191 national governments, UN agencies, and stakeholders to evaluate progress since Rio 1992. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and partnership projects focused on sustainable consumption, energy, and water sanitation (Dresner, 2008).

In June 2012, a conference in Rio de Janeiro produced a political statement defining specific strategies for implementing sustainable development (Huckle and Wals, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed in response to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the post-2015 agenda (Dresner, 2008). Nigeria, located in West Africa, spans 923,768 km<sup>2</sup> and shares borders with Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Nigeria has 36 states, a federal capital territory in Abuja, and two main rivers, the Niger and Benue, as well as minor waterways (Adetoro, 2014). Nigeria is the most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa and ranks seventh globally, with population estimates ranging between 182.5 million and 187 million (PRB, 2016; UN, 2016; World Bank, 2016). Disparities in these figures stem from irregular census schedules and record-keeping challenges, as noted by Adetoro (2014).

Nigeria is the most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa and ranks seventh globally, with population estimates ranging between 182.5 million and 187 million (PRB, 2016; UN, 2016; World Bank, 2016). Disparities in these figures stem from irregular census schedules and record-keeping challenges, as noted by Adetoro (2014). The United Nations projects Nigeria's population to reach 337 million by 2050, driven by a growth rate of 2.63% (UN, 2016).

However, achieving sustainable design in Nigeria is challenging for architects, as buildings are often viewed purely from an economic perspective rather than as social, ecological, and cultural responses to people's needs (Costanza *et al.*, 2016). Current architectural practices often contribute to environmental degradation, emphasizing the need for long-term thinking about resource usage (Tomas *et al.*, 2015).

Additionally, environmental sanitation in Nigeria faces significant issues, including poor waste management, inadequate water supply, improper land use, urban sprawl, and declining quality of life (Jubril and Shittu, 2015). Unplanned urban expansion has led to slums, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure. Urbanization in Nigeria grew from 15% in 1950 to 43.3% in 2000 and was projected to reach 60% by 2015 (Hoorweg *et al.*, 2011). Funding the SDGs remains another challenge, with Nigeria already grappling with fiscal constraints from declining oil revenues and limited economic diversification (Alibaba and Ozdeniz, 2004).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges and fostering a sustainable future for all. In the context of Nigeria, a country with a significant youth population, understanding the barriers and opportunities for Nigerian youth to contribute to the achievement of these goals is paramount.

Firstly, one of the primary barriers facing Nigerian youth is the lack of access to quality education and skills development. Despite efforts to improve educational infrastructure and enrollment rates, many young Nigerians still lack access to quality education due to factors such as poverty, inadequate facilities, and a shortage of

qualified teachers. This limits their ability to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to actively contribute to sustainable development initiatives.

Additionally, youth unemployment remains a significant challenge in Nigeria, with a large portion of the youth population either unemployed or underemployed. The lack of economic opportunities not only hinders the socio-economic progress of young Nigerians but also poses a barrier to their engagement in sustainable development efforts. Limited access to job opportunities, particularly in sectors aligned with the SDGs such as renewable energy, environmental conservation, and sustainable agriculture, further exacerbates this issue.

Furthermore, socio-cultural factors, including gender inequality and societal norms, often impede the meaningful participation of Nigerian youth, particularly young women, in sustainable development initiatives. Deeply ingrained cultural beliefs may restrict women's access to education, economic resources, and decision-making roles, limiting their ability to contribute effectively to SDG-related activities.

Despite these barriers, Nigerian youth possess significant untapped potential and represent a demographic dividend that could drive sustainable development in the country. With the right support and opportunities, they can play a crucial role in achieving the SDGs. Investing in education and vocational training programs that equip young people with relevant skills for the future economy is essential. Additionally, creating an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and innovation, through access to finance, mentorship, and supportive policies, can empower youth to create sustainable businesses and solutions to local challenges.

Moreover, addressing systemic issues such as corruption, political instability, and inadequate infrastructure is crucial for creating an environment conducive to youth participation in sustainable development efforts. Strengthening governance structures, promoting transparency, and enhancing accountability can foster trust and confidence among young people, encouraging their active involvement in shaping the country's development agenda.

Collaboration between government, civil society, private sector, and international partners is vital for addressing these challenges and leveraging the potential of Nigerian youth for sustainable development. By prioritizing investments in youth empowerment, education, and economic opportunities, Nigeria can harness

the demographic dividend of its young population and accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to understand the barriers and opportunities for Nigerian youth to contribute to sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Nigeria.

#### **1.3.1 Objectives of the study**

The objective of the study on barriers and opportunities for Nigerian youth to contribute to sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Nigeria to explore key socio-economic barriers, cultural norms and societal expectations influence the engagement of Nigerian youth in SDG-related activities, and what strategies can be employed to overcome cultural barriers and promote youth involvement in sustainable development efforts, also to find out the opportunities exist within the Nigerian educational system to equip youth through knowledge, skills, and resources to meaningfully contribute to the achievement of SDGs, and how can these opportunities be maximized to address the current gaps and finally possible ways technological advancements, entrepreneurship, and innovation serve can serve as a catalysts for empowering Nigerian youth to play an active role in advancing sustainable development goals, and what policy frameworks are needed to support and sustain these opportunities.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The research questions of the work are formulated as follows:

1. What are the perceived barriers preventing Nigerian youth from contributing to sustainable development?
2. What are the perceived knowledge and understanding about to sustainable development among Nigerian youths?
3. What are the opportunities existing among Nigerian youth to engage in sustainable development activities?
4. How can existing educational systems and training programs be improved to equip Nigerian youth with the necessary skills for effective participation in sustainable development efforts?

5. What roles do technology and digital platforms play in enhancing the capacity of Nigerian youth to contribute to the achievement of SDGs?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

We can define the significance of the study under six main titles:

**Youth Empowerment and Inclusion:** Nigeria has one of the largest populations of young people globally, with a significant portion facing challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and limited access to education. By understanding the barriers they face in contributing to SDGs, interventions can be tailored to empower and include youth in sustainable development efforts, fostering their active participation in shaping the country's future.

**Achieving Sustainable Development Goals:** Nigeria, like many other countries, has committed to achieving the SDGs by 2030. However, progress towards these goals requires the active engagement of all segments of society, including youth. By identifying and addressing the barriers preventing youth participation, this study can inform policies and programs aimed at accelerating progress towards achieving the SDGs in Nigeria.

**Social Equity and Inclusion:** Sustainable development aims to address issues of poverty, inequality, and social injustice. Understanding the barriers faced by Nigerian youth in contributing to SDGs can shed light on systemic inequalities and injustices that hinder their participation. By addressing these barriers, interventions can promote social equity and inclusion, ensuring that all segments of society have equal opportunities to contribute to sustainable development.

**Youth Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Nigerian youth are known for their entrepreneurial spirit and innovative mindset. By understanding the opportunities available to them in contributing to SDGs, this study can highlight the potential of youth-led entrepreneurship and innovation in addressing sustainable development challenges. By supporting and harnessing this potential, Nigeria can foster economic growth, job creation, and technological advancement while advancing the SDGs.

**Policy Formulation and Implementation:** Insights from this study can inform the development of evidence-based policies and strategies aimed at overcoming barriers and leveraging opportunities for youth participation in sustainable

development. By aligning policies with the needs and aspirations of Nigerian youth, policymakers can create an enabling environment that empowers them to contribute meaningfully to achieving the SDGs.

**Global Leadership and Collaboration:** As a signatory to the SDGs, Nigeria has committed to a global agenda for sustainable development. By understanding the barriers and opportunities for youth engagement in SDGs, Nigeria can demonstrate leadership on the global stage by implementing innovative approaches and best practices. Moreover, collaboration with international partners and stakeholders can facilitate knowledge sharing and capacity building, enhancing Nigeria's ability to achieve the SDGs.

In conclusion, the significance of understanding the barriers and opportunities for Nigerian youth to contribute to SDGs in Nigeria lies in its potential to empower youth, accelerate progress towards sustainable development, promote social equity and inclusion, foster entrepreneurship and innovation, inform evidence-based policies, and position Nigeria as a global leader in sustainable development efforts.

Nigeria has a young population with immense potential to contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, significant barriers hinder Nigerian youth from fully participating in the SDG agenda. These barriers include high unemployment rates, limited access to quality education, inadequate skill development, poverty, and a lack of political and economic opportunities. Gender inequality, insecurity, and poor governance also affect their ability to engage effectively. Additionally, limited awareness of the SDGs and insufficient support for youth-led initiatives further restrict their contributions. While the barriers to youth participation in the SDGs are formidable, they also present opportunities. Nigerian youth have demonstrated resilience, creativity, and leadership in areas such as entrepreneurship, technology, social advocacy, and environmental sustainability. Addressing the structural issues that limit youth participation, such as improving access to education, skills training, and youth-friendly policies, can empower them to drive SDG progress. Collaboration between government, private sector, civil society, and youth organizations is essential to harness their potential. Moving forward, it is crucial to focus on creating enabling environments for youth to thrive. By investing in education, entrepreneurship, and technology, and addressing systemic inequalities, Nigeria can unlock the full potential of its youth as key actors in achieving the SDGs.

## **1.6 Methodology**

### **1.6.1 Research design**

The researcher provides information about the study's geographical setting, the methodology used to construct the study, the sampling strategy used to determine the data population size, the subjects, the tools and instruments used to analyze and interpret the data, ethical considerations, and finally the study's limitations and a discussion of the field transcription in the study.

### **1.6.2 Sampling method**

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the barriers and opportunities for Nigerian youth in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### **1.6.3 Demographic characteristics**

The demographic characteristics of the respondents included:

**Age Distribution:** Categorized into three age groups: 18–24 years, 25–30 years, and 31–35 years.

**Gender:** A balanced representation of male and female respondents.

**Educational Level:** Ranging from secondary education to postgraduate qualifications.

**Employment Status:** Categorized into employed, unemployed, self-employed, and students.

**Geopolitical Zone:** Distribution across the six geopolitical zones to ensure regional diversity.

**Socioeconomic Background:** Consideration of income levels and access to opportunities.

### **1.6.4 Sampling technique**

A multistage sampling technique was used to ensure a diverse and representative sample:

1. **Stratified Sampling:** The six geopolitical zones of Nigeria (North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South, and South West) were considered as strata to ensure regional representation.

## **1.7 Research Approach**

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews are conducted with key stakeholders including youth leaders, policymakers, representatives from youth organizations, academics, and representatives from NGOs working on sustainable development issues. These interviews aimed to explore perspectives on the barriers and opportunities for Nigerian youth in contributing to SDGs, as well as potential strategies for addressing challenges and maximizing opportunities.

### **1.7.1 Focus group discussions**

Focus group discussions are organized with diverse groups of Nigerian youth representing different regions, socio-economic backgrounds, and areas of interest (e.g., education, entrepreneurship, technology). These discussions aimed to provide insights into shared experiences, perceptions, and aspirations related to SDGs, as well as identify common barriers and opportunities across different youth demographics.

#### **Objective**

To gather in-depth insights from Nigerian youth about their experiences, perceptions, and aspirations related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These discussions aim to identify common barriers and opportunities that exist across different youth demographics.

#### **Participant Selection**

Participants were selected to ensure a diverse representation of Nigerian youth, considering the following criteria:

##### **Regions:**

Youth from different geopolitical zones of Nigeria (North West, North East, North Central, South West, South East, South South) and religious ethnicity (Muslim and Christians)

**Socio-economic Backgrounds:** Participants from various socio-economic strata, including low, middle, and high-income groups.

**Areas of Interest:**

**Education:** Students, educators, and policy advocates.

**Entrepreneurship:** Young business owners, startup founders, and business mentors.

**Technology:** Tech enthusiasts, developers, and digital innovators.

**Preparation**

Develop a comprehensive discussion guide tailored to explore specific themes related to SDGs. Ensure the guide includes open-ended questions to facilitate rich, qualitative data.

Secure venues and necessary logistical support for the discussions in different regions. Recruit skilled moderators with experience in handling diverse groups and sensitive topics.

**Conducting discussions**

**Introduction:** Brief participants about the purpose of the focus group, confidentiality, and the importance of their honest input.

**Ice-breaker Activities:** Facilitate activities to create a comfortable environment and encourage active participation.

**Discussion Themes:**

**Awareness and Understanding of SDGs:** Assess participants' knowledge of the SDGs and their relevance to Nigerian society.

**Personal Experiences and Perceptions:** Explore how youth perceive the impact of SDGs on their lives and communities.

**Aspirations and Goals:** Discuss personal and collective aspirations related to the achievement of SDGs.

**Barriers:** Identify common challenges and obstacles faced by youth in contributing to and benefiting from SDG-related initiatives.

**Opportunities:** Highlight opportunities and potential solutions that can empower youth to actively participate in achieving the SDGs.

**Table 1.1: List of Participants of the Study**

<b>List of Respondent Interviews</b>		
<b>Categories</b>	<b>Basis for Participation</b>	<b>Number of respondents interviewed</b>
Youths (Rural and Urban)	Reposition in relation to sustainable development and their key components	10
	Reposition in relation to Barriers to Youth Contribution Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria	4
	Reposition in relation to Socio-economic barriers to Youth Contribution Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria	5
	Reposition in relation to Nigeria's educational system is helping in youth contribution to sustainable development goals in Nigeria?	5
	Reposition in relation to opportunities do you think exist for Nigerian youth to engage in sustainable development activities?	10
	Reposition in relation to role do technology and digital platforms play in enhancing the capacity of Nigerian youth to contribute to the achievement of SDGs?	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>39</b>

The data gathering was based on qualitative research. Here, the interviewee talked about their feelings regarding the pertinent topic. The foundation of the interviews also includes key informant interviews. One-on-one conversations were a part of the interviews. The process took place in Istanbul. I was able to have some my interactions majorly with Nigerians online and few one on one conversations in physical here. In chapter three of this thesis, the data presentation and analysis include their responses.

### **1.7.2 The data collection methods**

In this study, primary and secondary data are integrated. A survey questionnaire was utilized together with general responses from female youths. The questionnaire has both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Following the survey, those who were available and willing to stay were invited to participate in

additional discussions to better understand the survey respondents' perspectives on the phenomena. In-depth interviews were held with selected young female and the male participants. To facilitate debate among the respondents, a key informant participant's guide with open-ended questions was created. We also carefully observed the traits and conduct of the responders. Direct observation not only supports other data collection techniques by illustrating how one data set informs another, but it also fosters closer relationships with members of the community.

### **1.7.3 Data analysis tools**

The most important aspect of any research is data analysis. Data analysis is the summarization of gathered data. It entails analyzing and thinking rationally through data to discover patterns, correlations, or trends. In-depth interviews, casual chats, and open-ended questions produced information that was thoroughly assessed and presented in writing to provide precise examples and data to illustrate the topic.

### **1.8 Ethical Considerations**

Before the participants began the study, the researcher made sure they were aware of its goals and that their participation was voluntary. If they decided to participate, they signed a form given to them; for participants under the age of 18, parental or guardian consent was required. The participants were interviewed alone, absent their parents or guardians, to maintain anonymity. No names were recorded, and the study only required the participant's age.

### **1.9 Chapterization**

The table below illustrates the outline of the thesis, the chapter one is looking at the introduction, significance of the study, objectives, and research questions, statement of the problems, methodology, definition of term and chaptalization.

**Table 1.2: Chapterization**

<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>CHAPTER</b>	<b>TOPICS</b>
1	Chapter One	Introduction
2	Chapter Two	Literature Review
3	Chapter Three	Witnesses And Perceptions
4	Chapter Four	Conclusion

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review examines how various elements like Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), youth involvement, and barriers interact in the Nigerian context. The SDGs are a global blueprint consisting of 17 goals aimed at addressing pressing global challenges, including poverty, inequality, and climate change, with a focus on achieving a better and more sustainable future by 2030. In Nigeria, the SDGs are crucial for addressing key developmental challenges like poverty, education, and health. Nigeria's government has adopted several initiatives to align its policies with the SDGs, focusing on improving social and economic conditions.

Youth play a critical role in driving SDGs as they represent a significant portion of the population and are vital for innovative solutions and long-term development. Nigerian youths are pivotal for achieving the SDGs due to their energy, innovation, and ability to drive change. Engaging them in SDG initiatives can accelerate progress toward these goals. Barriers include lack of access to education, economic opportunities, and political inclusion, as well as social issues like unemployment and poor governance, which hinder youth involvement in achieving SDGs.

Government strategies include youth empowerment programs, skill development initiatives, and entrepreneurship support aimed at enhancing youth engagement in sustainable development. Religious and ethnic diversity in Nigeria can either promote or hinder youth engagement in sustainable development. In some cases, cultural and religious differences create barriers to unity and collective action, while in others, they offer unique opportunities for inclusive development.

### **2.1 Conceptual Framework**

#### **2.1.1 Sustainable development goals**

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires adapting to the data revolution for sustainable development. This involves integrating both

traditional and modern data sources to generate high-quality information that is timely, detailed, and relevant for various purposes and users. The value of such information lies in its completeness, accuracy, consistency, timeliness, uniqueness, and validity, which are essential for sound decision-making. These decisions, in turn, play a significant role in advancing national priorities to meet the goals and targets of the sustainable development agenda.

In 2015, all United Nations Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, providing a shared framework to promote harmony and prosperity for both people and the planet, now and into the future. At the core of this agenda are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which call for a collective effort from all nations—developed and developing alike to address critical global challenges. The framework emphasizes the need to eradicate poverty and tackle issues such as health, education, inequality, and economic growth, while simultaneously addressing climate change and protecting natural resources like oceans and forests.

This agenda is fundamentally about fostering the well-being of people, safeguarding the planet, and promoting prosperity. It also seeks to enhance global harmony and cooperation. Achieving these goals requires contributions from all countries and stakeholders through collaborative partnerships. The global community has committed to ending poverty and inequality, safeguarding the environment, and taking decisive actions to ensure a sustainable future. The ambitious 17 SDGs and 169 targets highlight the scale and scope of this transformative agenda.

At the policy level, the SDGs call for strategies that protect ecosystems, promote equality, and focus on long-term sustainable development. From an economic perspective, the shift has been toward service provision, which has now surpassed industrial production as a key driver of economic growth, often through innovative business models.

Optimizing the balance between supply and demand has contributed to the rapid growth of the "sharing economy," which creates value for individuals while simultaneously lowering production and operational costs (Fioramonti *et al.*, 2019). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their associated targets aim to drive impactful actions over the next 15 years in areas critical to both humanity and the planet. These goals address the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of

development, striving to achieve a sustainable future by 2030 that ensures equitable prosperity while respecting the Earth's ecological limits.

Although the SDGs are universal and apply to all nations both developing and developed it is up to each country to define its own national targets. These targets should reflect the country's priorities and the desired scale and pace of transformation, aligning with their ambitions and capabilities (Metternicht *et al.*, 2020).

According to Cameroon (1993), sustainable development is defined as the “progressive economic and social development of human society through maintaining the security of livelihood for all peoples and by enabling them to meet their present needs, together with a quality of life in accordance with their dignity and well-being, without compromising the ability of future generations to do likewise”. The definition explicitly recognizes that future generations also have interests and even rights deserving protection in the new model of development.

### **2.1.2 Sustainable development goals in Nigeria**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015 by all United Nations member states, represent a universal call to action aimed at addressing pressing global challenges. These 17 interconnected goals are designed to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, improve health and education, foster economic growth, and tackle climate change while preserving the planet's ecosystems (United Nations, 2015). For Nigeria, a nation grappling with significant socio- economic and environmental challenges, the SDGs provide a crucial framework to guide development efforts and ensure a sustainable future for its growing population.

Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa, faces a complex set of challenges that directly relate to the SDGs. Poverty remains a critical issue, with approximately 40% of the population living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2023). Similarly, the country struggles with widespread unemployment, inadequate healthcare, and a fragile education system, all of which highlight the urgent need to achieve goals related to economic growth, quality education, and good health and well-being (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). Moreover, Nigeria's high population growth rate places immense pressure on its natural resources and

infrastructure, further emphasizing the importance of sustainable development strategies.

Environmental sustainability is another key area of concern for Nigeria. The country faces severe environmental degradation due to deforestation, desertification, and pollution, which threatens biodiversity and exacerbates the effects of climate change (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2023). Achieving the SDGs related to clean energy, climate action, and responsible consumption is therefore essential to safeguard the environment for future generations.

In recent years, Nigeria has made strides toward implementing the SDGs by aligning its national policies with the global agenda. Programs such as the Economic Sustainability Plan (ESP) and the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) are examples of initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and creating jobs while fostering economic resilience (Presidency of Nigeria, 2022). However, achieving the SDGs by 2030 remains a daunting task due to challenges such as inadequate funding, poor governance, and limited access to reliable data for monitoring progress (UNDP Nigeria, 2023).

Despite these challenges, there is growing recognition of the need for collaboration among government agencies, private sector actors, civil society organizations, and international partners to accelerate progress. Investments in renewable energy, digital technology, and youth empowerment are emerging as critical components of Nigeria's sustainable development strategy (International Renewable Energy Agency [IRENA], 2023). Moreover, increased public awareness and grassroots advocacy are playing vital roles in mobilizing support for the SDGs at the community level. As Nigeria continues its journey toward achieving the SDGs, the country's efforts must prioritize inclusive development that leaves no one behind. By addressing systemic inequalities, strengthening institutions, and fostering partnerships, Nigeria has the potential to create a more equitable and sustainable future for its citizens.

According to Rogers *et al.* (2008), the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report, established by the UN General Assembly in 1983, was the primary source of discussion on Sustainable Development. The 1987 Brundtland Report was the first to define "Sustainable Development" as meeting current needs without compromising future generations' ability to fulfil their own.

Sustainable development is based on three fundamental pillars: economic, social, and environmental. Several countries have implemented these three pillars and young empowerment to promote growth and development (Obadan, 2008; Odeh and Okoye, 2014). According to Sachs (2015) and This Day Newspaper (2016), economic growth and poverty reduction are hindered by three major national challenges: rising income inequality, rapid population growth, and environmental crises. In Nigeria, obstacles such as youth unemployment, poverty, high mortality rates, security concerns, and population growth hinder sustainable development efforts. According to Obi and Nweke (2010), sustainable development refers to measures that improve people's socio-economic conditions. To further understand the issue of population growth, it's important to consider poor leadership and unequal access to scarce resources in Nigeria. Scholars have recognised population growth as a significant contributor to poverty among Nigerian adolescents. To enhance the social and economic position of Nigerian youths, initiatives addressing inequity have been implemented, including youth empowerment programs. Nigeria's Federal Government has implemented poverty reduction and economic empowerment policies to promote sustainable growth and development (Ayedun, Durodola, and Akinjare, 2011). According to the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2014), strong governance is essential for achieving sustainable development in all three dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. Empowering youth is a key strategy for sustainable development at the national, state, and local levels. Empowerment policies aim to reduce poverty and improve the lives of individuals, particularly underprivileged youth. Investing early in underprivileged youths is more rewarding, both economically and socially. According to Burchard, LeGrand, and Piachaud (2002), investing in human capital leads to greater national growth and development. Empowering youth is a crucial technique for addressing difficulties in Nigeria's fast changing social, economic, technical, and demographic surroundings. Empowering young people as promoters has a long-term impact on communities and national development (Fajana, 2000; Garduño, Sawyer and Sawyer, 2013). Neglecting Nigeria's youth population has led to regional insurgencies such as Niger Delta militants, Boko Haram, and New Biafra agitation. According to Gribble (2010), ignoring these issues will have long-term global consequences. To achieve sustainable development, adolescents must be enabled to meet their own needs, care for their families, and contribute to national development. According to the UNDP

(2014), if youths are not included in the development process, achieving sustainable development will be impossible. Collaborating with teenagers to drive change requires prioritising their well-being, which includes security, basic necessities, freedom of choice, access to healthcare, and positive social relationships. However, it's crucial to consider the socioeconomic status of individuals while providing key wellbeing services. According to Nnachi, Nwigwe, and Nkoma (2013), Idaka (2013), Odoh, and Innocent (2014), around 60% of Nigeria's population is made up of youths and children. Youth involvement is crucial for long-term growth and development worldwide. According to Koripamo-Agary (2010) and the United Nations (2015), youth empowerment is a global challenge that has led to ongoing discussions and debates, as traditional beliefs and ideologies have not yielded the desired outcomes. According to Roy and Tisdell (1998), effective governance is dependent on available institutional frameworks and economic resources. According to Sodipo (2014), the high rate of unemployment in the country has led to a rise in crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism, terrorism (Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda), prostitution, drug peddling, and other social vices, leading to hopelessness and aggression among the youth. According to Akintayo and Adiat (2013), policymakers in Nigeria created policies and programs with loopholes for unjustified gains, leading to institutionalized corruption. According to McDonald, Iloanya, and Okoye-Nebo (2014), the effectiveness of Nigeria's 'National Economic Empowerment Development' program has been hindered by inadequate leadership, societal disputes, environmental problems, discrimination against women, debt burden, and an exodus of youths. Odoh and Innocent (2014) identified a major challenge for Nigerian governments and lawmakers: providing chances for the continent's approximately 200 million youths to contribute to economic development. According to Udoma (2019), the Federal Government's previous Youth Empowerment Programs have not met their objectives, particularly in the northern region due to terrorism. However, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) recently approved N5.5 billion for additional training and device provision for 12,000 youths in the N-Power An understanding Multi-Track Youth Empowerment Programme.

### **2.1.3 Youths**

The notion of youth can be difficult to describe because it encompasses such a wide range of topics. In Western societies, the term "youth" refers to the transition

from childhood to maturity. The Pan- African Youth Charter (2016) defines youth as anyone aged 15-30. According to the English norm, youths range from 15 to 30 years old (William-West, 2007).

During youth, individuals want significance, belonging, and achievement. Vambe (2018) identifies three approaches on the concept of youth:

1. Youth as an age category: This category viewed youth as more flexible than other established age groups. The category identified age as the most straightforward method to characterize this group, particularly in terms of education and employment.
2. Youth as a transitional stage from childhood to adulthood: The four important happenings mark the transition from childhood to adulthood they are leaving home, finding employment, setting up home and marriage.
3. Youth as a social construct:

A social construction is something that society creates, and youth is one such example. It exists because people consent to act in a way that seems to adhere to certain accepted norms. Every society defines youth according to its own set of rules and laws, yet these social constructs might not always be accurate. Because of the changes in youth over the past century, youth can be considered a social construct. Children are consequently singled out by commerce in their own right since young people have become an increasingly important economic force in society and the family. The Bureau of Statistics states that Nigerians between the ages of 18 and 35 are considered youth. The United Nations Population Fund projects that there will be 40 million young people in Nigeria in 2021. Nigerian youth are highly capable of working in a variety of economic sectors, including manufacturing, agriculture, official and informal education, and other fields vital to the country's development and prosperity. Younger ages can differ between the sexes, with males often being 13–16 years old and females being 11–14 years old (Mokwena, 2003). The unique circumstances in Nigeria have prompted the development of social and economic definitions that accept individuals up to 40 years of age and older because they view youth as a mental state (Vambe 2018). Due to the economic latency of the period of independence, the typical Nigerian youth continues to socialise in the domain of youth for as long as they are reliant on their parents or guardians, which may be well past the age of thirty. Achieving financial independence, leaving the parental home,

getting married, and starting a family are just a few of the motivational elements that can be used to determine and quantify the achievement of adulthood. Certain social or cultural rites may be performed in different civilisations around the world to commemorate the passage into maturity. The term "youth" was interpreted by many nations as the legal age at which a person is treated equally. In several countries, it is regarded as the first step in the voting process. Following this age, the young person is regarded as an adult. Despite the differences in these opinions, it is generally accepted that youth is the time when people begin to physically, psychologically, and socially transition into adulthood. Many government programs take into account individuals between the ages of 13 and 25 based on this description (William-West, 2007). Sustainable Development Goals and the Nigerian Youth

Youths have been described as “great thinkers, innovators and drivers of change,” whose crucial roles in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be ignored. As earlier stated, in Nigeria, the youth include the citizens between the ages of 18-35 years, according to the bureau of statistics. The population of the Nigerian youth is estimated at 40 million in 2021 by the United Nations population fund. According to Salami (2013), The Nigerian youth have enormous strength to work in various sectors of the economy, such as the manufacturing and agricultural sectors; formal and informal educational sector etc. which are critical to economic growth and development. Nevertheless, they are prone to crimes if they are not adequately and properly harnessed for effectiveness. In achieving sustainable development goals, the utilization and effective use of the youth will go a long way in achieving this goal in Nigeria. Hence the need to prioritize the youth by formulating and implementing viable policies that will eradicate poverty, illiteracy vis-à-vis crime from among them. The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development focuses on ‘a present and a future that is economically sustainable, socially inclusive and environmentally resilient’. This is expressed through the framing of the 17 SDGs, 169 targets and 230 Key Performance Indicators. It is also aimed at ending poverty, safeguarding the planet and ensuring that all people live in peace and prosperity by the year 2030. The 17 SDGs can be synchronized as follows: No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, Reduce Inequalities, Sustainable

Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life Below water, Life on Land, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, Partnerships for the Goals. In summary, the SDGs are a call for universal action to end poverty, protect the planet and enable all to enjoy peace and prosperity by the dreaded year of 2030. The major concern for this research is that how do the youth in Nigeria key into this agenda in achieving these goals? Today, there are 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10-24 they are the largest generation of youth in history (Women, children and adolescent health, 2022). Close to 90 per cent of them live in developing countries of the world, where they make up a large proportion of the population. Their numbers are expected to grow between 2015 and 2030 alone, about 1.9 billion young people are projected to turn 15 years old. Connected to each other like never before, young people want to and already contribute to the resilience of their communities, proposing innovative solutions, driving social progress and inspiring political change. The youths are also agents of change, mobilizing to advance the Sustainable Development Goals to improve the lives of people and the health of the planet. If the youths are provided with the necessary skills and opportunities needed, they can be a driving force for supporting development and contributing to peace and security. Youth plays a significant role in the implementation process, monitoring and review of the Agenda of the Sustainable Development as well as in holding governments accountable for the fulfilment of the goals.

#### **2.1.4 Barriers to Youth Participation in SDGS**

In following part, we will elaborate several barriers that prevent the youth from participating in SDG's.

##### **1. Unemployment**

Unemployment is a critical and great challenge to the attainment of sustainable development gals by the youth. Youth is disproportionately unemployed. According to statistics by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBC, 2011), indicate that from 2006 to 2011, there were 1.8 million new entrants into the active job market annually; several states reported composite unemployment rates exceeding the national average of 23.9 percent as of 2013. For instance, in Bayelsa it was 38.4%; Katsina 37.3%; Bauchi 37.2%; Akwa-Ibom 34.1%; Gombe 32.1%; Adamwa 29.4%; Borno

27.7%; Kano 27.6%; Yobe 27.3%; Taraba 26.8%; and Jigawa 26.5% (Vambe, 2018). Nearly a fifth of the world's youth does not have job, education or training. Even in terms of economic recovery, the probability that youth is unemployed is extremely greater than that of adult; labour poverty, and low level of productivity, together with informal work, continue to represent an important challenge. High rate of youth unemployment implies a waste of resources and lead to the deceleration of the long-term growth potential of an economy, resulting in lower income. Today, the working poverty rate for youth at the 2 USD a day threshold in Nigeria ranges from 20-50 per cent (BBC News, 2017), attesting to the lack of productive employment opportunities. This is also ascertained by increased shares of workers in vulnerable employment that is the own-account workers and unpaid family workers who typically do not benefit from securities enjoyed by regular-salaried employees. All of these translate into more youth working in the informal sector, characterized by decent work deficits and relatively risks of exploitation. In seeking productive employment opportunities and decent work, one option selected by female and male youth is migration from rural to urban area or from their home to another country (ILO, 2015). Migration can be a positive experience for youth themselves and for both the 'origin' and 'destination' countries. However, migrating youth can be at risk of exploitation, abuse, social exploitation, adverse (physical and mental) health issues, human trafficking and death, with variability in risk between genders. Female youth, for example, are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking for sexual exploitation, while male youth may be susceptible to forced labour, such as in the agricultural industry.

## **2. Insufficient Education**

One of the major goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is quality education which is goal 4. In so many areas of the country, youth lack access to the quality and affordable education and skills training which would help them get jobs or create livelihoods and improve their lives (Vambe, 2016). Several educational policies have been put in place by several government administrations to empower young people and improve access to education including the introduction of Universal Basic Education, the abolishment of school fees and introduction of free feeding at primary level. The quality of education in schools are declining every day, Inadequate infrastructure and training facilities, poor and inappropriate curricula, and

lack of well-trained and motivated teachers are among the main reasons explaining the decline. The future of SDGs lies in the hands of the youth who are expected to be graduate in college/institutions but when the youth do not have access to this quality education, the future of Sustainable Development will be truncated. Many schools within the country are limited in capacity which is largely due to inadequate budgetary resources and implementation of policies for the sector. Many children do not have access to education, many are roaming the street hawking to make ends meet which is a threat to achieving the SDGs plan. Despite several hundreds of different ethnic groups in Nigeria, formal educational instruction occurs in only 3 languages (Hausa, Ibo; and Yoruba). Combined with discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and religion, youth (and children) whose mother tongue is not recognized in the formal education system are thus relatively disadvantaged, with negative implications for educational outcome. One Goal of the 2030 Agenda is to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015)’. Currently there exist structures and practices that discriminate against, for example, females, persons with disabilities, persons of low economic status and persons in rural and remote areas. These need to be recognized and rescinded, accompanied by the provision of facilities and procedures that promote access and inclusion.

### **3. Poverty**

The first and one important sustainable development goals is to ensure no poverty and government in several led administration has ensured that this is achievable for youths within the country. This is done by the creation of numerous programmes targeted to address these challenges among the youth. Programs such as N-power, Nigeria Youth Investment Fund, School feeding program, Tradermoni, Anchor Borrower’s programme; Conditional Cash Transfer etc., Despite these implementations of several poverty alleviation programmes, poverty remains a reality and a threat for millions of people in the country, to which the youth are particularly vulnerable. Based on the findings by the World Poverty Clock which was compiled by Brookings Institute indicated that extreme poverty in Nigeria is growing by six people every minute, which is the highest number in the world at large (Adeboye, 2018). The survey showed that Nigeria had an estimated 86.9 million people in extreme poverty compared to India’s 73 million. The World

Poverty Clock report as quoted by Edwoge (2018) stated that of the 10 countries on this extreme poverty list, only Ethiopia is on track to meet the United Nations' SDG of ending extreme poverty by 2030. Youth poverty is witnessed and observed in numerous ways ranging from hunger and under-nutrition to restricted, access to social services, access to quality health facilities, access to quality education etc. The future of many youths has been truncated because they do not have access to this necessity making them become victims of anti-social crimes in the society.

#### **4. Dis-Continuity of Government programmes for the youth**

The discontinuity of government activities and projects is a prevalent issue in Nigeria. The project is basically regarded as political. Every program is designated as a party event. Subsequent administrations abandoned the initiatives of their predecessors. This substantially influences the nation's policies and the performance of youth. Efficient governance depends on institutional frameworks and financial assets. The government has terminated some programs due to their inability to reproduce. Although policies may effectively promote youth, they are frequently discontinued, resulting in unnecessary misery.

#### **2.2 Land Degradation and Production Environment**

Ineffective leadership, mismanagement, poverty, and inconsistent policies have negatively impacted the environment. The Niger Delta region in Nigeria has received frequent media attention. Poor oil and gas development in the region is destroying the nation's mangrove ecosystems. The agrarian structure in the area has been decimated. The region relies on other regions for food supplies. The country has to abandon most rubber and oil palm farms. Clearly, these are the results of weak sectoral policy. It shows a disorganised development of policies, indicative of bad leadership. Desertification in Northern Nigeria, along with excessive fuel wood harvesting, inadequate farming techniques, and annual bush burning, is causing land destruction. In eastern Nigeria, gullies, erosion, and overcrowding are prevalent. The outcome has been a decline in the rural and agrarian sectors, leading to widespread poverty, increased food imports, and a significant migration of young people from rural areas. In the industrial and modern sectors, society's need for rapid and cheap currency has led to the abandonment of norms, including the release of harmful substances. Materials enter the environment. Inadequate products are being created

and imported. In Nigeria, environmental degradation is a threat to life itself, rather than just the level of living.

### **2.3 Lack of Motivation for the Youths**

Nigeria, like the majority of African nations, has struggled to inspire its workforce, particularly its young people, to be more productive in their designated roles. For example, the government's incapacity to meet the demands of health workers has led to a significant brain drain among the sectors, causing the third Sustainable Development Goal good health and general well-being to be truncated by the frequent and sporadic strikes by various health-related professional bodies. In pursuit of better opportunities, many professionals have moved to other locations. This has consistently become a threat in a variety of industries, such as manufacturing, health, and education. Youth motivation should be a key factor in bringing and enabling young people to effectively accomplish the goals of sustainable development, which have typically been neglected.

#### **2.3.1 Various policy strategies of government towards youths in Nigeria**

Various government policy ideas aimed at youth in Nigeria Nigerian governments have implemented many policies to promote long-term economic growth and eliminate youth poverty. Vambe (2018) highlighted the following policies, among others:

- 1. Establishment of the Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRFI).** This policy/programme was initiated in 1986 to execute rural development programmes. The directorate was involved in the construction and rehabilitation of feeder roads, rural water supply, rural electrification projects; and offering specified agricultural production support services. It identifies and support viable local community in the effective mobilization of the rural population for sustained rural developmental activities. It was also responsible for identifying areas of high production potential for the country's priority food and fibre requirement and supporting production of such commodity along agro-ecological zones within the context of one national market.

## **2. Environmental safe-guiding**

While preservation of natural resources policies have been established for many years, their execution has been inconsistent and disorganised. Nigeria has recently recognised the need of managing natural resources for sustainable development. Although programs for preservation of soil, reclamation, erosion control, food security, afforestation, and desertification have been in place for several years, air pollution control efforts have remained incorrectly organised till lately. The formation of the Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) and a Ministry of Environment demonstrates the government's commitment to the environment.

## **3. Anchor Borrowers Programme (ABP)**

President Buhari's administration formed ABP on November 17th, 2015, to connect anchor firms picking important crops with smallholder farmers. The initiative aims to connect farmers and processors to enhance rice and wheat output and bridge the gap between production and consumption. The ABP provided farmers with seed and cash to increase crop production and assure a consistent supply for agro processors. The initiative focusses on farmers who produce cereals such as rice, maize, and wheat. Roots and tubers (such as cassava, potatoes, yam, and ginger) Tree crops (e.g., oil palm, cocoa, rubber), legumes (e.g., soybean, sesame seed, cowpea), livestock (e.g., fish, poultry, ruminants), as well as other crops such as cotton, sugarcane, and tomatoes. The CBN allocated N40 billion from the N220 billion Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises Development Fund to farmers at an annual interest rate of 9% (Onuoba, 2015). Loans to SHFs must be reimbursed with harvested produce brought to the specified collecting centre, as per the Agreement. Proshare (2017) states that the loan principal and interest has to be covered by the supplied produce. The Central Bank of Nigeria's (CBN) development finance intervention has had some success, particularly in outreach and coverage. However, the failure of many farmers in some states to repay loans worth billions of naira has led to the initiative's failure. The National

Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) was introduced in 2016 to provide schoolchildren with free, nutritious, locally sourced meals every day. The program aims to increase school enrolment and completion, promote agricultural production, and offer job possibilities for the community. The federal government is collaborating with 18 Nigerian states to deliver sustainable school meals to 5.5

million children in public elementary schools through a trial initiative (The Nation, 2016). The HGSF initiative is facing significant hurdles in the states where implementation has begun. According to The Guardian (2017), some governments require participants to have political connections or partisan interests, which undermines the program's purpose. Certain states have halted the program to address funding and implementation concerns

(15). Successful execution and accountability measures are necessary to meet residents' goals, rather than just having excellent objectives.

### **2.3.2 Religion, ethnicity, and youth engagement in sustainable development**

Religion plays a profound role in shaping values, ethics, and worldviews among Nigerian youths, influencing their attitudes toward issues such as gender equality, environmental conservation, and poverty alleviation key areas of focus in the SDGs. For instance, Islamic and Christian teachings often emphasize charity and social justice, which can promote youth involvement in poverty reduction initiatives (Omotayo *et al.*, 2021). In contrast, rigid religious interpretations can sometimes pose challenges to gender equality (SDG 5) and reproductive health (SDG 3), limiting the full participation of women and girls in sustainable development initiatives (Osaghae and Suberu, 2022).

Ethnicity, on the other hand, often influences access to resources, political representation, and social capital, all of which affect the capacity of youths to contribute to the SDGs. In Nigeria, ethnic allegiances can determine access to educational and employment opportunities, particularly in regions where political patronage is deeply intertwined with ethnic identity (Akinyemi and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2020). Youths from minority ethnic groups may face systemic barriers that limit their ability to engage meaningfully in economic and social development, further widening existing inequalities (SDG 10) (Akanle and Olutayo, 2020).

The intersection of religion and ethnicity also poses unique challenges in fostering national unity, which is critical for the achievement of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Nigeria's history of religious and ethnic conflict, such as the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, has created significant hurdles to achieving peace and stability (Adesoji, 2020). These conflicts often

disproportionately affect young people, who are both victims and perpetrators of violence, thereby undermining their ability to contribute positively to sustainable development efforts.

Despite these challenges, religion and ethnicity also present opportunities for fostering sustainable development among Nigerian youth. Faith-based organizations and ethnic associations are increasingly becoming platforms for social mobilization and capacity-building, offering youths opportunities to participate in community development projects and entrepreneurial ventures. By leveraging the moral authority of religious leaders and the solidarity of ethnic networks, Nigeria can galvanize youth participation in achieving the SDGs (Nwosu, 2021).

Furthermore, promoting interfaith and interethnic dialogue can foster mutual understanding and collaboration among young people from diverse backgrounds, strengthening social cohesion and promoting inclusive development (SDG 17) (Udeh and Obioha, 2023). Efforts to integrate religious and ethnic considerations into policy frameworks for youth development could enhance the effectiveness of SDG-related initiatives, ensuring that no one is left behind.

In conclusion, religion and ethnicity are significant forces shaping the attitudes, behaviors, and opportunities of Nigerian youths, and their roles in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be overlooked. While both factors present challenges, they also offer valuable resources for mobilizing youth towards sustainable development. By addressing the religious and ethnic dimensions of youth engagement, Nigeria can harness the potential of its young population to drive progress toward a more sustainable and equitable future.

The conceptual framework focuses on how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in Nigeria, are connected to youth engagement and the barriers they face in participating. The SDGs aim to solve global challenges like poverty and climate change, and Nigeria has integrated these goals into its national policies. However, for the SDGs to succeed, active participation from youths is essential, as they represent a large, dynamic portion of the population capable of driving change.

Nigerian youth hold the potential to advance the SDGs, yet several barriers hinder their full participation. These include economic challenges, limited

educational opportunities, and political exclusion, which weaken their contribution to sustainable development. To address these challenges, the Nigerian government has introduced various policy strategies aimed at empowering youth, including programs that foster entrepreneurship and skills development.

Finally, religion and ethnicity play complex roles in youth engagement. While they sometimes serve as barriers due to cultural divides, they can also provide a foundation for inclusive, community-driven development efforts. Each of these factors, youth engagement, governmental strategies, and cultural diversity are crucial for understanding how Nigeria can progress toward achieving the SDGs.

## **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study adopted the following theories: Structural Functional

Theory, Theory of Positive Youth Development (PYD), and Ecological Systems Theory.

The Structural Functional Theory views society as a system made up of various interdependent parts that work together to promote stability and social order. Applied to Nigerian youth, this theory suggests that institutions like family, education, and religion play key roles in shaping youth behavior and ensuring societal stability. It emphasizes that for sustainable development, youth must perform their functions within these structures to maintain societal balance. However, the theory is often criticized for overlooking social inequalities and dynamics of change. This theory is more about maintaining order and focusing on the roles youth should play in established societal structures, rather than actively promoting change or personal development.

The Theory of Positive Youth Development (PYD) focuses on the strengths, resources, and capabilities of young people. Rather than viewing youth as a problem to be managed, it sees them as assets to be developed. PYD promotes the idea that with the right support, youth can contribute to their communities and achieve positive outcomes. For Nigerian youth, this theory encourages fostering skills, leadership, and engagement, which are essential for sustainable development. Unlike Structural Functionalism, PYD emphasizes personal growth and empowerment of youth,

focusing on their potential to contribute to societal change, not just maintaining the status quo.

The Ecological Systems Theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner suggests that youth development is influenced by various environmental systems, such as family, peers, schools, communities, and broader societal contexts. For Nigerian youth, this theory highlights how different systems from family structures to government policies interact to influence their development. Sustainable development, therefore, involves understanding these multi-layered influences and how they support or hinder youth progress.

Ecological Systems Theory differs by viewing youth development as complex and dynamic, influenced by multiple levels of their environment. It incorporates both the personal and societal influences, whereas Structural Functionalism focuses primarily on societal roles and PYD emphasizes individual strengths.

#### **2.4.1 Structural functional theory**

This study followed Gabriel Almond's structural functional theory. The functionalism hypothesis views society as a complex system with interconnected sections that cater to individuals' biological and social needs. Varma (2003) classifies organised human society as a social system. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), an English philosopher, identified connections between society and the human body. The author argues that social institutions, like the numerous functions of the body, collaborate to keep society operating. The theory claims that social systems require order and stability to function properly. The theory argued that all facets of the social system plays a crucial role in maintaining order and stability. Uzunoglu and Ogbator (2013) suggest that a functional pre-requisite connects and integrates the social system into an organic whole. As a result, functionalists believe that the social system must meet certain initial characteristics in order to persist. These criteria are referred to as functional prerequisites. Critics argue that the structural functional theory fails to explain social change and that dysfunction can persist even when it no longer serves a purpose, contradicting the theory's essential principles. Although criticism, the theory is relevant to this research since youth play a vital role in society

and have distinct functions. According to Afonja (1994), these roles aim to maintain societal continuity while also achieving fit and compatibility.

### **2.4.2 Theory of positive youth development (PYD)**

The Theory of Positive Youth Development (PYD) shifts away from a deficit-focused perspective of adolescence to one that emphasizes young people's inherent strengths and potential. According to Lerner *et al.* (2005), positive youth development (PYD) can be achieved by creating favorable circumstances for all adolescents to reach their full abilities.

We can define several core principles of positive youth development as follow

#### **Core Principles of PYD**

1. **Focus on Strengths:** Unlike traditional models that often emphasize risks and problems, PYD concentrates on identifying and nurturing the strengths, assets, and potential of youth (Damon, 2004). This approach is based on the belief that all young people possess inherent talents and abilities that can be developed.
2. **Developmental Assets:** PYD frameworks often utilize developmental assets, which are the positive qualities and experiences that young people need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. These assets are categorized into external assets (e.g., support, empowerment, boundaries) and internal assets (e.g., commitment to learning, positive values, social -competencies) (Search Institute, 2006).
3. **Ecological Perspective:** PYD is rooted in the ecological systems theory, which emphasizes the importance of the various contexts in which youth live, such as family, school, community, and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These environments play a critical role in shaping youth development.
4. **Youth as Active Agents:** PYD views youth as active participants in their own development rather than passive recipients of adult intervention. This principle underscores the importance of youth voice and agency in decision-making processes that affect their lives (Lerner *et al.*, 2009).
5. **Holistic Development:** PYD promotes the holistic development of youth, addressing multiple dimensions such as cognitive, emotional, social, and

physical development. This comprehensive approach ensures that all aspects of a young person's life are considered and nurtured (Eccles and Gootman, 2002).

**The key theoretical constructs are formulated as follows:**

1. **The Five Cs Model:** One of the most well-known PYD frameworks is the Five Cs model, which outlines five core competencies that are essential for positive development: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring (Lerner *et al.*, 2005). A sixth C, Contribution, emerges when these five competencies are present, indicating that well- developed youth are more likely to contribute positively to their communities and society.
2. **Developmental Systems Theory (DST):** DST integrates concepts from biology, psychology, and sociology to explain how individuals develop through dynamic interactions with their environment (Lerner, 2006). It emphasizes the mutual influence between the individual and their context, suggesting that positive development results from the alignment of individual strengths with environmental supports.
3. **Relational Developmental Systems (RDS):** Building on DST, RDS highlights the importance of relationships in youth development. This perspective asserts that positive outcomes are achieved through nurturing relationships between youth and their family, peers, schools, and communities (Lerner *et al.*, 2011).

**Several Practical Applications of PYD can be defined as follows:**

1. **Youth Programs and Interventions:** PYD principles are applied in designing youth programs that foster developmental assets and the Five Cs. Programs such as 4-H, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and Boys and Girls Clubs of America are examples of PYD-based interventions that provide supportive environments and opportunities for youth to thrive (Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2003).
2. **Policy and Practice:** PYD informs policies that aim to create supportive environments for youth. This includes policies that promote safe and supportive schools, community-based youth services, and family support programs (Benson *et al.*, 2007).

3. **Evaluation and Research:** PYD provides a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of youth programs. Researchers use PYD metrics to assess outcomes related to the Five Cs and developmental assets, providing evidence for the impact of positive youth development approaches (Bowers *et al.*, 2010).

#### 2.4.3 Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner)

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides an in-depth structure to comprehend human development and the various settings that impact humans throughout their lives. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, persons' development is formed by interactions with their environmental systems, which are organised into nested components that every one have an distinct effect on the individual. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory includes five interconnected environmental systems that impact human growth. The systems are: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

1. **The microsystem** refers to an individual's local surroundings, including family, school, peer groups, and neighbourhood. According to Bronfenbrenner (1986), individuals have both direct and bi-directional interactions with their surroundings.
2. **Mesosystem:** The mesosystem is the network of interconnected microsystems. A child's residence and educational experience form a mesosystem. Constructive relationships among various contexts can promote growth, whereas conflicts can be challenging (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).
3. **Exosystem:** The exosystem refers to the larger social structures that impact indirectly individuals. These systems impact the individual's microsystems rather than directly involving them. Examples include parental employment, community services, and local government regulations. A parent's employment stress can impact their interactions with their child, even if the child is not directly affected by the parent's workplace (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).
4. **Macrosystem:** The outermost part consists of cultural, economic, social, and political factors that influence other systems. It includes cultural trends, beliefs, practices, and laws. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), the

macrosystem shapes evolution by creating guiding principles for behaviour and expectations in smaller systems.

5. **The chronosystem** refers to the relationship between time and an individual's environment.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1995), life transitions, historical events, and socio-historical contexts all have an impact on development across time. The advancements in technology and slumps in the economy can significantly affect progress.

The key theoretical constructs can be defined as follows

1. **Proximal Processes:** Bronfenbrenner's theory focusses on the inverse connections between individuals and their environment, which drive development. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), these processes are most successful when repeated over time. Approximately processes involve behaviours including play, learning, caregiving, and problem-solving.
2. **Person-Process-Context-Time (PPCT) Model:** To provide a comprehensive understanding of development, Bronfenbrenner introduced the PPCT model, which emphasizes the dynamic interplay between individual characteristics (Person), developmental processes (Process), environmental contexts (Context), and time (Time). This model helps to analyze how these elements interact to influence development (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998).

**The applications of ecological systems theory are as follows**

1. **Education:** In educational settings, Ecological Systems Theory can be applied to understand how factors such as family involvement, peer interactions, school policies, and broader socio-economic conditions influence student outcomes. Teachers and administrators can use this framework to create supportive learning environments by considering the multiple contexts affecting students (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).
2. **Public Policy:** Policymakers can use Ecological Systems Theory to design and implement programs that address the diverse needs of individuals across different environmental systems. For example, family support policies, community health initiatives, and educational reforms can be

informed by an understanding of how various systems interact to influence development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

3. **Community Development:** Community developers can utilize this theory to foster environments that support positive development by strengthening connections between different systems, such as promoting collaboration between schools, families, and local organizations. This holistic approach can enhance community resilience and individual well-being (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).
4. **Clinical Psychology:** Therapists and counselors can apply Ecological Systems Theory to understand clients' issues within the broader context of their lives. By considering the influences of family, work, culture, and socio-economic status, practitioners can develop more effective, contextually relevant interventions (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

In conclusion, Structural Functional Theory highlights the role of societal institutions in shaping youth behavior, emphasizing the need for stability and order. This view transitions into the Theory of Positive Youth Development (PYD), which shifts the focus to empowering youth as active contributors to societal change through personal growth and skill development. Moving further, the Ecological Systems Theory expands this perspective by considering the multiple environmental systems that influence youth development, offering a more holistic view of how personal and societal factors interact. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive understanding of sustainable youth development, from societal roles to personal empowerment and environmental influences.

### **3. WITNESSES AND PERCEPTIONS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the research questions were examined. To uncover information on the relevant issues, the research used qualitative approaches. Additionally, the participants expressed their understanding about the barriers and opportunities for Nigerian youth to contribute to sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Nigeria. The analysis of each of these follows. In addition, the youth from the Urban and Rural Regions are important actors.

#### **3.2 Understanding of Sustainable Development and their Key Components**

Different knowledge and understanding of Sustainable Development and their key components are explained by the various actors. These participants include youths from different locations in Nigeria, and they held the following opinions of what they understood by sustainable development and their Key components.

##### **3.2.1 Youth perception on sustainable development (urban youth)**

**Name: A,**

**Age: 27,**

**Location: Lagos - Urban,**

**Occupation: Environmental Consultant.**

*“I recently attended a workshop on sustainable development, and it really opened my eyes to the importance of living in harmony with our planet. When asked to define sustainable development, I'd say it's about meeting our present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs.*

*Also, sustainable development means finding a balance between economic growth, social equality, and environmental protection. It's about recognizing that our*

*actions have consequences and taking responsibility for the impact we have on the planet.*

*I strongly believe that sustainable development is crucial for our future. We're the ones who will inherit the earth, and it's scary to think about the state it might be in if we don't make changes now.*

*Sustainable development is not just about saving the environment; it's also about ensuring everyone has access to basic necessities like healthcare, education, and clean water. It's about creating a world where everyone can thrive, regardless of their background or socioeconomic status.*

*Adding to the importance of sustainable development, is about making conscious choices in daily life, like reducing plastic use, conserving energy, and supporting sustainable brands. It's also about advocating for policies and practices that prioritize the well-being of people and the planet.*

*Finally, I believe our generation has the power to make a difference. We need to work together to create a sustainable future, and it starts with understanding the importance of sustainable development”*

### **Key Components:**

To achieve sustainable development in Nigeria, a comprehensive and inclusive approach is essential, focusing on key areas of economic growth, social equity, environmental protection, good governance, youth empowerment, and innovation and technology.

### **Economic Growth**

Nigeria must prioritize diversifying its economy to reduce dependence on oil revenues. By fostering the growth of other sectors such as agriculture, technology, and manufacturing, the nation can build a resilient and sustainable economic foundation. Supporting entrepreneurship through initiatives that empower small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and startups is equally critical to stimulate innovation and job creation. Furthermore, infrastructure development remains a cornerstone of economic progress, requiring investments in modern transportation systems and reliable energy solutions to boost productivity and connectivity.

## **Social Equity**

Achieving social equity begins with ensuring accessible, affordable, and high-quality education for all citizens, particularly the underserved populations. Healthcare reform is another pivotal aspect, focusing on strengthening primary healthcare systems and addressing critical issues such as reducing maternal mortality rates. Additionally, promoting social justice by addressing inequality and upholding human rights is fundamental to fostering a harmonious and inclusive society.

## **Environmental Protection**

Environmental sustainability must be at the heart of Nigeria's development agenda. Transitioning to renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydro power will reduce carbon emissions and promote energy security. Effective waste management strategies, including recycling and reuse, are necessary to address urban and industrial waste challenges. Moreover, conservation efforts aimed at protecting Nigeria's rich biodiversity are essential for maintaining ecological balance and supporting livelihoods dependent on natural resources.

## **Good Governance**

Good governance is the backbone of sustainable development. Transparency and accountability must be strengthened through open data initiatives and anti-corruption measures to rebuild public trust. Participatory governance, which actively involves citizens in decision-making processes, ensures policies reflect the needs and aspirations of the populace. Institutional reforms to bolster the judiciary, legislature, and executive are also crucial for fostering a robust democratic framework.

## **Youth Empowerment**

Empowering the youth is vital for securing Nigeria's future. Providing education and skills training tailored to the demands of the modern economy prepares young people for productive careers.

Entrepreneurship support, including funding, mentorship, and networking opportunities, can unleash the potential of youth-led businesses. Additionally, encouraging political participation among young Nigerians will foster new perspectives and innovative solutions in governance.

## **Innovation and Technology**

Harnessing the power of technology is pivotal for driving development. Expanding digital infrastructure, such as broadband access, will bridge the digital divide and support e-commerce growth. Promoting research and development is essential for fostering innovation, securing patents, and positioning Nigeria as a competitive player in the global knowledge economy.

## **Path to Sustainable Development**

To achieve these goals, Nigeria must foster collaboration between the government, private sector, and civil society to leverage collective strengths and resources. Investing in human capital development ensures a skilled and healthy population capable of driving progress. Promoting sustainable practices and environmental stewardship safeguards resources for future generations. Finally, encouraging youth participation and leadership will bring fresh ideas and energy to Nigeria's development journey. This holistic approach will position Nigeria on the path to sustainable development, ensuring prosperity, equity, and resilience for generations to come.

As young Nigerians, we must take ownership of our future. We must advocate for policies and practices that prioritize sustainable development.

**Name: B,**

**Age: 25,**

**Location: Enugu - Rural,**

**Occupation: Farmer**

*"I'm from a small village, and sustainable development means something different to me. Growing up, I've seen how farming and agriculture are crucial to our community's survival. To me, sustainable development is about preserving our natural resources, like water and soil, so we can keep farming and feeding our families.*

*It's also about having access to basic necessities like healthcare, education, and electricity. Sometimes, we lack these essentials due to our remote location. I've seen how climate change affects our crops and livelihoods. Sustainable development is about adapting to these changes and finding ways to mitigate its impacts.*

*As a young person from a rural area, I believe sustainable development is vital for our community's future. We need to protect our land, water, and forests to ensure our children can continue farming and living here.*

*I think sustainable development should focus on:*

- 1. Improving agriculture practices to increase yields and reduce waste.*
- 2. Providing renewable energy sources, like solar or wind power.*
- 3. Enhancing access to quality education and healthcare.*
- 4. Supporting local businesses and entrepreneurship.*
- 5. Preserving traditional knowledge and cultural heritage.*

*We need to work together with policymakers, organizations, and our community to achieve sustainable development. It's not just about us; it's about the future of our planet."*

### **Key Components:**

Achieving sustainable development in Nigeria requires a focused and strategic approach to rural development, addressing key areas such as agricultural growth, infrastructure, education, healthcare, environmental conservation, community engagement, and economic empowerment.

### **Agricultural Development**

Sustainable farming practices must be prioritized to ensure long-term agricultural productivity. Promoting organic farming and crop rotation not only enhances soil fertility but also contributes to environmental health. Investments in efficient irrigation systems are essential for improving water management, particularly in regions prone to drought. Additionally, enhancing access to markets for rural farmers will empower them economically, reduce post-harvest losses, and foster agricultural growth.

### **Infrastructure Development**

Robust infrastructure is the backbone of rural transformation. Improving rural road networks will facilitate better transportation of goods and services, connecting remote areas to urban centers. Expanding renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydro power ensures access to reliable and sustainable energy, fostering productivity. Furthermore, extending telecommunication networks will bridge the

digital gap, enabling rural communities to access information, education, and economic opportunities.

### **Education and Skills Training**

Education is key to empowering rural populations. Vocational training programs can equip youth with practical skills for immediate employment, while functional literacy initiatives are crucial for improving literacy rates among adults. Promoting digital literacy will further bridge the digital divide, enabling rural communities to participate in the evolving digital economy.

### **Healthcare and Wellness**

Strengthening primary healthcare systems in rural areas is vital for improving health outcomes. Special attention must be given to maternal and child health to reduce mortality rates and ensure healthy families. Improved sanitation and hygiene practices will contribute significantly to the prevention of diseases, fostering overall wellness in rural communities.

### **Environmental Conservation**

Environmental sustainability must be integrated into rural development efforts. Protecting forests and Nigeria's biodiversity through preservation initiatives will maintain ecological balance. Soil conservation measures, such as planting cover crops and building terraces, are essential to prevent erosion and maintain agricultural productivity. Supporting rural communities in adapting to climate change will enhance their resilience against environmental challenges.

### **Community Engagement**

Active participation of rural communities in governance ensures that development initiatives align with their needs and aspirations. Empowering traditional leadership structures can provide culturally relevant governance while fostering unity and social cohesion within communities.

### **Economic Empowerment**

Economic empowerment initiatives must focus on expanding financial inclusion by increasing rural banking services, which will enable farmers and entrepreneurs to access credit and savings. Providing targeted funding and

mentorship for rural businesses will boost entrepreneurship, while encouraging cooperative formation can foster collective growth and shared prosperity.

### **Path to Sustainable Rural Development**

To ensure sustainable development, Nigeria must prioritize rural development, recognizing its potential to drive national progress. Investing in human capital through education and healthcare ensures a healthy and skilled population. Promoting sustainable agricultural and environmental practices safeguards resources for future generations. Lastly, fostering community engagement and unity is essential for driving grassroots development.

By addressing these critical areas, Nigeria can unlock the vast potential of its rural communities, ensuring equitable growth, environmental stewardship, and resilience for all.

As rural youth, we're critical to Nigeria's development. We must advocate for policies supporting rural growth.

While speaking with these young individuals, I noticed distinct differences in their understanding of sustainable development. Urban youth defined it as balancing economic, social, and environmental needs, whereas rural youth focused on preserving natural resources and adapting to climate change.

Urban youth prioritized individual actions and policy changes, whereas rural youth emphasized community development, agriculture, and access to basic necessities. The challenges they faced also differed, with urban youth citing consumerism and waste management, and rural youth struggling with limited access to education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

Despite these differences, both urban and rural youth shared common concerns. They worried about the planet's future and recognized the importance of sustainable development. Both groups acknowledged climate change's impact on their lives and the need for adaptation. They also expressed a desire for education and skills training to contribute to sustainable development.

Our research revealed the following key themes:

- Definition: Urban youth emphasized balance, while rural youth focused on preservation.

- Priorities: Urban youth prioritized individual actions, while rural youth emphasized community development.
- Challenges: Urban youth faced consumerism, while rural youth struggled with access to basic necessities.
- Solutions: Urban youth advocated for sustainable lifestyle choices, while rural youth promoted sustainable agriculture.
- Motivations: Urban youth acted out of personal responsibility, while rural youth prioritized community well-being.

These findings highlight the importance of considering urban and rural perspectives in sustainable development initiatives. Education and awareness are crucial for promoting sustainable development in both contexts.

To bridge the urban-rural divide, policymakers should:

1. Develop targeted education programs.
2. Invest in sustainable agriculture initiatives.
3. Improve access to basic necessities in rural areas.
4. Encourage community-led development projects.

In conclusion, our research demonstrates that urban and rural youth hold unique yet complementary perspectives on sustainable development. By understanding and addressing these differences, we can work towards a more inclusive and sustainable future.

### **3.3 Barriers to Youth Contribution Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria**

#### **3.3.1 What do you perceive as barriers to youth contribution sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Nigeria?**

**Name: C,**

**Age: 24,**

**Location: Kano - Urban,**

**Occupation: Teacher**

*“Well Ma, what I can say is that, Many young people in Nigeria face limited access to quality education, particularly in rural areas, it has been reported that*

*even in urban settings, the education system is often not tailored to equip youth with the necessary knowledge and skills to drive sustainable development”.*

**Name: D,**

**Age: 26,**

**Location: Abia - Rural,**

**Occupation: Small Business Owner**

*“Is very disturbing that the high rate of unemployment discourages youth from actively participating in sustainable development initiatives. We Young people struggle to secure jobs, and this financial instability makes it difficult for us to focus on long-term development goals when immediate survival is a priority. We youths have expressed that one of our major challenges is the lack of access to funding and resources to start sustainable businesses or projects. Many promising initiatives fail to take off due to a shortage of financial support, mentorship, and infrastructure”.*

**Name: E,**

**Age: 23,**

**Location: Ibadan - Urban,**

**Occupation: NGO Worker**

*“Ma I can say that weak institutional frameworks and ineffective governance hinder our ability to contribute meaningfully to the SDGs. Corruption and bureaucracy often frustrate youth-led initiatives, and the absence of strong policy implementation limits opportunities for engagement also insufficient platforms for young people to voice their concerns or contribute to decision- making processes related to sustainable development. Even when platforms exist, they may be poorly organized or inaccessible to a wider population of youth”.*

*Also, I feel in many cases, cultural norms and societal expectations limit youth involvement in leadership roles, especially for young women. It has been mentioned that older generations tend to overlook or dismiss youth-led ideas, which stifles innovation and progress toward the SDGs and inconsistent or weak environmental policies hinder their contributions to sustainable development. When policies around climate change, energy, and environmental conservation are not*

*enforced or constantly shifting, it discourages youth from investing in long-term projects that could contribute to sustainability”.*

In my conversations with urban and rural youth, it is often reported that the lack of access to technology and digital tools prevents them from fully engaging in global discussions about sustainability. This digital divide leaves many young people out of conversations and initiatives that could advance the SDGs. Many youth argue that their voices are underrepresented in policymaking circles. Despite their potential to contribute fresh perspectives and solutions, they often face structural barriers that prevent them from influencing policy decisions at local, regional, and national levels.

### **3.3.2 What do you perceive as Socio-economic barriers to youth contribution sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Nigeria?**

**Name: F**

**Age: 28,**

**Location: Anambra - Rural,**

**Occupation: Entrepreneur**

*“ I strongly believe that inadequate infrastructure, such as poor internet connectivity and lack of access to technology, had been a significant barrier. Many of our youths in rural areas couldn't take part in global conversations or access online resources that would allow them to contribute to sustainable development goals”.*

**Name: G**

**Age: 24,**

**Location: Anambra - Urban,**

**Occupation: Entrepreneur**

"The youth gender inequality was another obstacle i have experienced. Young women, in particular, faced discrimination and were often excluded from decision-making processes, limiting their ability to contribute to the SDGs in meaningful ways."

**Name: H**

**Age 20**

**Location: Abia**

**Occupation:- Trader**

*"I believe that societal expectations and traditional mindsets had hindered their participation. I feel that many older generations did not take young people seriously or provide them with the platforms needed to engage in decision-making processes related to sustainability."*

**Name: I**

**Age 27**

**Location: Abia**

**Occupation:- Student**

*"Seriously, limited access to funding and resources for youth-led initiatives was a significant barrier. I know that without proper financial backing, many innovative ideas for sustainable development could not be executed".*

**Name: J**

**Age 20**

**Location: Ebonyi**

**Occupation:- Trader**

*"Ma, corruption and mismanagement of resources in the country had discouraged us from contributing efficiently to SDGs in Nigeria. Even when I tried to participate in sustainable initiatives, there was often a lack of transparency, which made it difficult to trust that their efforts would lead to real change."*

From my one on one interactions i observed that the youth participants consistently cited socio- economic barriers such as lack of access to quality education, unemployment, and limited financial resources. It was noted that these issues significantly hindered their ability to engage in initiatives related to sustainable development goals in Nigeria. It was also observed frustration regarding corruption

and the exclusion of young people from decision-making spaces, as well as challenges faced by women and those in rural areas.

The socio-economic challenges faced by Nigerian youth are multi-faceted, including educational deficiencies, economic instability, and systemic corruption. Additionally, the lack of infrastructure and societal expectations further marginalized the youth, preventing their active participation in sustainable development efforts. Despite these obstacles, many youths expressed a willingness to engage if given proper support, resources, and platforms."

Unless these socio-economic barriers are addressed, the potential of Nigerian youth in contributing to the achievement of sustainable development goals will remain untapped. It was noted that targeted interventions are necessary, including improved access to education, financial support for youth-led initiatives, and inclusive governance structures that integrate the voices of young people in key decision-making processes."

### **3.3.3 Do you think Nigeria's educational system is helping in youth contribution to sustainable development goals in Nigeria?**

**Name: J**

**Age 20**

**Location: Ebonyi**

**Occupation:- Student**

*Ma, am seriously dissatisfied with the current educational system, it did not equip me with practical skills for sustainable development. Most of the curriculum was outdated and not aligned with the demands of modern sustainability challenges."*

**Name: K**

**Age 23**

**Location: Sokoto**

**Occupation:- Student**

*"While Nigeria's educational system provided some basic knowledge, it lacked emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation. They noted that these are essential skills for young people to contribute to the SDGs actively."*

**Name: L**

**Age 26**

**Location: Anambra**

**Occupation:- Student**

*"The educational system was too focused on theoretical learning, with little attention given to real- world applications. They shared that without opportunities for hands-on experience, it was difficult for students to engage in sustainable development projects after graduation."*

**Name: M**

**Age 27**

**Location: Adamawa**

**Occupation:- Student**

*" Access to quality education was uneven across different regions in Nigeria. They mentioned that many youths, especially in rural areas, did not receive the same opportunities, which limited their ability to contribute to the SDGs."*

**Name: N**

**Age 20**

**Location: Ebonyi**

**Occupation:- Student**

*"Lack of courses and programs specifically focused on sustainability and environmental issues. They said that if the educational system incorporated more content on the SDGs and related topics, it would encourage more youth participation in sustainability efforts."*

It was observed that the majority of the youth felt that Nigeria's educational system was not adequately preparing them for active participation in sustainable development. Common themes included the system's focus on outdated, theoretical content, a lack of emphasis on practical skills, and limited exposure to sustainability

issues. Also, it could be noted that there are concerns about the disparity in educational quality between urban and rural areas."

According to the youths, the educational system in Nigeria falls short in equipping young people with the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. Key issues raised included the lack of focus on critical thinking, innovation, and practical application in the curriculum, as well as a failure to address sustainability challenges through education. The unequal access to quality education, particularly for youth in disadvantaged regions, was also identified as a major barrier."

Unless there are significant reforms in Nigeria's educational system—such as modernizing the curriculum, integrating sustainability-focused subjects, and promoting hands-on learning—youth contributions to the SDGs will remain limited. The need for equal access to quality education across all regions was also emphasized as a critical factor in enabling youth participation in sustainable development initiatives."

### **3.4 Opportunities for Youth Contribution**

#### **3.4.1 What opportunities do you think exist for Nigerian youth to engage in sustainable development activities?**

**Name: O**

**Age: 28,**

**Location: Anambra - Urban,**

**Occupation: Entrepreneur**

*"I strongly believe that there are several exciting opportunities for we as Nigerian youths to participate in sustainable development, and they stem from various sectors. One key area is agriculture. Nigeria has vast arable land and untapped potential for sustainable farming practices. Youth can be trained in modern techniques such as organic farming, agroforestry, and sustainable irrigation, which are not only environmentally friendly but also profitable".*

**Name: P**

**Age: 28,**

**Location: Rivers - Urban,**

**Occupation: Entrepreneur**

*“I know very well that, another promising area is in renewable energy. Nigeria faces energy challenges, but with abundant sunlight and wind resources, youth can play a crucial role in developing and implementing solar, wind, and other renewable energy projects. They can be innovators, engineers, and entrepreneurs in this sector, helping to create a cleaner and more sustainable energy future”.*

**Name: Q**

**Age: 28,**

**Location: Delta - Urban,**

**Occupation: Entrepreneur**

*“Technology is an essential driver of sustainable development. Youth in Nigeria have a growing interest in tech, and many are already leading in areas like fintech, agritech, and edtech. They can develop apps and platforms that promote sustainable practices, such as platforms for waste management, climate monitoring, or even sustainable e-commerce. The tech-savvy generation can leverage digital tools to create innovative solutions to environmental challenges”.*

**Name: R**

**Age: 22,**

**Location: Enugu - Urban,**

**Occupation: Entrepreneur**

*“Yes, Nigerian youth can also engage in advocacy and policy development. By raising awareness, engaging with stakeholders, and pushing for stronger environmental and sustainability policies, youth can influence government decisions. There are also opportunities to join or create community-based organizations focused on sustainable practices such as clean energy, biodiversity conservation, or waste reduction”*

**Name: S**

**Age: 28,**

**Location: Abuja - Urban,**

**Occupation: Entrepreneur**

*“Absolutely, Education and skills training are key. Young people need access to education and training programs that focus on sustainability skills, whether it’s in farming, renewable energy, or tech innovation. Partnerships between government, the private sector, and educational institutions can ensure that Nigerian youth are equipped to take advantage of these opportunities”.*

The different youths outlined several sectors where Nigerian youth have opportunities to engage in sustainable development, including agriculture, renewable energy, technology, and policy advocacy. They stressed that education and skills development are critical to ensuring youth can maximize their contributions to sustainability efforts. From the observations, it is clear that Nigerian youth have immense potential to drive sustainable development across various sectors. Agriculture, renewable energy, and technology offer direct pathways for innovation and entrepreneurship. Moreover, engaging in advocacy and policy development provides opportunities for youth to influence systemic change. Education and training will play a pivotal role in equipping young Nigerians to take full advantage of these opportunities, making them essential players in shaping Nigeria's sustainable future.

**Name: T**

**Age: 25**

**Location: Akwa Ibom - Urban,**

**Occupation: Entrepreneur**

*“That the educational system needs to be more practical, stating that “there should be a shift from theoretical knowledge to hands-on training in areas like renewable energy and environmental conservation.” The youth suggested that incorporating these subjects would make Nigerian youth more aware of sustainable development challenges and give them the tools to actively contribute”.*

**Name: U**

**Age: 28,**

**Location: Bauchi - Urban,**

**Occupation: Entrepreneur**

*“That the curriculum must be updated, explaining that “the current curriculum is outdated and doesn’t align with the modern job market.” According to him, integrating courses on entrepreneurship, digital skills, and sustainable business practices will prepare youth for the changing global economy”.*

**Name: V**

**Age: 28,**

**Location: Kaduna - Urban,**

**Occupation: Student**

*“The importance of collaboration with industries, saying that “schools need to partner with local businesses and international organizations to provide internships and mentorship programs.” She believed that real-world exposure to sustainable projects would better equip youth with practical skills”.*

**Name: W**

**Age: 29,**

**Location: Jigawa - Rural,**

**Occupation: Student**

*“The role of technology, asserting that “more investment is needed in e-learning platforms and ICT infrastructure.” She mentioned that improving access to online learning tools and resources focused on sustainability would help bridge the gap between urban and rural students”.*

**Name: X**

**Age: 28,**

**Location: Anambra - Urban,**

**Occupation: Student**

*“More awareness and engagement are needed, stating that "youth must be actively involved in policy-making and development projects." They suggested that leadership and civic education be integrated into school programs to foster a sense of responsibility and inspire youth to lead sustainable initiatives”*

From the interviews, it was observed that the different participants consistently emphasized the need for practical learning and curriculum updates to align education with modern job market demands. Many participants felt that Nigeria’s current educational and training programs lack the necessary focus on sustainability, digital skills, and real-world experience. They also noted gaps in technology infrastructure and industry collaboration, which they believe are critical for youth to effectively participate in sustainable development efforts

The youths proposed several improvements to the existing educational systems. Interviewee A highlighted the importance of shifting from theoretical knowledge to practical, hands-on training in sustainability-related fields. Interviewee B emphasized updating the curriculum to include entrepreneurship and digital skills to meet the demands of the global economy. Interviewee C advocated for stronger partnerships between educational institutions and industries to provide internships and mentorship. Interviewee D suggested investing in e-learning platforms and improving ICT infrastructure to enhance access to educational resources. Finally, Interviewee E underscored the need for youth engagement in policy-making and leadership training as part of the educational framework. In conclusion, the interviewees collectively suggested that to equip Nigerian youth for effective participation in sustainable development, the educational system must undergo significant reforms. These reforms should include curriculum updates, practical training, technological advancements, industry partnerships, and opportunities for youth involvement in leadership and decision-making. By addressing these areas, Nigeria's youth will be better prepared to contribute meaningfully to the country’s sustainability goals.

### **3.5 Technology and Digital Platforms Play In Enhancing the Capacity of Nigerian Youth to Contribute To the Achievement of SDGs**

#### **3.5.1 What role do technology and digital platforms play in enhancing the capacity of Nigerian youth to contribute to the achievement of SDGs?**

**Name: Y**

**Age: 29,**

**Location: Kaduna - Urban,**

**Occupation: Software Developer**

*“I strongly believe that technology gives us access to vast amounts of information and learning materials.” Also digital platforms allow me to get educated on the SDGs, enabling me to understand global challenges and how they can contribute, even from remote areas”*

**Name: Z**

**Age: 25,**

**Location: Ebonyi - Rural,**

**Occupation: Trader**

*“I know digital platforms have made it easier for us to connect with like-minded individuals and organizations.” I know how social media and networking platforms allows me to collaborate on projects, share ideas, and collectively work toward achieving the SDGs through community initiatives”.*

**Name: AB**

**Age: 25,**

**Location: Zamfara - Rural,**

**Occupation: Trader**

*“I feel technology enables us to create innovative solutions to local problems.” I strongly agree with fact that digital tools helps average Nigerian youth to develop apps and platforms that address key SDG issues such as poverty,*

*healthcare, and education, while also providing an opportunity to turn these solutions into sustainable businesses”*

**Name: CD**

**Age: 25,**

**Location: Delta - Rural,**

**Occupation: Trader**

*“I agree that “digital platforms provide us with opportunities to participate in global discussions.” I can say through webinars, online forums, and virtual conferences, any Nigerian youth can engage with global leaders, policymakers, and experts on sustainability, allowing them to bring their voices and ideas to international platforms”.*

**Name: DC**

**Age: 25,**

**Location: Rivers - Urban,**

**Occupation: Trader**

*“I know how digital tools have improved my ability to advocate for social change.” I feel that technology allows an average Nigerian youth to raise awareness about SDG issues through online campaigns, using social media to amplify their messages, attract attention from policymakers, and drive collective action on key sustainability challenges.”*

From the interviews, it was observed that Nigerian youth recognize the transformative power of technology and digital platforms in advancing their ability to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Many of the participants noted that these tools enable access to information, foster collaboration, drive innovation, and create advocacy opportunities. They consistently highlighted the diverse ways in which technology helps them connect with global networks and take actionable steps toward sustainability efforts.

The interviewees offered various insights into how technology enhances their capacity to support the SDGs. Interviewee A mentioned that digital platforms provide youth with access to educational resources and information on sustainability.

Interviewee B emphasized the role of digital platforms in connecting individuals and organizations, allowing youth to collaborate on projects aimed at achieving the SDGs. Interviewee C pointed out that technology enables young people to create innovative solutions to address local problems, which align with the SDGs. Interviewee D discussed how digital platforms allow Nigerian youth to participate in global discussions, giving them a voice in international sustainability dialogues. Interviewee E stressed that digital tools empower youth to advocate for social change, using online campaigns to raise awareness and influence policymakers.

In conclusion, the interviewees collectively expressed that technology and digital platforms are crucial in empowering Nigerian youth to actively contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. These tools provide access to knowledge, foster collaboration, encourage innovation, and amplify advocacy efforts. By leveraging these digital resources, Nigerian youth are better positioned to engage in sustainable development initiatives and make meaningful contributions to the global sustainability agenda.

### **3.6 Discussion**

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) present a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all. Nigeria, with its substantial youth population, holds significant potential to advance the SDGs. However, this potential remains largely untapped due to structural, educational, and socio-economic barriers, compounded by insufficient support mechanisms. This discussion integrates the perspectives of Nigerian youth alongside scholarly findings to explore these challenges and opportunities, offering recommendations for effective youth engagement in SDGs.

Respondents from urban and rural areas consistently highlighted Nigeria's education system as a barrier to SDG participation. Youth noted the curriculum's outdated and theoretical focus, lacking practical applications and sustainability-oriented content. The disparity in education quality across regions further exacerbates this issue. Research supports these concerns, emphasizing that modernizing education to include SDG-related subjects is crucial (Ogunbanwo et al., 2023).

Critical thinking, innovation, and hands-on learning are essential for youth to address sustainability challenges effectively.

Socio-economic factors, including unemployment, financial instability, and gender inequality, pose significant challenges. Youth in rural areas particularly noted limited access to technology, funding, and basic amenities like healthcare and electricity. Similarly, urban youth highlighted systemic corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies as obstacles. Studies by Ajayi et al. (2022) align with these observations, identifying unemployment and resource inadequacy as key deterrents to youth-led initiatives. Traditional mindsets and societal norms often marginalize youth voices, particularly for women. Respondents also mentioned ineffective governance and corruption as significant barriers, echoing findings by Dada et al. (2021), which highlight the need for inclusive governance structures. Without platforms for meaningful participation, youth contributions to policy development and implementation remain limited.

Agriculture offers a vital pathway for rural youth engagement. Respondents emphasized the importance of sustainable farming practices, renewable energy, and access to markets. Research by Chukwu et al. (2020) underscores the potential of agro-entrepreneurship to enhance food security and create employment opportunities, aligning with SDG goals.

Urban youth highlighted technology as a transformative tool for sustainability. Digital platforms facilitate access to information, enable collaboration, and support innovation in areas like fintech, agritech, and waste management. As Oluwaseun et al. (2021) note, technology-driven solutions can bridge urban-rural divides, fostering inclusive participation in SDG-related projects. Education is pivotal for equipping youth to address SDG challenges. Respondents proposed reforms such as curriculum modernization, industry partnerships, and e-learning platforms. These recommendations align with Ajayi et al. (2022), who advocate for integrating entrepreneurship and digital skills training into educational systems.

Respondents recognized the power of advocacy in influencing policies and driving change. Community-based organizations and grassroots initiatives provide platforms for youth to lead sustainable practices. This aligns with Ogunbanwo et al. (2023), who highlight the role of youth in advocating for environmental and social equity. The study revealed distinct urban-rural differences in youth priorities. Urban

youth emphasized individual actions and technological solutions, while rural youth focused on community development and agricultural sustainability. Bridging these perspectives requires targeted education programs, investment in rural infrastructure, and inclusive policy frameworks. As Dada *et al.* (2021) suggest, fostering collaboration across regions is key to unified progress toward the SDGs.



## **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter concludes the study on the challenges and opportunities for Nigerian youth to contribute to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria. The content of this section evaluates and recommends barriers and opportunities for Nigerian youth to contribute to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria.

### **4.2 Conclusion**

The study highlights the essential function of Nigerian youth in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), stressing their enthusiasm, creativity, and resilience as vital resources for sustainable development in multiple sectors, including agriculture, technology, education, and governance. These characteristics render Nigerian youth as transformative agents with the ability to facilitate significant advancement. Structural impediments, including outdated educational frameworks, socio-economic inequalities, limited resource availability, and cultural limitations, significantly obstruct this potential.

These obstacles not only restrict individual potential, but also hinder collaborative endeavors aimed at achieving national and global sustainable development goals. Analysing the structural functional theory presented in section 2.2, the systemic obstacles encountered by Nigerian youth might be perceived as dysfunctions within societal institutions. The concept believes that the cohesive operation of society elements, including education, family, and governance, is crucial for sustaining stability and fostering progress. The failure of these institutions to adjust to the changing requirements of youth results in a disconnection that hampers their contributions to societal advancement. The antiquated educational institutions inadequately prepare adolescents with the necessary skills and knowledge for modern challenges, consequently constraining their capacity to perform their functions within society.

Rectifying these institutional deficiencies is essential for empowering kids to meaningfully engage in sustainable development. The analysis underscores the necessity of transitioning from a deficit-orientated framework to one that prioritizes the strengths, assets, and potential of adolescents, as articulated by the Theory of Positive Youth Development (PYD). Nigerian youth have intrinsic qualities that, when cultivated, can result in substantial contributions to their communities and society as a whole. PYD promotes the establishment of supportive settings that cultivate skills, leadership, and active participation, essential for sustainable development. The focus on comprehensive development corresponds with the results of the study, which advocate for educational and policy reforms that not only tackle current obstacles but also foster chances for youngsters to prosper. Empowering young people through specialized skill development programs and inclusive policies may unleash their potential, allowing them to spearhead technological advancements, advance agricultural sustainability, and champion social justice. The Ecological Systems Theory enhances our comprehension by emphasizing the intricate interactions of environmental elements that affect youth's development.

The conclusions of this paper correspond with the theory's focus on the multifaceted influences of family, peers, educational institutions, communities, and wider societal contexts. The divergent viewpoints of urban and rural children about sustainability illustrate the diverse environmental contexts in which they function. Urban youth emphasize technical innovations and personal initiatives, while rural youth concentrate on agricultural sustainability and community-orientated strategies. This variability highlights the necessity of implementing customized solutions that cater to the distinct needs and strengths of various youth groups. Utilizing the technological expertise of urban youth may foster improvements that benefit both urban and rural populations, while bolstering support for agricultural initiatives can enhance rural youth's contributions to food security and environmental protection. The amalgamation of various theoretical viewpoints offers a thorough framework for comprehending the role of Nigerian youth in sustainable development. The Structural Functional Theory stresses how important it is for society's institutions to work well. The Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework emphasises how young people can be active contributors. And the Ecological Systems Theory explains how the environment affects youth development. Collectively, these theories contribute to a

comprehensive strategy for overcoming the obstacles encountered by Nigerian youth and leveraging their potential for transformative change.

The study concludes that, although Nigerian adolescents encounter considerable problems, they also harbor untapped potential for fostering sustainable development. Confronting systemic obstacles through educational reform, inclusive policies, and resource allocation is crucial for realizing this potential. By cultivating an environment that promotes their development and empowerment, Nigerian youth may serve as the foundation of a sustainable future, advocating for environmental stewardship, social equity, and economic advancement. Their varied viewpoints and creative methodologies, shaped by urban and rural experiences, provide a comprehensive and effective means to attain the SDGs, guaranteeing inclusivity for everyone.

The findings from Chapter 3 provide valuable insights into the barriers and opportunities for Nigerian youth in contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study reveals that while young people possess enthusiasm, creativity, and resilience, structural impediments such as outdated educational frameworks, socio-economic inequalities, and limited access to resources significantly hinder their ability to drive sustainable change. The disparity between urban and rural youth perspectives further highlights the need for tailored interventions that address regional challenges and opportunities.

Urban youth emphasize technological innovations and digital platforms as key tools for advancing sustainability initiatives. Digital connectivity facilitates collaboration, advocacy, and entrepreneurial activities that align with SDG objectives. In contrast, rural youth place greater importance on community-driven approaches, with a strong focus on sustainable agriculture and environmental conservation. This divergence underscores the necessity of integrating technological advancements with rural development efforts to create inclusive progress.

Education remains a critical factor influencing youth participation in sustainable development. The study confirms that the current curriculum does not adequately equip young people with practical skills for SDG-related challenges. Aligning educational reforms with sustainability goals by incorporating digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and environmental education can bridge the knowledge gap and enhance youth engagement.

Furthermore, socio-economic barriers such as unemployment, financial instability, and gender inequality continue to limit youth participation. Rural youth, in particular, face restricted access to technology, funding, and essential infrastructure. Corruption and governance inefficiencies also emerge as key challenges, inhibiting policy implementation that would otherwise support youth-driven initiatives.

Despite these challenges, the study highlights significant opportunities for Nigerian youth. The expansion of digital platforms provides a means for collaboration, innovation, and advocacy. Additionally, agro-entrepreneurship, skill development programs, and inclusive policies can empower youth to take leadership roles in sustainable development. Strengthening partnerships between government, private sectors, and civil society will further enhance youth capacity to contribute meaningfully to the SDGs.

In conclusion, while Nigerian youth face substantial obstacles, they also represent a transformative force capable of driving sustainable change. Addressing systemic challenges through educational reforms, policy adjustments, and resource allocation is crucial for harnessing their potential. By fostering an enabling environment that prioritizes youth empowerment, Nigeria can leverage its young population to advance sustainable development on a national and global scale

### **4.3 Recommendations**

Numerous strategic efforts are advocated to empower Nigerian youth and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These efforts attempt to tackle significant obstacles for young people and unlock their potential to create sustainable development in Nigeria.

Educational reform is crucial. Incorporating sustainability-focused courses into the curriculum, such as climate change, renewable energy, and sustainable business practices, would better equip students for the difficulties of the future.

Integrating critical thinking, problem-solving, and practical abilities in education promotes innovation and adaptation. Partnerships with companies to offer internships, mentorships, and hands-on learning can help bridge the gap between academic understanding and practical applications.

To address socioeconomic constraints, youth-led initiatives should get financial support through grants, loans, and mentorship programs. Increasing access to digital tools and infrastructure, especially in rural regions, can bridge the urban-rural gap and generate opportunities for a diverse population.

Unemployment can be addressed through focused programs that stimulate entrepreneurship and provide thorough skill development, preparing youths for competitive jobs.



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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix - A: Informed Consent**

My name is Natenin Tielman Coulibaly, and I am a graduate student at Istanbul Gedik University Institute of Graduate Studies. I study international relations. My research focusses on the barriers and opportunities for Nigerian youth to contribute to sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Nigeria. I'm inviting you to participate in this research project. You have the choice to participate in the study willingly. I'll now explain the study to you. Reach out to me if you have any questions about the research. I am happy to provide more information. I am researching the barriers and opportunities for Nigerian youth to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria. You will be requested to provide your ideas or comments about the aforementioned study. This will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

The privacy of all information will be protected. If you desire to remain unidentified, your name and responses will only be known to myself and my thesis advisor. If you choose to keep your responses secret, I will code the questionnaire so that only I can identify the person who submitted them. This research will help us understand the barriers and opportunities for Nigerian youth to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria, which will help me pass my thesis. You can end the interview at any point in time.

If you do not intend to carry on, you may withdraw from the study without consequence at any moment. Participant: "Every query and worry I had regarding this study has been addressed. I volunteered to engage in this study experiment. I confirm that I am at least 18 years old, that all information is my own, and that I can defend it if requested.

Date:

**Appendix - B: Demographic Information**

**Section 1: Demographic Information**

- 1. **Name (Optional):**
- 2. **Age:**
- 3. **Gender:**
- 4. **Educational Background:**

**Section 2: Understanding of Sustainable Development**

How would you define sustainable development?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Section 3: Barriers to Youth Contribution**

What do you perceive as the main barriers preventing Nigerian youth from contributing to sustainable development goals in Nigeria?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

What are the socio-economic barriers you have experienced before?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Do you think Nigeria's educational system is helping in youth contribution to sustainable development goals in Nigeria?

.....

.....  
.....  
.....

**Section 4: Opportunities for Youth Contribution**

What opportunities do you think exist for Nigerian youth to engage in sustainable development activities?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Section 5: Existing Educational Systems and Training Programs for Nigerian Youths**

How can existing educational systems and training programs be improved to equip Nigerian youth with the necessary skills for effective participation in sustainable development efforts?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Section 6: Technology and Digital Platforms Play In Enhancing the Capacity of Nigerian Youth to Contribute To the Achievement of SDGs?**

What role do technology and digital platforms play in enhancing the capacity of Nigerian youth to contribute to the achievement of SDGs?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Conclusion**

Thank you for your time and valuable insights. Your contributions will significantly help in understanding the barriers and opportunities for Nigerian youth in contributing to sustainable development, considering the influence of religion and ethnicity. If you have any questions or need further information about this study, please feel free to contact me at [Your Contact Information].

Would you like a summary of the findings once the research is completed?

Yes

No

