

Reining Back Nigeria's Post-COVID-19 Education indicators of Multidimensional Poverty



Sola Afolayan
Founder, SHE Foundation



Demola Lewis
Researcher, SHE Foundation

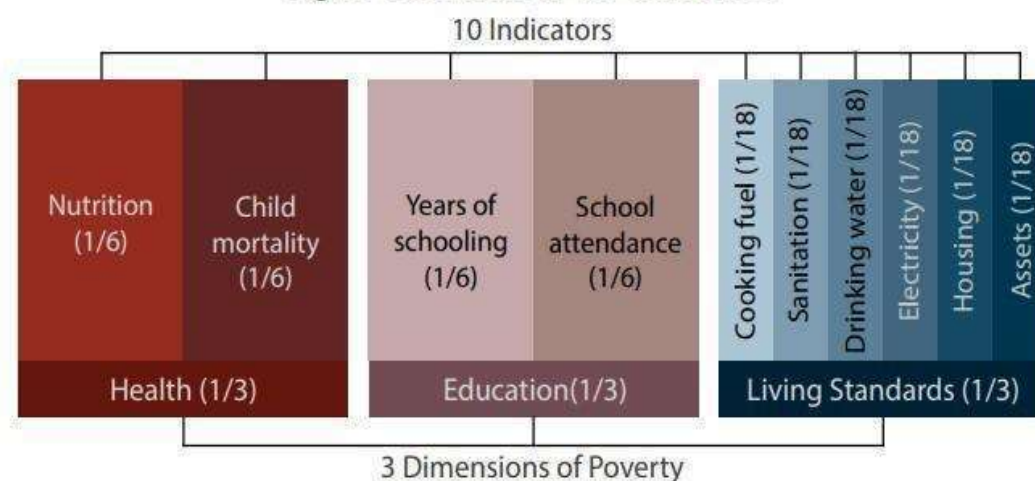
info@she.foundation

Introduction

When the world heralded the year 2020, there was no inkling as to what she beckoned. Here we are, a quarter of the year spent and a global grounding has ensued at the behest of COVID-19. The medical symptoms are too well known and there has been attendant pandemonium in the global health sector, but the effects of the pandemic on educational poverty need yet to be investigated. Much of the stimuli by governments and NGOs have been by way of food and funds to the vulnerable. Whereas these interventions could stem the tide of malnutrition and monetary poverty, their effects, however commendable, impinge only on the health and lifestyle indicators of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). As for MPI education indicators, they likely will take a dismal spike, especial in lower and middle economies, which Nigeria straddles.

Based on a poverty cut-off of 33.3% weighted deprivation score, 52% of Nigerians are multidimensional poor, and 32.7% are severely so (OPHI 2018). Education constitutes a critical one-third of the MPI (Fig. 1 from OPHI, 2018). This paper, therefore, focuses on the plausible debilitating consequences of COVID-19 in deepening educational poverty in Nigeria, just as, at the end, it proffers broad realistic interventions to nullify the effects.

Figure 1. Structure of the Global MPI



COVID-19, Education and the MPIs

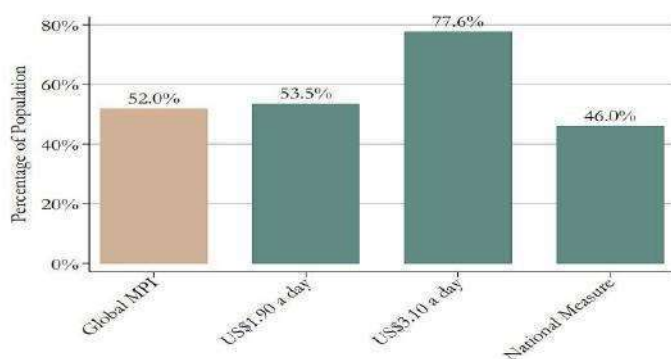
On 19 March 2020 the Economist Magazine reported that COVID-19 had interrupted the schooling of 1 billion students in the world, and that this “slowed the transmission of the virus, even if it also slowed the transmission of knowledge”. This assertion could not be truer for Nigeria where 31 million of these students reside (Fed. Ministry of Education, 2019). In fact, the effects of the virus will cease once the disease has been eliminated, but the consequences of deficits in knowledge transfer may linger into the distant future. There is already educational inequality in Nigeria, where 13.2 million school-age children, the highest in the world, were out of school as at 2018 (UNICEF, 2019). The incidence and intensity of educational poverty may skyrocket on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the twin MPI education indicators - school attendance and a minimum of 6 years of schooling may be significantly compromised.



It is ungainsayable that the shutting of schools will markedly affect school attendance. Whereas it might be argued that school attendance in Nigerian public schools does not necessarily amount to sound knowledge acquisition as many subjects are insufficiently taught consequent upon the non-availability of teachers, books and equipment; the situation with the COVID-19 lockdown would however amount to a knowledge blackout! Whereas the children of non-multi-dimensionally poor Nigerians may still be taught by their educated sit-at-home parents, and this could suffice for school attendance, those of most impoverished homes scarcely have parents with enough educational attainment to enable such home coaching. In many of these households, the children are first generation education beneficiaries. This situation is bound to expand the national chasm of inequality between the multidimensionally deprived and the endowed populations.

Furthermore, where family members are unable to tutor their wards, access to educational resources available on the internet could make up for continuing education. Indeed globally, there have been calls for schools to switch mode from face-face to online learning via Zoom, Moodle and virtual classrooms. By all indications, Nigeria scarcely has the infrastructure to facilitate such a switch. Granted, knowledge is universal and whatever is available on the World Wide Web could be locally accessed. That possibility will again elude members of multidimensional impoverished households, especially for nearly 70% of the national population with absolutely no internet access (DHS-2018). Fig. 2 shows that as at December 2018, at least 77.6% of Nigerians lived below \$3.10 per day (OPHI, 2018). Hardly any household in this category is data-endowed enough to access online educational materials. This scenario will only be magnified by the COVID-19-induced lockdown; thus, increasing privations on the MPI scale, except effectual steps are taken.

Figure 2 Headcount ratios a by poverty measures (OPHI, 2018)



Notes: Source for global MPI: MICS, year 2016-2017, own calculations. Monetary poverty measures are the most recent estimates from World Bank (World Bank, 2018). Monetary poverty measure refer to 2009 (\$1.90 a day), 2009 (\$3.10 a day), and 2009 (national measure).

Likely, a good proportion of the lean 24.6% of Nigerians with daily consumption above \$3.10 can hardly sustain the cost of online-learning for a prolonged period. At some point surfing is bound to give way to subsistence. That is to say nothing of the linguistic barrier occasioned by e-learning. The bulk of educational materials on the internet are printed in foreign languages, which would require some educational attainment to comprehend. Hence, post-pandemic, a considerable percentage of children of current internet users, since deprived of access to educational materials,



would have slid into the ranks of those wanting in online school attendance. This will push up deficits in education and portend an increase in the national MPI. —

Effect of COVID-19 on Six-years of Schooling

Six years of schooling is the cut-off for educational attainment as recommended by the Alkire and Foster methodology for computing the MPI (Alkire and Foster, 2016; 2019). Although that comes with a caveat, “However, completing six years of schooling is no panacea. Schools may be ramshackle, and teachers may not teach, so six years of schooling may convey little” (OPHI, 2019 p.12). Substandard as the quality of education attained in six years of schooling in Nigeria, it far outweighs the lack thereof. Therefore, despite recent gains in national educational attainment (UNICEF, 2019), the odds are that the COVID-19 lockdown will force many children out of school. There are a number of reasons why this would happen, but the most pertinent is a fragile social security system with respect to Nigeria’s inadequate adoption of the Universal Basic Income (UBI). The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) scheme of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) is Nigeria’s version of the UBI. Though it has been a welcome development from government since 2015, there is yet a yawning need for improvement in its value and in its spread. The CCT disburses ₦5,000 monthly (calculated as \$30 at inception) to persons considered to live below the \$1.90 monetary poverty line of the World Bank. The amount itself does not scale the monetary poverty level and it is largely disbursed in northern Nigeria which inhabits the bulk of the multi-dimensionally poor. A bit will be said about sub-national MPI later, but for the present the interest is on how financial insecurity impinges on educational poverty.

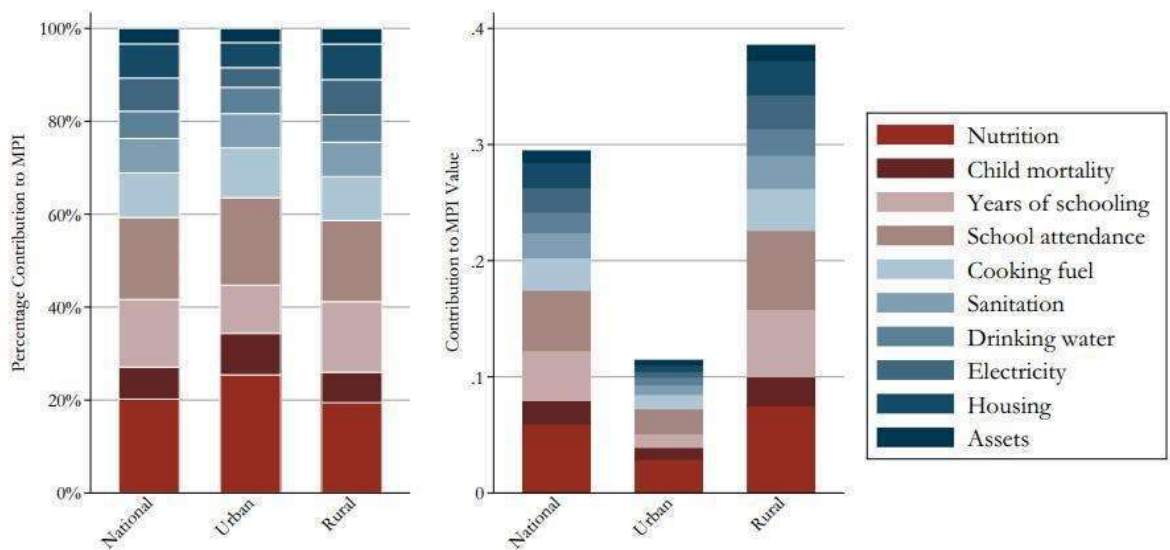
Due to financial insecurity many school-age children drop out of school. While some are into full-time child labour, others (the females) are given away in arranged marriages. These constitute the 13.2million out-of-school children enumerated by UNICEF. However, an additional set of child-workers are likely to lose their studentship if the disruption of academic work persists as a result of COVID-19. This is because insipient financial insecurity is likely to take a new dimension. The children to be affected are those who practise child-labour in the evenings after school. During this pandemic era, both school and work are on hold. Intellect and income are stalled. Alternative sources of subsistence, such as petty farming and hunting are also strained by restrictions in movement. The situation could be worse, as the entire family capital risks being spent during the lockdown. It would be unlikely for children in such circumstances to return to school post-pandemic, except of course facilitated by UBI.

Joint effects of MPI Education Indicators

The resultant effect of slacking in school attendance and years of schooling is a vicious poverty circle trapping in which low income begets low educational attainment, which in turn begets low income, and the spiral swing persists in perpetuity. The poverty trap points out in high relief the status of basic education as a fundamental human right, without which it would be impossible to attain self-actualization. Education is the leveller, the salutary bridge between being deprived and being privileged. It facilitates the expression of human freedom by multiplying possibilities and enhancing the capacity to choose right. Sadly, as shown in Fig. 3, school attendance and years of schooling are high contributors to the MPI and MPI value in Nigeria; coming only closely behind nutrition, a health indicator. In fact, when pooled together, the education indicators rank higher than health indicators in defining the multi-dimensionally poor. For a fact, it is the education indicators which often determine nutrition and lifestyle choices; just as they are determinants of monetary capacity.



Figure 3 Indicator contribution to overall poverty by area (OPHI, 2018)



Notes: Source: MICS year 2016-2017, own calculations.

Dimensional Breakdown of COVID-19 Effects on Educational Poverty

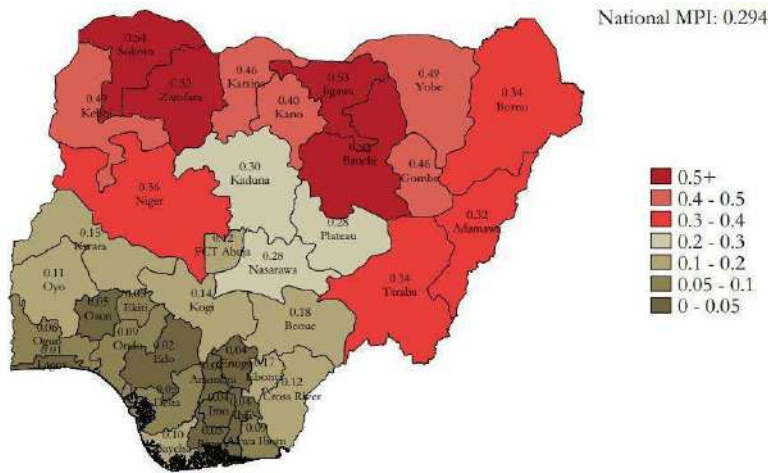
Much as the COVID-19 lockdown will grossly affect the nation; the resultant steep rise in multidimensional poverty will affect sectors of the populace differently. In this section, the projection about MPI education indicators will be related to the dynamics of sub-national regions, urban and rural areas, and gender.

COVID-19, Educational Poverty and Sub-national Regions

Whereas multidimensional poverty has a national spread, its intensity in northern Nigeria is quite alarming, relative to the south. Fig. 4, culled from OPHI Country Briefing (2019) buttresses this point. It shows by colour and shades the incidence and intensity of multidimensional poverty in Nigeria. MPI values are multiples of poverty incidence (H) and intensity (A) for each state, calculated from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MIC). To say that poverty is experienced with more intensity in a region than the other is to imply that a poor person in the intense region is deprived in more indicators than the poor in the other region. Whereas as in Fig. 4, there are multi-dimensionally poor populations across the country; all the states of core northern Nigeria have an MPI equal to or higher than 0.2 (≥ 0.2), which is an expression of intense poverty. Conversely, all of the states in southern Nigeria have MPI equal to or less than 0.2 (≤ 0.2). These values reflect a sharp poverty contrast between northern and southern Nigeria.



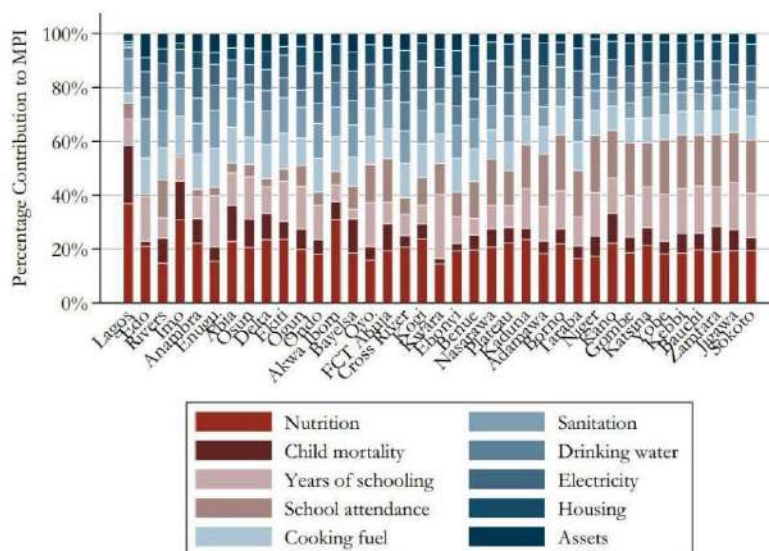
Figure 4 Sub-national MPI for Nigeria (OPHI, 2018)



Notes: Source: MICS year 2016-2017, own calculations. Underlying shp-file from Global Administrative Areas (2018).

Fig. 5 also further portrays the contribution of each MPI indicator to the multidimensional poverty scale. The states are arranged on the basis of rightward increase in the intensity of multidimensional poverty. Observably, the states of northern Nigeria all appear to the right extremities of the graph. Moving rightward from FCT Abuja, only Cross River and Ebonyi states punctuate the northern states in terms of the intensity of poverty. This is a parlous reflection of the crass sub-national regional inequality between the northern and southern Nigeria.

Figure 5 Contribution of Indicators to Sub-national MPI (OPHI, 2019)



Notes: Source: MICS year 2016-2017, own calculations.



It has been established by the inequality adjusted human development index (IHDI) that globally, there is a strong correlation between inequality and education.

The correlation coefficient of 0.737 indicates a strong association. The association tends to be strongest in Europe and Central Asia, where the incidence of multidimensional poverty and education inequality are low, and in Sub-Saharan Africa, where both are higher.

OPHI (2019 p.18)

This correlation is given visual accent in Fig. 5, as adjudged by the heights of the bars representing the education indicators. These bars are quite noticeably jointly higher for the states in northern than they are for those in southern Nigeria. This is not unconnected with dwindled status of the *Almajiri* phenomenon, inherent in the north. Hitherto, the *Almajiri* were children groomed in Islamic religion and culture. They became imams and Sharia court judges and enjoyed elite status. The advent of the British, who did not recognise this brand of education, led to the seizure of public funding to the *Almajiri* schools. The turn in fortune has to date turned their students to beggars and potential security threats (Daily Trust, 2019). The presence of unschooled and un-attended children roaming the streets of northern Nigeria has become part of the educational poverty trap. This, in large measure, contributes to the educational disadvantage, which constitutes a major determinant of multidimensional poverty more in Northern than in southern Nigeria. Bringing this into the context of COVID-19, there are bound to be more new educationally poor populations in northern Nigeria than in the south as a result of sustained social distancing. Many, who up till the pandemic attended school may, for reasons of economy and parental neglect, join the *Almajiri* and just linger on post-COVID-19. There therefore ought to be a dedicated drive to enrol the *Almajiri* in schools after the pandemic. For as OPHI (2019 p.17) argues, "Policies can be tailored to different groups of poor people, including the most and the least intensely deprived".

Urban and Rural Educational Poverty Peculiarities

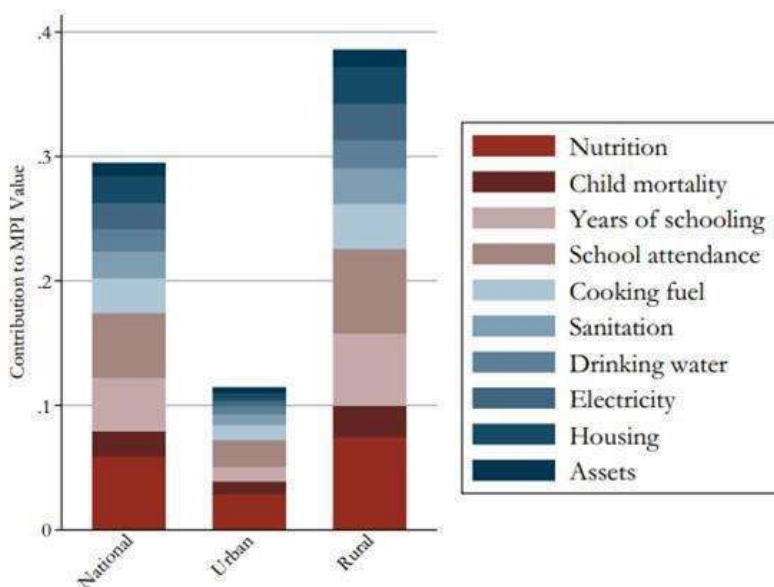
Different priorities pertain to urban and rural life, and these settings privilege urban dwellers above rural populations in terms of educational poverty and multidimensional poverty. Starting with the education indicator of school attendance; whereas, school attendance is taken as a norm for enrolled urban children; field experience has shown that farm attendance is prioritised over school attendance in the rural areas. As such, it is quite usual for school attendance to drop remarkably in rural settings during the rainy season when crop planting is at its peak. As a matter of fact, rural school teachers are wont to deploy students to school and personal farms during the planting and harvesting season.

Aside from school attendance being taken up by farming, there is also the unwillingness of teachers to work in rural areas. Teachers loathe working in rural areas because of the low incentives and poor standard of living therein. Teachers in urban areas could more easily augment their pay by taking up lucrative private coaching, and even enrol in academic programmes to acquire more skills and improve marketability. Those who work in rural areas are not spoilt for choice. As a result of the unattractiveness of rural areas to teachers, those who end up working in rural schools are either forced by compulsory posting such as the National Youth Service Corps or by social affiliations such as marriage or royal lineage. As may be imagined, such compulsion impedes motivation and slows down the learning process. The situation will only worsen with the arrest of school activities by COVID-19. Fig. 6 (part of Fig. 3) reflects the urban-rural dichotomy in



the MPI value due to the contribution of education indicators of multidimensional poverty. It reveals how thinly sliced the urban poverty indicators are relative to the rural. This is indicative of the severity of rural poverty. The rural poor are poor in many ways, and education indicators have big chunks among the pointers. COVID-19 home stay will only widen the gap. As such there should be rurally directed stimuli to cushion the effect.

Figure 6 Indicator contribution to MPI value by area (OPHI, 2018)

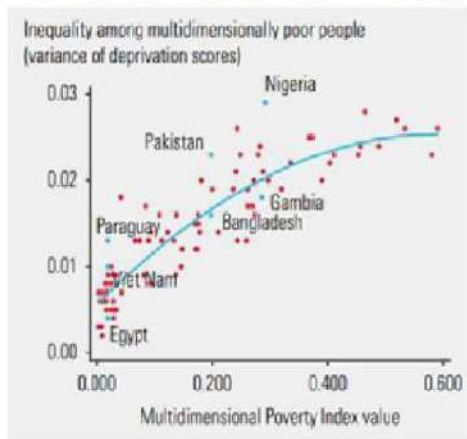


Gender, Education and COVID-19

Nigeria is the worst hit by poverty inequality in sub-Saharan Africa and indeed the world (Fig. 7). “In Sub-Saharan Africa, Gambia and Nigeria have similar MPI values (around 0.290), but inequality is higher in Nigeria (variance of 0.029) than in Gambia (0.018)” (OPHI, 2019 p17). The abiding enormous poverty inequality in Nigeria tilts more to the female gender (see Fig. 8 from DHS, 2018 p84). While 35% of women get no education at all, 22% of men do not. In the same vein, 17% of men go beyond secondary education and only 11% of women attain that level. This shows that at the two extremes of the lack of education and the fullness of it, men fair significantly better than women. It is curious to note, however that an even percentage of men and women complete primary education and stop there, while more men get the opportunity to forge to higher attainment.

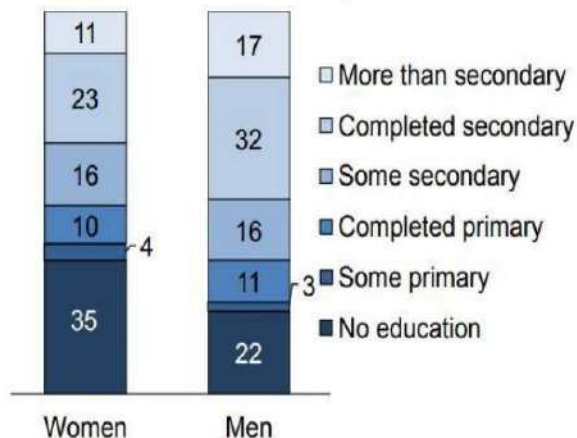


Figure 7 Nigeria as the worst case of MPI inequality



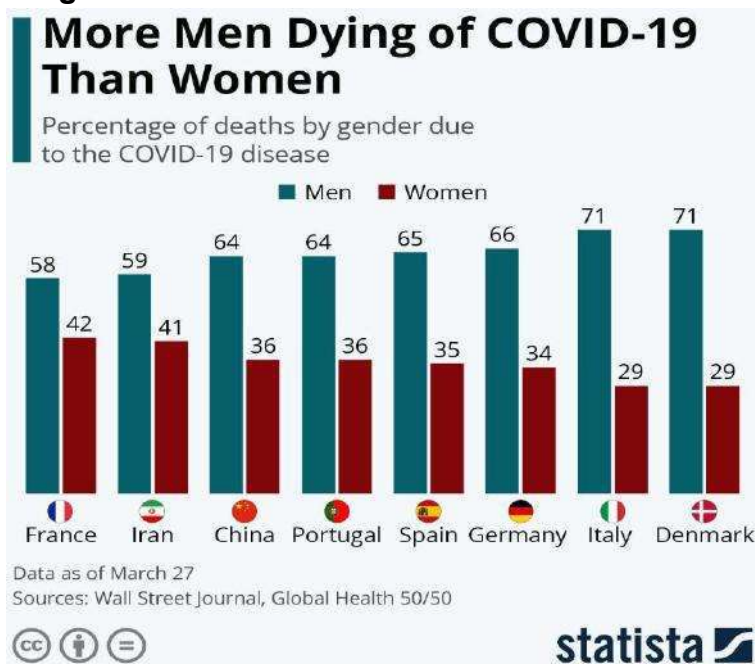
Note: Data are from surveys conducted between 2007 and 2018.
Source: Alkire and Santos 2019.

Figure 8 Percent distribution of women and men age 15-49 by highest level of schooling attended or completed



The gender imbalance may, however, tip with COVID-19, as reports emerge that twice as many men are dying from the disease than are women (Fig. 9). This may infringe on education indicators in several ways. It might reduce enrolment as some households may lose their breadwinners and children are forced out of school. It may also reduce the number of male teachers available more than it does females. Boys could also be forced to early fulltime employment so as to fill the gap of a deceased parent. To deal with these dynamics, post-COVID data must be sought for the gender variables mentioned and more.

Figure 9



Reining Back Education Indicators

The paper has illuminated ways by which education poverty indicators may peak at the instance of the COVID-19 pandemic. To rein back these effects a number of coping strategies must be evoked. There would yet be the need to investigate and expand these strategies, as they are only tentatively presented here.

4. Shoring up the Conditional Cash Transfer scheme in terms of a realistic value and a nationwide spread. As is the case with UBI in other climes, the amount per person would vary with **evidence of the number of children in school**. The UBI should be tied to BVN or national ID-card or both. The programme should be funded from a special tax on those who earn above a national average income on a pro rata basis.

5. Rural and Urban Child Labour Prevention

There is a need to disaggregate urban and rural child labour. The former is street after-school hawking; the latter is farming during school time. For the latter, there should be synergy between the Ministry of Agriculture and the University Agricultural Engineering Departments to fabricate low-tech mechanical tools to be deployed to rural areas. That way, fewer hands will be required in farms and children will be less engaged.

a Harnessing IT and Technical Resources of the NYSC for Radio and Elearning

There should be a dedicated deployment of youth corps members to a digital educational material unit. The task of this Unit will be to develop E-educational materials in a systematic manner and in such a way that they can be deployed as accessories to face-to-face teaching and adapted for online and radio/TV-teaching during pandemics. Licences could be granted for educational radio/TV and Edunet (this may be handled by communications giants).

b School Meal Distribution Database and Expansion. Good meals will always attract students, whether rural or urban. The National Home Grown School Feeding Programme should be reorganised in such a way that it attracts even the *Almajiri* to enrolment. Indeed, if the *Almajiri* are on the streets for food. They will attend school if it guarantees them food. There should also be a definite plan to ensure that these meals get to urban public schools; especially in communities where child-labour is the norm. The database to be assembled would include students' home addresses, so that they may still be supplied food during lockdowns.

c Effective Monitoring and Evaluation of Education Indicators of poverty The N-power Programme of the Federal Government should be re-tooled to adequately monitor and evaluate the education and other indicators of the MPI.

To arrest a climb in education indicators, each of the aforementioned measures and more yet need to be carefully firmed out in researched documents.



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House 2, No 80, Yakubu Gowon Crescent
Asokoro, Abuja, Nigeria



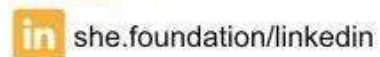
info@she.foundation
www.she.foundation



+234 (0) 708 474 2474



[shefoundationng](#)



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