



## Promoting Adolescent Well-Being as A Prerequisite for Nigeria's National Development: A 21st Century Perspective

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### Abstract

This research investigates the significance of well-being on the overall development of the nation, focused on the Nigerian context. It discusses the challenges and the prospects. Primary and secondary qualitative and quantitative data, including academic papers, governmental and international organizational sheets, are analyzed using a mixed approach. It emphasizes the correlation of adolescent well-being to development, considering enormous potential adolescents hold in future nation building. Simultaneously, it criticizes the absence of basic building blocks, which include educational systems, scope of healthcare, and economic opportunity. Therefore, the study suggests the need to address well-being from different fronts that includes psychosocial development through education and healthcare systems, economic pipelines, and civic and social rights active participation. The study speaks to the conscience of educational leaders, politicians, and developmental practitioners on advancing adolescent well-being, considering national development aspirations of Nigeria.



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### INTRODUCTION

Despite the efforts put in various policy directions and development plans, poverty, inequality, and social unrest remain commonplace in Nigeria. Part of the reason why is the lack of attention paid to the well-being of the adolescents in the population. Nigeria Demographic Profile (2022) shows that nearly 42.54% of Nigeria's population is 0-14 years and 19.61% is 15-24 years. For Nigeria's national development, tapping investments in the well-being of adolescents is fundamental, as this is the only population segment that truly has the potential to positively alter the nation's future.

Many obstacles prevent adolescents in Nigeria from prospering such as inadequate access to educational opportunities, social and healthcare unemployment, and the lack of economic opportunities. Supporting adolescents through empowerment programs, religious and moral education, and structured engagement can prepare them to play meaningful roles in national development (Nwadiokwu, Ossai, & Alordia, 2024). Nigeria as an economy continues the over-reliance on crude oil, with little attention paid to diversification. Funding and infrastructural decay

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has further contributed to the education sector's lack of diversification (Ogwumike, 2015). On the political front, the chronic celebration of corrupt leadership and the celebration of morally questionable achievements creates disillusionment towards the value and systems of hard work, and civic responsibility (Oba-Adenuga et al., 2015).

This study seeks to fill the gap in understanding how the well-being of adolescents relates to national development in Nigeria. More specifically, the focus is on how the well-being of adolescents relates to national development, as well as how to promote the well-being of adolescents.

This study examines the interconnection between adolescent well-being and national development in Nigeria by analyzing how the conditions and challenges faced by adolescents influence broader developmental outcomes. It identifies key problems affecting adolescents and explores their implications for the country's social and economic progress. Based on this analysis, the study proposes strategic actions and policy directions aimed at enhancing adolescent well-being as a foundation for sustainable national development.

By integrating the fields of adolescent development and national development, this research seeks to fill an existing gap in the literature and provide insights for policymakers, educators, and development stakeholders on fostering a development agenda that is responsive to the needs of young people in Nigeria.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

### **Development**

Development is a multifaceted term with various interpretations, often shaped by the context in which it is used. Scholars tend to define it based on the specific circumstances of their studies. Naomi (2015) views development as more than just economic progress; it includes equitable distribution of resources, access to healthcare, education, housing, and other basic services aimed at enhancing both individual and collective quality of life. Gboyega (2023) sees development as encompassing all initiatives geared toward improving human living conditions across all spheres. According to Todaro and Smith (2016), development is best understood through three core elements: sustenance, self-esteem, and freedom universal goals shared by individuals and societies alike. Hence, development can be understood as a process of meeting basic human needs while creating a supportive environment and promoting effective governance.

### **National Development**

The term "national," as defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, refers to something that encompasses the entire nation. National development, according to Mezieobi et al. (2015), is a broad concept that includes the economic, political, social, and religious progress of a country. Obasi (2010) describes it as a social process through which a nation mobilizes its human and material resources to transform its environment and elevate the overall quality of life for its citizens. This process involves the unified effort and collective determination of the populace. Mezieobi (2013) further defines national development as a systematic transformation across economic, scientific, political, and technological domains through strategic management, civic participation, and a shared commitment to societal advancement. For the purpose of this study, national development is operationally defined as the capacity of a nation to utilize its resources (Ossai, 2024) to improve public welfare by providing essential services such as security, education, clean water, electricity, transportation, healthcare, infrastructure, digital technology, and effective governance.

### **Adolescence**

Adolescence represents a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood, marked by significant biological, cognitive, and emotional changes. The term originates from the Greek word "adolescence," meaning to grow into maturity. A primary task of this phase is preparing for adult responsibilities. As noted by Larson et al. (2022), the future of any society largely depends on how well adolescents are prepared during this period. Adolescence is characterized as both a time of opportunity and challenge, involving a shift from dependence to independence, accompanied by puberty and the psychological changes that come with it. Typically, adolescence spans three stages: early (ages 11–14), middle (14–17), and late adolescence (17–20). Development experts consider it to begin around age 10 or 11 and continue for approximately ten years (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2015; WHO, 2016). This stage is particularly vulnerable, requiring youth to readjust socially, academically, and within the family setting.

Historical and philosophical perspectives offer varying views on adolescence. Plato associated this stage with the development of aesthetic appreciation and amusement. Aristotle described it as a time of intense emotions and impulsive behaviors, particularly concerning sexuality and personal choices. Socrates viewed adolescence through a moral lens, identifying it as a phase of defiance and emotional unrest. Rousseau saw it as the emergence of rational thought and self-awareness. During this stage, adolescents are full of energy and curiosity, which drives exploration and critical thinking. G. Stanley Hall (1904), considered the pioneer of adolescent psychology, characterized it as a period of "storm and stress." For this paper, adolescents are defined as individuals between the ages of 11 and 20, acknowledging that the onset and duration may vary between individuals.

### **Well-being**

Well-being broadly refers to the overall quality of life experienced by individuals. In general usage, it denotes a state of happiness, health, and prosperity. Within development literature, the term often takes on a more technical meaning, involving aspects of welfare, utility, and multidimensional indicators of societal advancement. Although widely used in child development studies, the term is inconsistently defined (Pollard & Lee, 2023). Statham and Chaise (2010) describe well-being as a dynamic state achieved when individuals are able to meet their personal and social goals. It encompasses both objective indicators, such as income, access to education, and health status, and subjective factors like life satisfaction, happiness, and personal fulfillment. Child well-being is generally classified into five domains: physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and economic. In this context, well-being refers to the state of happiness and life satisfaction that emerges from a high quality of life supported by a conducive environment and responsive governance.

### **Conceptual Framework of Adolescent Well-being**

Adolescent well-being is a multifaceted concept, encompassing several interconnected domains that collectively influence a young person's ability to mature into an educated, economically stable, productive, and healthy adult. This study identifies seven critical domains that shape adolescent well-being: civic engagement, economic empowerment, education, health, information and communication technology (ICT), safety and security, and family structure. These elements are not isolated; they interact in ways that can reinforce each other, producing compounded effects that either enhance or diminish adolescent development.

### **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF DEVELOPMENT**

This study is based on the work of Erik Erikson who developed the Psychosocial Theory of Development. He delineated 8 consecutive stages of development, all of which occur sequentially and

are to be completed by the individual at a specific age. Each one of these stages involves different social institutions and provides different psycho-affective tasks which need to be completed by the individual. The successful completion of a stage results in the healthy development of a core virtue, while failure results in relatively permanent emotional and social dysfunctions.

### **Adolescence Stage: Identity Vs. Role Confusion**

The adolescence stage (12-18 years) is a transition period from childhood to adulthood. During this period, individuals are preoccupied with establishing a distinct identity by integrating their competencies and values into a unified self. According to Erikson, the primary psychosocial strength developed in this stage is fidelity, which entails being true to self and to others. In the Nigerian context, however, identity formation is a challenge due to the unyielding social, cultural, and economic structures concerning adolescence.

### **Linking Erikson's Theory to Nigerian Socio-Political Context**

In the Nigerian context, adolescence is typified by role confusion, wherein adolescents cannot reconcile the demands of their culture with their personal desires. The socio-political landscape of the nation, which is marred by corruption, poverty, and insecurity, aggravates identity problems and weakens the self-concept formation of adolescents. It is, therefore, critical to construct social and political mechanisms that promote self-worth in adolescents to allow positive identity formation.

### **Focus on Adolescence for National Development**

This study places special emphasis on Stage 5 Adolescence, as it is a particularly volatile and formative period, often described as one of "storm and stress." Adolescents face multiple developmental challenges, including identity formation, independence, emotional regulation, mental health issues (such as anxiety and mood disorders), and relationship dynamics.

Erikson's notion of ego identity is especially crucial: it refers to an adolescent's ability to understand who they are and how they fit into society. Failure to establish this identity can result in a state of role confusion, often referred to as an identity crisis. Adolescents in this stage explore options, embrace change, and try to shape goals for adulthood. However, many struggle to reconcile bodily changes and social pressures with a stable sense of self.

Within the family setting, identity conflicts may manifest as rebellion, frustration, or withdrawal. For example, a child growing up in a family of professionals might desire a career path in entertainment or sports, creating tension and confusion. When adolescents experience unresolved identity crises, they may exhibit problematic behaviors ranging from substance abuse and school dropout to anger directed at family, political systems, or religious institutions.

Given the gravity of this developmental phase, it is vital that parents, teachers, policymakers, and community leaders recognize the risks and provide support systems. Guiding adolescents through this stage can strengthen family cohesion, enhance individual well-being, and ultimately contribute to the nation's progress. Adolescents who successfully navigate this period tend to achieve higher life satisfaction and are better equipped to contribute meaningfully to their communities making them key agents in Nigeria's national development.

## **National Development Plans and the Imperative of Adolescent Well-being in Nigeria**

### **National Development Plans in Nigeria**

Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has persistently grappled with the challenge of achieving sustainable development. Aremu (2023) notes that Nigeria remains a country where virtually all known models of development have been attempted, yet significant progress remains

elusive. The nation's post-independence development history is marked by ambitious planning initiatives that were often undermined by poor implementation, unstable governance, and over-reliance on external financing.

The First National Development Plan (1962–1968) aimed to improve access to health, education, and employment. However, it failed largely due to overdependence on external funding only 14% of the projected 50% foreign input was realized (Ogwumike, 2015). The collapse of the First Republic and the outbreak of the civil war further disrupted the plan.

The Second National Development Plan (1970–1974) was launched after the civil war, focusing on agriculture, industry, manpower, and infrastructure development. This was followed by the Third Plan (1975–1980) which was even more ambitious, emphasizing rural development and agricultural revitalization.

The Fourth Plan (1981–1985) aimed to improve living standards by increasing real income, reducing unemployment, and promoting equitable income distribution. Yet, despite immense oil revenues, these plans failed to lay the foundation for industrial and agrarian revolutions necessary to eradicate poverty. Initiatives like Operation Feed the Nation and the Green Revolution Programme fell short of expectations.

Subsequent strategies such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Vision 2010, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), and Vision 2020 have similarly underperformed, often lacking clear methodologies and sustainable outcomes.

### **Problems of National Development in Nigeria**

Despite numerous policy attempts, meaningful development in Nigeria remains largely unachieved. Several core challenges have been identified:

1. **Lack of Inclusive Planning:** Past development efforts lacked grassroots consultation. Mimiko (2018) highlights the failure to involve local government officials and rural communities in planning processes, which undermines ownership and effectiveness.
2. **Poor Leadership:** Nigeria's leadership crisis has been marked by corruption, injustice, and greed. According to Oba-Adenuga, Oba-Adenuga, and Williams-Oladapo (2015), successive leaders have mismanaged sectors such as health, education, and energy, promoting poverty, insecurity, and social instability.
3. **Mono-Economic Structure:** The nation's overdependence on crude oil has stifled diversification and left other economic sectors underdeveloped.
4. **Corruption and Indiscipline:** Corruption has become institutionalized, with governance often serving elite interests. Selective anti-corruption efforts and nepotism further erode public trust and hinder progress.

### **Importance of Adolescent Well-being to National Development**

Adolescents represent the future of any nation. As part of the youth demographic, they hold critical potential for societal transformation. The adolescent period, often described by Hall (1904) as one of "storm and stress," is characterized by significant physical, emotional, and cognitive transitions. These changes carry both risk and opportunity.

The World Health Organization (2018) asserts that adolescents are central to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with their well-being directly influencing outcomes in poverty reduction, education, gender equality, and social inclusion.

In Nigeria, adolescents play vital roles in:

1. **Sports:** With international benchmarks like UEFA's €4.6 billion revenue in 2016, Nigeria can similarly harness youth potential in sports for economic growth.

2. Entertainment: Nigeria's entertainment industry generated approximately \$2.8 billion between 2016 and 2021 (Obiora, 2017).
3. Education: Institutions like JAMB have also demonstrated the economic potential of youth participation generating N46 billion in six years (Adesulu, 2018).

### **Constraints to Adolescent Well-being**

The potential of Nigerian adolescents is constrained by various societal and systemic issues:

1. Negative Role Models and Bad Leadership: The prevalence of corrupt leaders and the celebration of dubious success stories distort value systems.
2. Moral Decay: A decline in public morality and the glorification of mediocrity suppress the spirit of excellence.
3. Materialism and Impunity: The "get-rich-quick" mentality, fueled by corruption and nepotism, discourages hard work and civic responsibility.
4. Personality Cults and Poor Reward Systems: Hero-worship of individuals with questionable ethics diminishes the motivation to pursue excellence through legitimate means.

### **Strategies for Improving Adolescent Well-being**

To unleash the full potential of adolescents, Nigeria must adopt a multi-pronged approach:

1. Family Upbringing: Strong family foundations are vital for adolescent psychological and moral development. Parents play a critical role as primary socializers, and harmonious family interactions foster well-adjusted youth.
2. Responsible Parenting: Effective parenting supports adolescents' physical, emotional, and intellectual development. The increasing breakdown of family structures rising divorce rates, parental neglect, and reliance on domestic staff exposes adolescents to maladaptive behaviours like truancy and cultism (Oba-Adenuga et al., 2015).
3. Access to Quality Education: Education not only equips adolescents with cognitive skills but also instills civic values and aspirations. A robust education system enhances both individual and national capacity.
4. Civic Participation: Encouraging adolescents to engage in democratic processes builds a sense of agency. Legislative reforms such as the "Not Too Young to Run" bill exemplify the shift toward youth inclusion in governance and policy.
5. Information and Communication Technology (ICT): ICT platforms offer adolescents access to global information, networks, and entrepreneurial opportunities. However, unreliable electricity and costly internet limit access. Addressing infrastructure challenges is key to maximizing ICT benefits.
6. Healthcare Access: Adolescents face health threats ranging from communicable diseases to mental illness and substance abuse. A comprehensive adolescent-friendly healthcare system is essential to ensuring their well-being and long-term productivity.

Adolescent well-being is inextricably linked to national development. Nigeria's development trajectory has been marred by failed plans, leadership deficits, and systemic inefficiencies. However, by investing in the health, education, participation, and holistic development of adolescents, the nation can lay a strong foundation for a prosperous and sustainable future.

Table 1. Adolescent Well-being Domains and National Development Indicators

<b>Adolescent Well-being Domains</b>	<b>National Development Indicators</b>
Civic Engagement	Voter turnout, community involvement

Economic Empowerment	Unemployment rate, poverty rate, GDP growth rate
Education	Literacy rate, educational attainment, access to quality education
Health	Life expectancy, mortality rate, access to healthcare
Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	Internet penetration, digital literacy, access to ICT Infrastructure
Safety and Security	Crime rate, violence rate, sense of safety
Family Structure	Family stability, parental involvement, support systems

The table conveys the relationship between varying domains of adolescent well-being and corresponding indicators of national development, thus calling for a unified strategy to improve these areas.

By applying Erikson's psychosocial theory to the Nigerian socio-political context, this work offers a clearer picture of the specific Nigerian context realities adolescents face. The summary table provides a framework to understand the relationship between guardrails on national development and the wellbeing of adolescents to identify focus areas for policy and investment.

## CONCLUSION

As articulated in this study, the importance of investing on the wellbeing of adolescents remains significant to the development of the Nigeria. Nigeria stands to gain a great deal on its promise to become a prosperous and sustainable state by investing the health, education, and all round development of its adolescents. The potential of adolescents has not been recognized in the developmental literature of the country. The expressions we provided should focus on the importance of wellbeing of adolescents in the context of developmental literature for the country. The unparalleled challenges Nigeria faces today in the context of 21st century calls on the policymakers, educators, and all the stakeholders to focus on adolescents and their wellbeing so that adolescents can become the advocates for development of the country.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The government should initiate widespread campaigns aimed at reorienting societal values and raising public awareness on the role of adolescents in national development. These campaigns should clearly articulate the vision of what adolescents are expected to be and contribute to Nigeria's growth.
2. Government should adequately fund the education sector and rehabilitate decaying infrastructure. In line with UNESCO's recommendation, a minimum of 26% of the national budget should be allocated to education to ensure access to quality learning environments for all adolescents.
3. There is a need to create and strengthen platforms that enable adolescents to understand their rights and responsibilities. Policies and programs should be developed to promote their active participation in social, political, developmental, and environmental activities. This includes removing systemic barriers that hinder their full contribution to society.
4. The government should invest heavily in developing sporting and recreational facilities across communities. These serve as vital tools for promoting adolescent physical health, emotional well-being, and vocational development.

5. Greater focus should be placed on Erik Erikson's fifth psychosocial stage identity versus role confusion to help adolescents develop a strong sense of ego identity. Educational, counseling, and mentoring programs should be tailored to assist adolescents in navigating this critical developmental stage effectively.

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