ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS IN ACHIEVING HEALTH-RELATED SDGS (SDG 3) IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

International partnerships play a pivotal role in achieving health-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3) in Nigeria, where health challenges are significant and resources are limited. This paper examines the impact of global collaborations on Nigeria's progress toward SDG 3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all. The world has witnessed a series of partnerships in all forms and levels, with a strategic focus on low- and middle-income countries (LMIC), particularly Africa, in areas of food security, economic development, and health. In the area of health, SDG 3 was created to ensure the world achieves sustainable development and sufficiency. Thus, international partnerships have so far been fashioned in a way to achieve this goal. Despite these partnerships, the health systems in Nigeria are at best underdeveloped. This presents a problem the paper seeks to address. The objective of the study stems from finding out how partnerships with international organizations, donor agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have contributed to improving health outcomes. The paper employs the qualitative method of research while using the secondary sources of data and thematic/document analysis in analysing the data. Findings show that these partnerships have provided financial support, technical expertise, and innovative solutions to address key health challenges, including high maternal and child mortality rates, infectious diseases, and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). However, challenges such as inconsistent funding, poor governance, and the lack of local ownership have hindered the full potential of these collaborations. Thus, provision of financial resources, technical expertise, and policy support will help the international partnerships in curbing health care challenges. Finally, improvement in governance and accountability in Nigeria will make the collaborations and cooperations to be more effective and efficient.

Keywords: SDG 3, International Partnerships, Health Systems, Nigeria, Sustainable Development, Maternal Health, Infectious Diseases.

1.1. Introduction

The contemporary globe is increasingly intertwined, with events occurring in distant Asia impacting Africa. Globalization constitutes the contemporary world order, whereby cooperation, partnerships, and interconnectedness are essential components. Thus, countries around the world have continued to partner with one another based on economic, political, social, and environmental factors, and even, as the study implies, health.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by member states in 2015, highlight the importance of international collaborations. The Covid-19 epidemic in 2020 exacerbated the significance of partnerships amongst state and non-state actors, revealing the disparities and inequities between the wealthy and undeveloped nations. Categorically, these inequalities, according to underdevelopment scholars like Samir Amin and Andre Gunder Frank, incorporate several segments, ranging from economic, social, environmental, and even health.

Nevertheless, the SDGs signify a global cry for help to save not just Mother Nature and the climate but humanity in its entirety. As Le Blanc (2015: 37) rightly puts it in his work on SDGs and Integration, "The planet is dying and it is up to us humans to make sure it is saved. Nature has been corrupted and defiled. The coming together of nations in partnerships and integration might be the only solution."

The SDGs aim to achieve the complete eradication of various human-made and natural inequalities that have exacerbated challenges such as poverty, hunger, underdevelopment, and natural disasters like hurricanes, typhoons, and earthquakes. The SDGs prioritize the reformation and rehabilitation of global well-being, with a target for realization by the year 2030. Notably, SDG 3 focuses on health and seeks to ensure the provision of adequate healthcare facilities and the improvement of human lives (Baimenov & Liverakos, 2019). The attainment of the SDGs significantly depends on strategic and effective partnerships or cooperation among various actors, including state-to-state, state-to-non-state, and non-state-to-non-state entities. This collaboration is particularly vital for developing countries, irrespective of their capacity to fully implement the outlined agenda.

Nigeria is the giant of Africa, with a population of 216,783,381 comprising 108,350,410 males and 108,432,971 females (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). According to Statista (2024), there are 3.8 medical doctors per 10,000 patients in Nigeria, yearly health expenditures against the country's GDP do not exceed 3.03%, and life expectancy at birth sits at 61.79. Nigerians often suffer from various health challenges, including malaria, cholera, measles, infant and maternal mortality, and even HIV/AIDS. Health challenges in Nigeria are significantly exacerbated by inadequate healthcare infrastructure, insufficient health financing, and disparities in access to healthcare services. These issues represent critical barriers to achieving optimal health outcomes for Nigerians, posing a substantial threat to their well-being. Consequently, addressing these challenges highlights the importance of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3), which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all (Uzochukwu, 2015).

Cooperation amongst actors has become necessary in the realization of SDG 3, finding solutions to health challenges and activating potential strategies that will enable progress towards a healthy population in LMICs like Nigeria. These partnerships are essential in ensuring the mobilization of resources, provision

of technical assistance, and encouragement of capacity building in the health system. So far, Nigeria has cooperated and partnered with public, private, and third-party actors internationally or locally in combating diseases, improving maternal and child health, and strengthening health systems (Nwonwu, 2020).

If this is anything to go by, the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020 has exposed how no state can afford to live in autarchy. Effective international cooperation is essential to strategically address the health-related challenges confronting the world. This paper aims to contribute to the body of research on the role of international partnerships in Nigeria, specifically examining their contributions to achieving health-related SDGs. By analysing these collaborative efforts and their outcomes, the study seeks to provide insights into how global cooperation can further enhance healthcare systems in Nigeria.

The paper seeks to explore the role of international partnerships in strengthening Nigeria's healthcare system. Therefore, understanding its contributions to healthcare improvement in Nigeria towards the realization of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being).

1.2. Literature Review

The literature review of this paper closely examined two themes: International Partnerships and Health Systems & International Partnerships and Health-related SDGs (SDG 3).

International Partnerships and Health Systems

Collaborations between international institutions and states aimed at improving global health outcomes have been extensively documented in the field of Global Health. Previous studies have highlighted the efforts of these partnerships in implementing programs, projects, and initiatives within LMICs, demonstrating their impact in addressing health challenges in these contexts.

Smith et al. (2018) emphasize in their work on the dynamics of international partnerships in health systems that such collaborations—often involving synergies between public and private sectors—are intentionally designed to address longstanding inequities within global health systems. These partnerships facilitate the provision of resources, funding for research, the implementation of health projects or programs and capacity-building within health systems. They are typically established through bilateral or multilateral agreements between two or more countries or entities. Under these agreements, donor countries or actors provide the financial, technical, and organizational support necessary for the recipient parties to address specific health challenges effectively.

In a similar vein, Yamey et al. (2019), in their work "The Role of Global Health Partnerships in Improving Health Outcomes in Africa: The Case of the Global Fund and GAVI," argued that multinational corporations and multilateral organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO), the Global Fund, and GAVI have shown immense efforts towards the strengthening of global health systems. While partnering with countries, particularly within the third world, these organizations have acted against serious health challenges like malaria, HIV/AIDS, cholera, measles, etc. Also, Levine (2016) explained that GAVI, as an international organization, has played a vital role in the world, particularly Africa, as regards the provision of vaccines for both adults and children. These actions have led to the curtailing of vaccine-preventable diseases in the continent to a considerable extent.

For an exceptionally long time, international partnerships between multinational and multilateral organizations have included NGOs and civil society groups, who are able to reach the grassroots in the proper implementation of health programs. They serve as *"saviours or guardians of life"* who deliver essential services and adequate health care services to marginalized groups and push for good health policies that will revolutionize the health system. A very good example is the frequent collaborations of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) and different public and private actors on the challenge of health emergencies and raising the health level of people living in crisis areas (Abbasi, 2019).

Ayodele et al. (2017) explained the critical role of international partnerships in strengthening healthcare systems globally, particularly in LMICs. They argued that the contributions of these collaborations to overall health and well-being are significant, yielding both immediate health improvements and long-term benefits for healthcare systems. One notable area where these impacts are profoundly evident is in disease control and prevention. For instance, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), a product of various international partnerships, has achieved remarkable success, with a 99% reduction in global polio cases since its inception in 1998 (WHO, 2019). Nigeria's declaration as polio-free in 2020 further highlights the transformative role of international collaborations as a crucial factor in addressing healthcare challenges and strengthening health systems worldwide.

Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that the impacts of international partnership in healthcare systems go beyond disease control. It also centres on healthcare strengthening and all-round improvements. To this effect, international partnerships have become important in capacity building in healthcare systems for areas like healthcare infrastructure, health workforce training, and health information systems. African countries that have been beneficiaries of these partnerships have undergone improvements in the areas of maternal and child health services, expansion of new primary healthcare facilities, funding of health-related research, etc. (Barker et al., 2017).

In Nigeria, Uzochukwu et al. (2015) have argued that collaborations with international organizations like the WHO and Global Fund in an international partnership have so far led to massive improvement in the areas of capacity building, health funding, d, interventions, sensitization, and addressing health challenges. The Nigerian health sector is lacking in the financial capabilities and technical strength to fully provide its population with adequate health services; thus, these partnerships help in providing the framework for such improvement.

The work of Olajide et al. (2017) has highlighted the success of these international collaborations in combating malaria in Nigeria. The Global Fund, in partnership with the Nigerian government, has contributed to the fight against malaria and HIV/AIDS, facilitating the distribution of insecticide-treated nets (ITN) and anti-retroviral drugs, which have helped to reduce the spread and numbers of those infected in Nigeria. The health system of the Nigerian people and the international collaborations it has been exposed to cannot be overemphasized.

International Partnerships and Health-Related SDGs (SDG 3)

As enunciated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the SDGs are a global emancipation of resources, actions, and intentions towards saving humanity and nature, and SDG 3—Good Health and Well-being is part of the agenda. This agenda illustrates the collective effort towards

improving the lives and health of people around the world. The Global Sustainable Development Report (2019) has it that the SDG 3 embodies the eradication of all health-related challenges (reduction of child and maternal mortality, fighting deadly diseases and infections, provision of good health services, etc.).

Smith (2018) asserts that the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All (SDG3 GAP), established in 2019, was designed to strengthen collaboration among public and private actors, particularly the 13 multilateral health, development, and humanitarian agencies involved. According to Smith, the creation of GAP was driven by the objective of accelerating the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) through effective partnerships across institutions and stakeholders. GAP serves as a platform for stakeholders to engage in joint actions and provide coordinated support to countries in need (WHO, 2024). The leading health agencies, each guided by their respective mandates and principles, commit to pooling financial and technical resources to support LMICs and to address inefficiencies within health systems.

The Global Fund Report (2020) outlines the significance of international partnerships amongst multilateral corporations in the realization of SDG 3 around disease control. The reports explain their partnership with GAVI and WHO, which have helped combat deadly diseases like AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, and vaccines for infectious diseases in LMICs. The report also outlined that billions of dollars have been invested in malaria reduction programs and projects, which has in turn led to a 60% reduction rate of the malaria illness all over the world between the years 2000 and 2005 (Global Fund, 2020).

International partnerships have significantly advanced the realization of SDG 3 globally, particularly through collaborative efforts in maternal and child health. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2021), these collaborations often involve home governments and NGOs working together to implement maternal and child health projects and programs. Such initiatives have been instrumental in reducing maternal and infant mortality rates, especially in LMICs like Nigeria. The UNICEF report (2021) highlights efforts such as vaccination campaigns, antenatal care services and nutritional support programs as key components of these partnerships. Since 1990, UNICEF's interventions have contributed to a 50% reduction in global under-five mortality rates. These efforts exemplify the robust collaboration between international actors and home countries in pursuing the SDG 3 targets, especially the goal of achieving a healthy global population by 2030.

Nwonwu (2020) argued that despite the seamless collaborations and partnerships between the international actors in the actualization of SDG 3, there remain key challenges that have affected the efficacy of the partnerships. He opined that there is a challenge in the sustainability of these partnerships. The resources and funding that come from these international donors come from various actors, thus making international health programs dependent on these donations. There is a challenge to the nature of these donations and their sources because there can be fluctuations and changes in political priorities or economic conditions in these donor countries. This would forestall the flow of development in the health sector and programs in the recipient countries once there is a withdrawal of donations.

Uzochukwu et al. (2015) identified coordination and alignment challenges between international partners and local governments as significant obstacles. In many instances, there is a disconnect in the implementation process, where international actors conduct health programs independently of national health authorities. This lack of coordination can lead to duplication of efforts and inefficient use of

resources. Additionally, it may result in overlapping or conflicting health interventions, thereby undermining the achievement of SDG 3. Moreover, the exclusion of home countries from the design and implementation of health programs often produces solutions that are poorly adapted to local contexts, diminishing the long-term effectiveness of these initiatives.

1.3. Gap in the Literature

On a broader scale, most of the works of scholars available on this subject matter have examined the contributions of international partnerships to reinforcing healthcare systems on disease-specific programs like cholera, malaria, HIV/AIDS, etc. Limited studies have been done to understand and find out how these international co-operations align with Nigeria's broader health-related SDGs. Additionally, many of the works of scholars on this subject have focused on the role of international cooperation on the 17 SDGs, without singling out the health-related agenda. This paper focuses its lens on Nigeria and SDG 3. Achievement with the key role of international partnerships. It will also assess the long-term sustainability of these efforts in the context of achieving multiple SDG targets.

1.4. Methodology

This paper follows the qualitative research method in its collection of data. Consequently, the paper makes use of the document review/thematic style of analysis, where relevant documents obtained are sieved and vital information is interpreted according to themes. The secondary data of academic books, journal articles, internet materials, archives, official documents, etc. were used in the formation of this paper.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

In shedding more light on the role played by international partnership in the propagation and achievement of the SDG 3 agenda, particularly in Nigeria, the **Systems Theory** is a suitable theoretical framework for the research paper.

The theory is a multi-dimensional framework that highlights and explains the intricacies of how parts of a system function together appropriately to produce the best outcome. It emphasizes the interconnectedness, interdependence, and dynamic interactions between parts of a system, whether biological, social, or organizational. Systems theory views the system, focusing on the relationships and processes that bind its parts together.

Scholars like Talcott Parsons and Jay Forrester are early proponents of the theory. Systems theory opines that "holism" is the best way to understand any phenomena. In other words, a system cannot be fully understood in separation or isolation, as the interactions and connections between these parts explain the workings of the system. Secondly, interconnection is crucial for the success of every system. The theory argues that for there to be a breakthrough, each part will work together for the success of the system. Thirdly, the theory suggests that systems are best regulated via feedback mechanisms, which serve as a booster (positive) or caution (negative). This feedback helps the system in improving or maintaining its nature.

In relation to the paper, systems theory views health-related outcomes as the product of interconnected systems, including governments, international organizations, NGOs, and local communities. This holistic view aligns with the collaborative nature of international partnerships, emphasizing how each component interacts to influence health outcomes in Nigeria. The importance of cooperation and interdependence between stakeholders cannot be overemphasized. International partnerships involve diverse entities contributing resources, expertise, and strategic direction to tackle health challenges in Nigeria. Achieving SDG 3 involves managing complex systems with multiple feedback loops. Systems theory helps analyses how interventions by international partnerships (e.g., funding, technical support, or policy advocacy) create ripple effects across the healthcare ecosystem, impacting policies, service delivery, and health behaviours.

1.6. Findings and Discussion

So far, globalization and the advancement of the liberalism tenets, which focus on democratization and cooperation, have enabled the connection between international partnerships in Nigeria's SDG 3 achievement to be stronger than before. WHO (2020) argued that following the Covid-19 pandemic, the world has realized that in finding solutions to challenges that affect humanity, cooperation, joint coordination, and coming together with shared goals or interests is the only way forward. Thus, international actors and health organizations have continued to act under one umbrella via partnerships and collaborations.

The role that international partnerships play in advancing SDG 3 goals in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. This targets the collective well-being and healthy lives of Nigerians, as well as a rejuvenation of its healthcare system into serving its budding population better. The nature of Nigeria's healthcare system has been riddled with internal and external challenges like poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, high disease burden, etc. The role played by these international organizations and their partnerships in advancing SDG 3 goals or targets in Nigeria has helped bridge the resource and health-knowledge gaps due to donations and research funding.

According to Detomasi (2014), the roles of these international collaborations in achieving SDG 3 can vary due to their modus-operandi, diverse goals, context, and the program in question. However, there is always an overriding goal that surpasses their individual interests, thus pushing these international organizations, NGOs, home governments, and even private institutions to work as a joint body to achieve the SDG 3 targets faster, more efficiently, and more effectively. Categorically, Bull and McNeil (2019), in their popular work on international actors and partnerships, explain that there are five (5) key specifications of international partnerships: local implementation, resource mobilization, advocacy, policy development and lobbying, and market-based operations. All of these, they believed, have been instrumental in pushing the SDG 3 agenda towards complete realization. These roles have helped international partnerships in Nigeria push SDG 3 forward through advancing positive rules, creating cross-sectoral connections at the policy level, shifting individual and organizational behaviour and empowering marginalized and vulnerable people.

The roles played by international partnerships in achieving SDG 3 in Nigeria has so far included:

i. Financial Support and Resource Mobilization

This is believed to be one of the most significant roles played by international partnerships in Nigeria today, as regards the health-related SDGs. Organizations (international or local) serve as a finance booster to the healthcare system of Nigeria via numerous donations and funding done on an annual or monthly basis. The World Bank, Global Fund, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, etc., help fund health projects and programs in Nigeria addressing diseases like malaria, HIV/AIDS, infant and maternal health challenges, etc. According to the Global Fund report (2021), financial aid given to Nigeria by the fund so far has reached over 2.3 billion dollars.

ii. Technical Assistance and Capacity Building

As UNICEF (2021) mildly puts it, one of the roles played by international partnerships in upgrading the healthcare system in Nigeria, particularly in achieving the SDG 3 agenda, is the provision of technical expertise and ensuring capacity building. The WHO and USAID have been very instrumental in the strategic training of health workers and personnel in Nigeria, as well as shaping the health policies in the country to meet international standards. Nigeria's beneficial position has enabled it to enjoy modern healthcare practices, especially in the grassroots, where there are inadequate and limited health personnel.

iii. Disease Control and Emergency Response

International collaborations have made it possible for Nigeria to record significant successes and progress around disease control. In 2020, Nigeria announced the eradication of polio, acknowledging the efforts of WHO, Rotary International, and UNICEF. In 2014, Nigeria also joined Senegal as the only two countries to contain Ebola actively and successfully, with the support of international partnerships. In 2021, Nigeria benefited from the COVAX Initiative, which is a global partnership spearheaded by the WHO, GAVI, UNICEF, etc., to ensure adequate and enough Covid-19 vaccines reach every member of its population. Millions of vaccines were obtained and secured by the initiative to help curb the pandemic in Nigeria (GAVI Report, 2021).

iv. Advancing Maternal and Child Health

The maternal and infant mortality rate has been one of the key health challenges facing Nigeria, especially in the rural areas where functional health services are not available. According to UNICEF's (2024) data, about 576 per 100,000 women die during live births, which makes it the fourth largest globally. Annually, 262,000 babies die at birth, as the infant mortality rate in Nigeria stands at 69 per 1,000 live births. Lastly, under-five mortality rates for children have risen to 128 per 1,000 live births. To advance maternal and child health in Nigeria, international partnerships like Saving Mothers, Giving Life, and USAID have partnered, thereby enhancing emergency obstetric services and the promotion of skilled birth attendance. UNICEF has also aided the provision of immunization, nutrition programs, and clean water initiatives to significantly ensure the reduction of infant and under-five mortality rates.

v. Public Health Infrastructural Developments and Innovations

One of the ways to improve Nigeria's healthcare system and achieve the SDG 3 goal is to advertently pursue infrastructural developments and innovations. Thus, the international partnerships have played a role in the construction of healthcare facilities, providing essential medical supplies and integrating health innovations to the system in Nigeria. The World Bank in its report in 2020 has shown support for Nigeria's modernization of its total health delivery system includes improving supply chains and upgrading health

data management systems. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has also ensured the fusion of new health innovations like drugs, ITNs, repellents, etc. in the prevention and treatment of malaria in Nigeria (Osayi, 2021).

vi. Policy and Advocacy Support

Ultimately, international organizations and local actors have been the drivers shaping health policies, as well as proving support for policy changes in Nigeria. The WHO has provided technical assistance to the Nigerian government to help in shaping the health policies to meet international standards. Thus, ensuring the health strategies are evidence-based approaches that further deepen the achievement or realization of SDG 3. UNDP and UNFPA have partnered in their advocacy for better investments around sexual and reproductive health, which are also parts of the SDG 3 targets (UNFPA, 2020).

1.7. Conclusion

In a world where countries have decided to contract into a global village, cooperation and collaboration are the order of the day. To get things done effectively and efficiently, partnerships have often proven to be the best way. Thus, in achieving or advancing the health-related SDG 3 in Nigeria, the role of international partnership in achieving health for all cannot be overemphasized. Nigeria, being a developing nation, cannot be said to be free from challenges like inadequate infrastructure, archaic health policies, maternal and infant mortality rates, limited technical support, etc., facing its health sector. Therefore, the need for this cooperation and joint effort from these international organizations, local actors, home countries, and even the informal sector has become increasingly important, with the country facing key health challenges affecting its population more than ever before.

This paper shows the role played so far by these international organizations via partnerships and collaborations in improving the healthcare system in Nigeria to the realization of SDG 3. The paper concludes that by providing financial resources, technical expertise, and policy support, these international partnerships play their role in curbing healthcare challenges like diseases, weak infrastructure, etc. However, for the collaborations and cooperations to be more effective and efficient, there should be an improvement in governance and accountability in Nigeria.

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