1. <u>Title:</u> Increasing educational attainment in Nigeria with a focus on public schools

2. <u>Issue:</u>

2.1. Dear Minister for Education, you requested advice on policy measures for increasing educational attainment in Nigeria.

3. <u>Recommendation:</u>

3.1. The recommended policy is a package of two measures: capital expenditure into public school infrastructure and promote innovative volunteerism.

4. <u>Background:</u>

4.1. Primary and secondary enrolment levels[1] have fallen in the midst of insecurity and decaying public school infrastructure, placing Nigeria amongst the lowest ranked in Sub-Sahara Africa[1]. Policy reforms should propel public investment into newer infrastructure, in order to improve student outcomes and reduce the nation's persistent out-of-school population. Nigeria boasts 12.7 million out-of-school children, with the worldwide total at 20 million[2]. The prevalence of this phenomenon provides compelling evidence that Nigeria has failed to achieve the 'Education For All' goals and Millennium Development Goals of 'universalizing access to primary education for all school-age children irrespective of social class, religion, region, or ethnicity[2].

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[1] The World Bank, 'School enrollment, secondary (% gross)', 2022
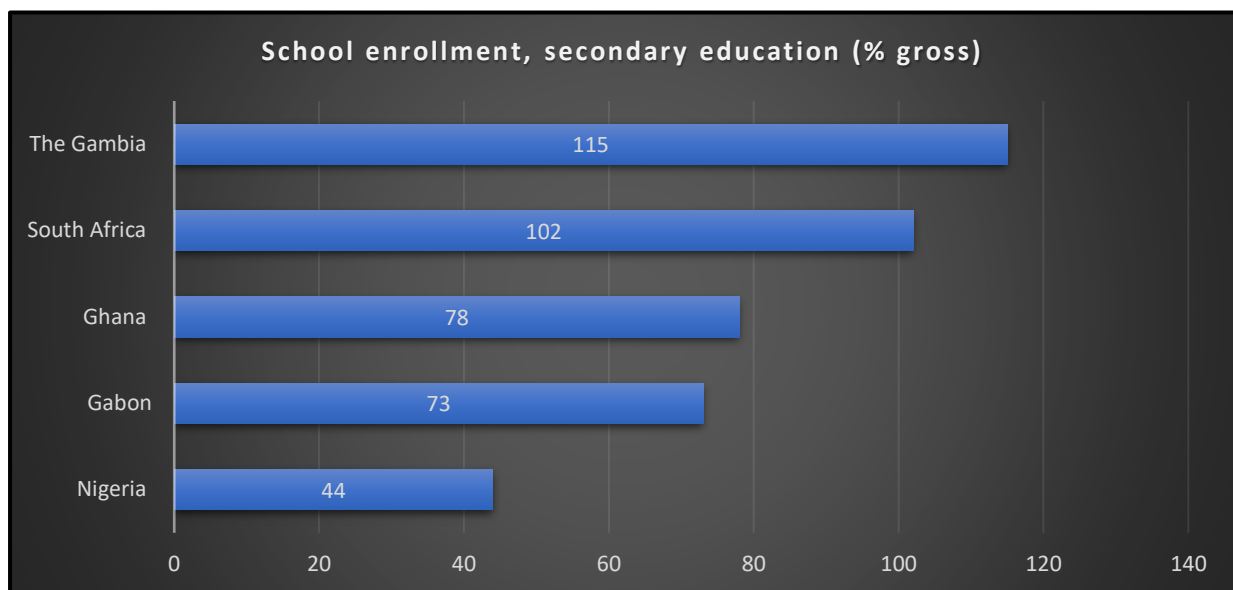[2] Federal Ministry for Education, 'Ministerial Strategic Plan', 2020

Figure 1: School enrolment, secondary education (Source: World Bank)[1]

Original Graph

4.2. Budget shortfalls have piled immense pressure onto the education system. The 2023 budget allocation to the Ministry of Education (MEd) stands at N1.08 trillion ($2.3 billion) with the agency responsible for education at the grassroots, Universal Basic Education Commission receiving approximately $328 million[3]. Despite the allocations exceeding the 2022 budget, they still fall short of the internationally recommended benchmarks of at least 15-20-% of public expenditure, which would mean an allocation to the MEd of approximately $10 billion[3].

4.3. Teacher attrition is another shortcoming which has caused attainment levels across public schools to plummet. Strikes protesting low salaries and late payments are pertinent, weighing heavy on classroom performance. In addition, unpromising post education job prospects are turning youths away from school, which casts a shadow over attainment levels.

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[3] Premium Times, '2023 Budget: Buhari proposes more money for education, but allocation still below UNESCO recommendation', 2022

5. <u>Outline of policy options:</u>

5.1. Option 1: Business as usual (do nothing)

5.2. Option 2: Capital Investment into Public School Infrastructure & Promote Innovative Volunteerism

5.3. Option 3: VAT reduction for EdTech enterprises

6. <u>Description of policy options:</u>

6.1. Business as usual (BAU)

6.1.1   The government have implemented a school feeding programme, providing a meal a day to all enrolled children in schools, this comes to $0.4 million[4]. An additional 1,000 community schools annually has been proposed, costing $12.9 million[4]. There are plans to have a standardised assessment instrument to ensure that the competency levels of teachers commensurate with their qualifications and engagement, a proposal costing $131 million[4].

6.1.2   The trade-offs include:

6.1.2.1 There is the risk that none of the strategies proposed above provide a great enough incentive to keep children within the school system. For instance, simply increasing the number of community schools might not outweigh parental concerns of insecurity or kidnapping which have persuaded them to keep their children away from school grounds.

6.1.2.2 Moreover, implementing a school feeding programme might not yield its expected return on educational attainment. The $400,000[4] spent could well become a sunk cost, having no significant impact on a pupil's engagement with the learning materials and thus fail to translate over into higher educational attainment.

6.1.2.3 Educational experience is heavily associated with the quality of teaching. Thus, by installing a higher benchmark suggests that higher expectations will be embedded within schools which in turn can translate into high classroom performance. Ultimately, whether $145 million worth of strategy[4] ($131 million + $0.4 million + $12.9 million) will be enough to increase educational attainment needs to be weighed up not just against school enrolment levels but also school completion rates[5], an area in which Nigeria has suffered.

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[4] Federal Ministry for Education, 'Ministerial Strategic Plan', 2020

[5] The World Bank, 'Lower secondary completion rate, total (% of relevant age group) - Sub-Saharan Africa', 2022

**Lower secondary completion rate, total
(% of relevant age-group)**

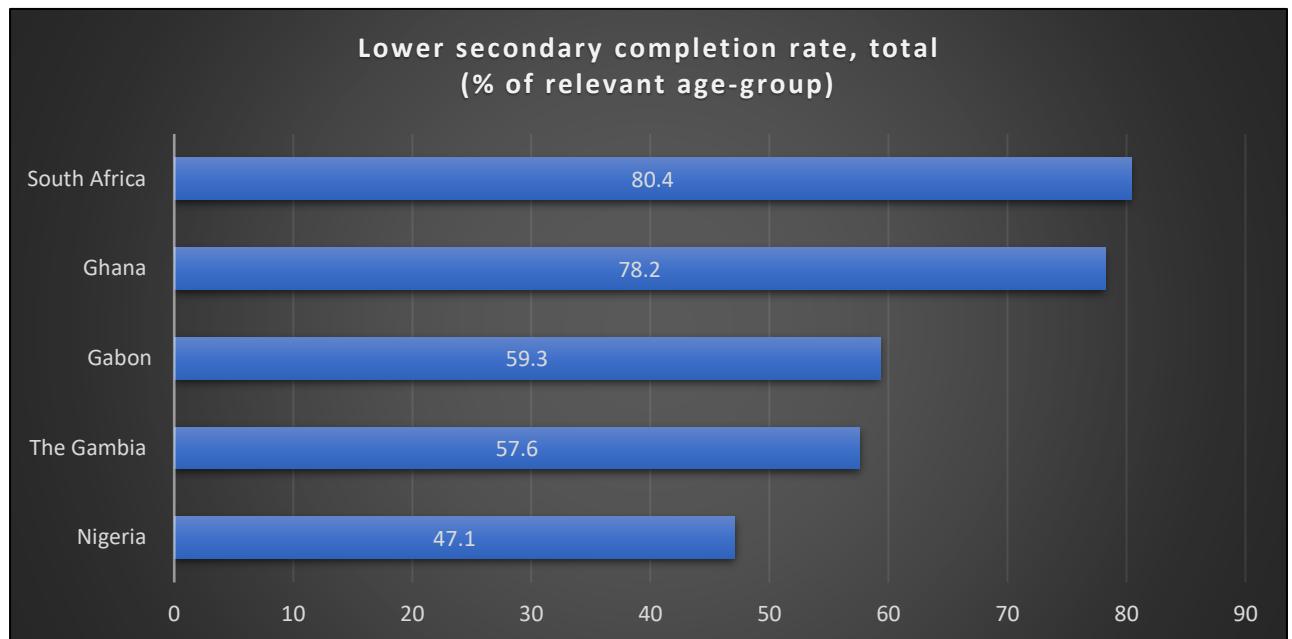| Country	Rate
South Africa	80.4
Ghana	78.2
Gabon	59.3
The Gambia	57.6
Nigeria	47.1

Figure 2: Lower secondary completion rates (Source: World Bank)[5]

Original Graph

6.2. Capital Investment into Public School Infrastructure & Promote Innovative Volunteerism

6.2.1 This is a packaged policy consisting of dual measures. The first measure follows the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) increasing capital expenditure[3] into classroom infrastructure, thus bringing public schools to parity with private schools with regards to learning conditions. The successive measure is the promotion of Innovative Volunteerism[6] within classrooms. Innovative Volunteerism[6] seeks to raise attainment levels through enterprise-action and community-based learning. Figure 3 highlights a strong cognitive association[7] (among young people) between volunteering activities and the development of skills, knowledge, and experiences. Through cultivating an environment of learning that mergers community-focused innovations with quality classroom conditions, the government can drive capacity-building and in return raise attainment levels.

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[6] UN Volunteers, 'Innovative Volunteerism', 2019
[7] Fodor et al., 'Correlation between Generation Z in Hungary and the Motivating Factors to Do Volunteer Work in a Value-Based Approach', 2021

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Motivational Directions	Rating Average (Where 1 = Not Important at All, 7 = Most Important)
To develop my existing skills and knowledge	5.79
To obtain new skills, knowledge and experiences	5.76
The fate of humanity and our environment depends on our actions.	5.71
These actions can also change the world.	5.03
To try myself and to test my abilities	5.22
To meet new people and to acquire new friends	4.75
To feel better about myself	3.65
To learn how people satisfy their needs	3.55
To feel less alone	3.43

Source: Own research, N = 840.

Figure 3: Motivations for Innovative Volunteerism (Source: Sustainability)[7]

6.2.2 The trade-offs include:

6.2.2.1 Honing entrepreneurial skills of students in a tangible and rewarding way (such as by incorporating elements of handiwork), can cultivate a resilient and innovative growth mindsets[6]; thus galvanising their motivations towards formal education.

6.2.2.2 Collaboration between the government, public schools, and local NGOs might run into coordination challenges. There will need to be a project manager assigned to each public school, whose role is to facilitate the student-led community project until completion.

6.2.2.3 The policy is modifiable which can allow the government to respond to changing demands and unexpected shocks across states. For instance, the UBEC can include grants/non-financial rewards for the best solutions delivered to each community project.

6.2.2.4 With the UBEC receiving just 14%[3] of the 2023 budget allocation to the Ministry of Education, there is an added risk that the level of capital expenditure required to obtain parity status with private schools will not be reached.

6.2.2.5 Despite innovative volunteerism[6] targeting the lack of enterprising skills currently within the national curriculum, there is the risk that the human capital will not translate into higher attainment levels. The possibilities are that students may find work as an alternative to school or decide to fully commit to entrepreneurship. Although beneficial to the wider economy, it would be at the cost of educational attainment levels.

6.3   VAT reduction for EdTech enterprises

6.3.1   EdTech enterprises are another means which the government can tap into in order to raise attainment levels across public schools in Nigeria. Educators need to be able to leverage education technology and utilise it effectively to innovate learning experiences, which in turn further engages pupils by catering for different abilities and learning styles[8]. Nigeria's 'ULesson' is one of the most prominent edtech platforms in Africa, raising $25.6 million and accruing over 3.5 million downloads[8]. Currently, the Lagos state government has partnered with 'EkoEXCEL'(owned by NewGlobe), an EdTech programme which covers more than 1,000 public schools, 14,000 teachers and 500,000 pupils[8]. The programme approximately costs the state $13million a year[8], and they have committed to a multiyear contract in which they've agreed to pay NewGlobe around $12 per pupil[8], per term. At the moment, standard VAT rates in Nigeria are at 7.5%, by offering a tax reduction to EdTechs such as trimming VAT to 5% should aid in increasing the uptake of EdTech services across Nigeria's public schools. If the government was able to negotiate better terms with EdTech providers, paying $8 per pupil, per term instead of $12, this could lead to the state supplying more schools with this technology and thus impact more students.

6.3.2   The trade-offs include:
6.3.2.1 There is the increased exposure to security threats[8] which can place a school's data in the hands of hackers. In addition, there is connectivity costs[9]associated with EdTech adoption, schools might lack the digital savviness or the complementary hardware to access the vital materials such as computers and smart phone devices.

6.3.2.2 EdTechs naturally absorb huge costs since they depend on expensive mobile network providers to distribute educational content. The World Bank predicts that Africa needs $100 billion[9] to provide good quality, affordable and well-integrated broadband access by 2030, which suggests that the desired impact on attainment levels might be delayed.

6.3.2.3 With a gradual integration of EdTechs into the formal education system, educators can benefit from cost-savings, redirecting funds saved into further enriching the learning experience of students by lowering the teacher-to-student ratio, which will in turn enhance the attainment levels of students in the school.

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[8] Business Post, 'Sustainable EdTech and the Environment: What We Can Do Now', 2023
[9] Further Africa, 'Can EdTechs Solve Africa's Educational Crisis', 2023

6.3.3.4 EdTechs by nature solve many issues which hamper attainment levels in public schools, such as long-distance commutes as well as overcrowding in classrooms[9], the norm for many rural areas in Nigeria.

6.3.3.5 EdTechs will become a more appealing investment for investors, this combined with a public-private partnership[9] between the government and education providers can decrease the average cost for universal EdTech adoption, thus increasing the scalability of state-wide adoption.

7. Recommendation and Justification:

7.1. We recommend the government to adopt the second policy as it's believed to have the most immediate impact on educational attainment across public schools in Nigeria. In order to improve gross enrolment levels and school completion rates, pupils need to be empowered culturally as well as intellectually, which the second policy captures far better than BAU. If stretched along a longer time horizon, there is not a large difference between the recommended policy option and the third option. In the long-term, a larger share of the government budget can be allocated towards EdTech adoption across public schools. However, if the government aims to increase educational attainment with immediacy then a packaged policy consisting of capital investment into infrastructure coupled with innovative volunteerism is better served. We recommend a more proactive approach which places students at the centre of their learning rather than at the periphery.

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