

Globalisation, Sustainable Development Goals, and Inclusive National Development in Nigeria: Evidence from Edo State

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between globalisation and inclusive national development in Nigeria, with Edo State as a sub-national empirical context. The paper reframes the established discourse within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Using a qualitative research design anchored on Dependency Theory and World-Systems Theory, and drawing on secondary data from institutional, governmental, and peer-reviewed sources, the study examines four key variables: the influence of international financial institutions (IFIs), globalisation-induced unemployment, human capital flight (brain drain), and foreign trade and investment dynamics. Empirical evidence from Edo State reveals that globalisation has constrained rather than catalysed SDG-aligned development. IFI conditionalities have restricted fiscal space for social investment; globalisation-induced labour market restructuring has deepened structural unemployment (approximately 42% among graduates); brain drain has materially eroded institutional capacity in health and education; and the state's trade and investment profile remains enclave-like and insufficiently linked to productive diversification. The study recommends a Sustainable Industrialisation and Human Capital Retention Strategy (SIHCRS) calibrated to the Edo State context.

Keywords: Globalisation, Sustainable Development Goals, Inclusive Development, Brain Drain, Dependency Theory, Edo State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation understood as the intensification of cross-border flows of goods, capital, labour, technology, and information has profoundly altered the development trajectories of nations across the global South. While early neoliberal orthodoxy presented globalisation as a convergent and mutually beneficial process, a rich body of critical scholarship has since demonstrated its asymmetric, structurally embedded consequences for resource-dependent and institutionally fragile economies (Dreher, Gaston, & Martens, 2020; Rodrik, 2018; Stiglitz, 2017). The question is no longer whether globalisation affects development, but how, for whom, and under what structural conditions its effects materialise as genuine human progress.

Against this backdrop, the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a transformative normative framework for evaluating global economic integration. The SDGs shift the discourse from aggregate growth metrics toward multi-dimensional and inclusive conceptions of development encompassing decent work (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), quality education (SDG 4), strong institutions (SDG 16), and the structural conditions for equitable global partnerships (SDG 17). This paper argues that globalisation, as currently experienced by developing economies, has produced outcomes that are systematically misaligned with SDG aspirations and that this misalignment is most acutely felt at the sub-national level.

Nigeria, Africa's largest economy with a GDP of approximately USD 373 billion and a population exceeding 220 million, provides a compelling case study (World Bank, 2023; IMF, 2024). Despite sustained engagement

with global markets and international financial institutions, Nigeria ranks 168th out of 193 countries on the SDG Index, with particular deficits in SDG 1, SDG 4, SDG 8, and SDG 10 (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2024). The persistence of this performance gap constitutes the central paradox motivating this inquiry.

This study grounds the national analysis in Edo State, located in Nigeria's South-South geopolitical zone — an instructive sub-national case that encapsulates the central paradoxes of globalisation. The state combines agricultural commodities (notably rubber and oil palm), hydrocarbon extraction, and a services sector anchored in Benin City. Despite these assets, Edo State faces persistently high youth unemployment, an escalating rate of skilled professional emigration, and a governance environment shaped by conditions attached to development finance from the World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB, 2021; Edo State Government, 2022). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2022) estimates that Edo State accounts for over 30 percent of all irregular Nigerian migrants intercepted in Libya a haemorrhage of human capital that directly contradicts SDG 8 and SDG 10 objectives.

This paper examines globalisation and inclusive development through four analytically interconnected channels: the influence of international financial institutions, globalisation-induced unemployment, brain drain and human capital flight, and foreign trade and investment structural dynamics. Each channel is examined at both national and Edo State levels, situated within the SDG framework and Dependency Theory.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Nigeria's prolonged and deepening engagement with globalisation, inclusive and SDG-aligned development has remained elusive. More than four decades of structural adjustment, trade liberalisation, and financial integration have not produced sustainable reductions in poverty, improvements in employment quality, or meaningful reductions in structural inequality. In Edo State, the graduate unemployment rate is estimated at approximately 42 percent, compared to a national youth unemployment rate of 38.6 percent (Edo State Ministry of Economic Planning, 2023; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2024). Simultaneously, the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) and the Edo Specialist Hospital have experienced severe staffing shortfalls attributable to emigration under the United Kingdom National Health Service International Recruitment Framework — directly undermining SDG 3 and SDG 4 outcomes at the sub-national level.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the relationship between globalisation and inclusive national development in Nigeria, with specific reference to Edo State, using the SDG framework as an analytical lens. The specific objectives are: (i) to investigate the impact of IFIs on SDG-aligned development outcomes in Edo State and Nigeria (SDG 17); (ii) to examine the relationship between globalisation-induced labour market restructuring and unemployment in Edo State (SDG 8); (iii) to assess the impact of brain drain and human capital flight on institutional capacity in Edo State (SDG 3; SDG 4); and (iv) to evaluate the implications of foreign trade and investment patterns for productive diversification and structural transformation in Edo State (SDG 9; SDG 10).

Significance of the Study

This study advances the integration of the SDG framework into political economy discourse by applying it sub-nationally a level of analysis that remains underexplored relative to its policy relevance. By grounding the analysis in Edo State, the study provides a granular examination of globalisation's developmental consequences that complements aggregate national analyses, offering evidence-based insights for the Edo State Government, the Federal Government of Nigeria, and international development partners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualising Globalisation in the SDG Era

Globalisation resists reduction to a single definition. Baylis and Smith (2001) characterise it as the intensification of worldwide social relations linking distant localities such that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away. The UNDP (2022) extends this to encompass an unprecedented rapid growth in the extensiveness and intensity of interconnections on a truly global scale. Within the SDG framework, globalisation is evaluated not merely in terms of efficiency or growth-generating properties but in terms of its distributional consequences and contribution to or detracting from the multi-dimensional development vision of the 2030 Agenda.

Rodrik (2018) argues that hyperglobalisation has systematically undermined the domestic policy space of developing economies necessary for context-specific development strategies. Stiglitz (2017) similarly contends that the rules governing the global trading and financial system are tilted in favour of advanced economies, producing outcomes that contradict the promise of shared prosperity. In Edo State, this multi-dimensional character is apparent in an export economy centred on palm oil processed by Okomu Oil Palm Plc, which connects the state directly to global commodity markets governed by pricing dynamics determined in London and Rotterdam an enclave-like pattern of commodity-dependent integration that SDG 9 and SDG 10 are explicitly designed to address (Balami, Olufemi, & Liberty, 2023).

International Financial Institutions and SDG-Aligned Development

The role of IFIs in shaping Nigeria's development trajectory has been extensively debated. Arowolo and Aluko (2010) documented how structural adjustment policies prescribed by IFIs in the 1980s led Nigeria into a cycle of debt dependency and fiscal constraint that directly contradicts SDG 16's emphasis on effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. The IMF's (2024) Article IV consultation acknowledges Nigeria's macroeconomic reforms but raises concerns about social protection gaps: the removal of the petrol subsidy in 2023, undertaken partly in response to IMF and World Bank recommendations, produced a 250 percent increase in domestic fuel prices, disproportionately affecting low-income households and undermining SDG 1 outcomes.

At the sub-national level, the World Bank-supported Nigeria Edo State Economic Governance and Competitiveness Project (EDSGCP) improved internally generated revenue from approximately NGN 11.3 billion in 2019 to NGN 18.7 billion in 2022 (Edo State Government, 2022), but fiscal conditionalities constrained public expenditure on social services at precisely the time when post-COVID-19 recovery demanded increased investment in health and education. This tension between IFI-prescribed fiscal discipline and the investment imperatives of SDG 3, SDG 4, and SDG 8 is a recurring feature of Nigeria's conditioned development finance landscape.

Globalisation, Unemployment, and SDG 8

Effiong, Udofia, and Okon (2020), using panel unit root tests and Dumitrescu-Hurlin Granger causality tests across West African economies (1991–2017), found that globalisation reduces unemployment in the short run but contributes to significant structural unemployment expansion over the long run. Popoola (2020) concluded that globalisation is the root cause of Nigeria's massive unemployment rate, with structural adjustment policies, currency devaluation, and IFI conditionalities identified as primary transmission mechanisms.

In Edo State, the state's labour market exhibits a pronounced duality between a small formal sector dominated by Okomu Oil Palm Plc, NAOC's facilities, and financial services in Benin City, versus a vast informal economy. Globalisation has sharpened this duality through trade liberalisation that exposed the artisanal manufacturing sector including Benin City's traditional bronze and brass casting industry to cheaper imported goods from Asian economies, without commensurate job creation in export-oriented sectors (Ukeje, 2012). Edo State's universities collectively produce approximately 25,000 graduates annually (NUC, 2023), yet Samuel, Ofem, and Samuel (2012) found that only 25 percent of Nigerian graduates possess the skills required by the labour market.

Brain Drain, Human Capital Flight, and SDGs 3 and 4

Brain drain represents one of the most structurally consequential manifestations of globalisation for peripheral states. Docquier and Rapoport (2012) documented that skilled emigration from sub-Saharan Africa intensified significantly after 2000, driven by globalisation-lowered migration barriers and persistent push factors including low wages and institutional dysfunction. The Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria estimates that more than 80 percent of physicians trained in Nigeria since 2010 have emigrated within five years of completing their National Youth Service Corps obligations (Ogundele, 2023).

UBTH experienced a documented loss of more than 40 percent of its specialist medical staff to emigration between 2018 and 2023 under the NHS International Recruitment Framework (Ogundele, 2023). The Edo Specialist Hospital operates at less than 60 percent of approved staffing complement, with critical shortfalls in anaesthesiology, radiology, and paediatric surgery. These deficits directly compromise SDG 3 performance: Edo State's maternal mortality ratio is estimated at 512 per 100,000 live births, against the WHO-recommended target of 70 by 2030 (Edo State Primary Health Care Development Agency, 2023). In higher education, faculty shortages at Ambrose Alli University where more than 35 percent of approved academic positions are vacant compromise teaching quality and research output (NUC, 2023).

Foreign Trade, Investment, and Structural Dependence

George-Anokwuru (2018), applying ARDL bounds testing over 1981–2016, found that FDI negatively influenced Nigeria's GDP suggesting that foreign investment functions more as a vehicle for profit extraction than for productive development. In Edo State, Okomu Oil Palm Plc's primary export commodity generated approximately NGN 64 billion in revenue in 2022, yet the majority of this value is captured at processing and international trading stages outside Nigeria (Okomu Oil Palm Plc, 2023). FDI in Edo State is concentrated in NAOC's upstream oil and gas operations, which generate fewer than 5,000 permanent jobs and produce significant environmental externalities for host communities (Omofonmwan & Odia, 2009).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Dependency Theory, associated in its origins with Prebisch (1950) and Hans Singer, and subsequently elaborated by Frank (1967). The theory posits that the global economic system is organised hierarchically, with advanced economies constituting the core and developing economies occupying the periphery. Within this structure, peripheral economies remain structurally dependent on core countries for capital, technology, markets, and policy direction, perpetuating underdevelopment despite formal integration into the global economy.

The theory's central argument that development and underdevelopment are simultaneous and mutually constitutive outcomes of the same global capitalist system provides a powerful interpretive lens for Nigeria's and Edo State's globalisation experience. The extraction of palm oil and crude oil from Edo State at primary commodity prices, the emigration of doctors trained at public expense to staff advanced economy health systems, and the IFI fiscal conditionalities that constrain public investment in Edo State's schools and hospitals are each analytically intelligible as mechanisms of peripheral dependence.

The study draws complementarily on World-Systems Theory (Wallerstein, 2004), which extends dependency theory by introducing the semi-periphery category and conceptualising the world economy as a single capitalist system in which surplus value generated by peripheral labour and resources is systematically transferred to core economies. The Human Development Approach associated with Amartya Sen and Mahbub ul Haq, which underpins the UNDP Human Development Index and the philosophical foundation of the SDG framework, serves as the normative standard against which globalisation's outcomes in Edo State are assessed not whether trade volumes have increased, but whether the real capabilities of Edo State residents have been expanded.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a focus on secondary data analysis and systematic literature review. The research relies on existing literature, government reports, institutional publications, and empirical studies to examine the impact of globalisation on development in Edo State and Nigeria. The qualitative approach is chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of globalisation's structural effects particularly concerning IFIs, unemployment, and brain drain phenomena that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative proxies alone.

Purposive sampling is employed to select relevant literature and empirical studies that align with the research objectives. Priority is given to studies published between 2000 and 2024, with specific focus on: (a) studies examining globalisation, development, and labour markets in Nigeria and West Africa; (b) reports and institutional data disaggregated to the Edo State level; and (c) studies explicitly examining SDG performance in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa. Data are sourced from peer-reviewed journals accessed through Google Scholar, JSTOR, and EBSCO; World Bank and IMF reports; Edo State Government annual budgetary and performance reports; NBS labour force statistics; NUC institutional data; IOM migration reports; and AfDB project evaluation documents. Content analysis and thematic synthesis are employed to evaluate the collected data, categorised into themes corresponding to the four research objectives and six SDG dimensions identified as relevant.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Impact of IFIs on SDG-Aligned Development (SDG 17)

The findings confirm that IFI engagement has had a mixed but predominantly constraining effect on SDG-aligned development in Nigeria and Edo State. Structural adjustment policies imposed by IFIs entrenched Nigeria in a debt cycle requiring the removal of subsidies and the rationalisation of public sector employment (Arowolo & Aluko, 2010). While the World Bank's EDSGCP improved Edo State's internally generated revenue from NGN 11.3 billion in 2019 to NGN 18.7 billion in 2022, embedded conditionalities constrained public expenditure on health and education at a time of acute social need (Edo State Government, 2022). The World Bank (2023) concedes that poverty headcount rates have risen in the post-reform period in the South-South zone including Edo State. The dependency theory lens explains this pattern as structural: IFIs design policy frameworks that maintain conditions for peripheral economy debt servicing rather than for autonomous peripheral development.

The AfDB's Value Chain Development Programme in Edo State (AfDB, 2021) represents a more SDG-compatible modality of development finance, with explicit linkages to SDG 2 and SDG 8. However, implementation limitations particularly inadequate rural road infrastructure and weak smallholder farmer organisation have constrained impact. The overarching finding is that the SDG 17 aspiration of revitalised global partnerships is achievable through development finance only when conditionality frameworks are genuinely aligned with SDG targets rather than with macroeconomic orthodoxy preferences of donor institutions.

Globalisation, Unemployment, and SDG 8

The evidence overwhelmingly supports the finding that globalisation has had a net adverse effect on SDG 8 outcomes in Edo State and Nigeria. Youth unemployment in Edo State stands at approximately 42 percent more than double the SDG 8 target trajectory driven by the capital-intensive character of primary formal sector employers and a chronic skills mismatch (NBS, 2024; NUC, 2023). Edo State's universities have adopted internationalised curricula a direct product of globalisation in higher education but these curricula are insufficiently aligned with the practical demands of the local economy, which requires skills in agro-processing, small-scale manufacturing, construction, and health care. The IOM's (2022) estimate that over 150,000 Edo State indigenes attempted irregular migration to Europe between 2015 and 2022 constitutes the most telling indicator of SDG 8 failure in the state consistent with the dependency theory prediction that peripheral integration produces structural unemployment rather than convergence.

Brain Drain and SDGs 3 and 4

The findings confirm that brain drain from Edo State constitutes a structural developmental crisis with direct consequences for SDG 3 and SDG 4 attainment. UBTH's loss of more than 40 percent of its specialist medical staff to emigration between 2018 and 2023 (Ogundele, 2023) is directly correlated with Edo State's maternal mortality ratio of 512 per 100,000 live births more than seven times the SDG 3 target of 70 by 2030 (Edo State Primary Health Care Development Agency, 2023). Faculty shortages at Ambrose Alli University, where more than 35 percent of approved academic positions are vacant, compromise teaching quality and research capacity (NUC, 2023).

Docquier and Rapoport (2012) argued that beyond a threshold of skilled emigration, brain drain erodes rather than supports development through remittances and Edo State has clearly exceeded this threshold in both health and education. The active extraction of Edo State's human capital by advanced economies constitutes an unreimbursed developmental transfer consistent with the dependency theory's surplus extraction mechanism. When communities actively endorse student migration as many Edo State communities have through diaspora networks they reinforce a self-perpetuating cycle of institutional deterioration and further emigration (Chimanikire, 2005).

Trade, Investment, and Structural Dependence (SDGs 9 and 10)

Edo State's trade and investment profile remains structurally dependent and insufficiently oriented toward SDG 9 and SDG 10 objectives. While Okomu Oil Palm Plc generated NGN 64 billion in revenue in 2022, value capture is concentrated at processing and international trading stages outside Nigeria, with Edo State smallholders receiving a marginal share of the total value created in the global palm oil chain (Okomu Oil Palm Plc, 2023). Oil exploration in Edo State's communities has rendered agricultural lands in riverine areas unusable for farming, contributed to biodiversity loss, and caused significant water pollution directly undermining SDG 15, SDG 14, and SDG 3 for affected communities in Orhionmwon and Ovia North-East Local Government Areas (Omofonmwan & Odia, 2009). Wallerstein's (2004) characterisation of the core-periphery relationship as one in which surplus profits are systematically transferred to core countries is empirically confirmed in Edo State's trade and investment profile.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that globalisation, as currently structured and experienced in Edo State and Nigeria, has constrained rather than catalysed SDG-aligned inclusive development. The four channels examined IFI influence, unemployment, brain drain, and trade and investment dynamics individually and collectively reinforce a pattern of structural dependence that perpetuates underdevelopment despite deepening integration into the global economy. Dependency Theory, supplemented by World-Systems Theory, provides the most coherent explanation for these outcomes: Edo State's position in the periphery of the global economic system determines the terms on which it engages with global markets, international finance, and skilled labour migration terms that are systematically unfavourable to the SDG vision of inclusive development.

The study's sub-national grounding in Edo State advances the literature by demonstrating that the abstract propositions of dependency theory are manifest in concrete realities: the staffing crisis at UBTH, the graduate unemployment queues outside Ambrose Alli University, the palm oil prices received by smallholders in Orhionmwon, and the irregular migration of educated youths through the Sahara Desert. Addressing these realities requires policy frameworks that are simultaneously locally grounded, structurally transformative, and aligned with the normative ambitions of the SDGs.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations constitute the core elements of a Sustainable

Industrialisation and Human Capital Retention Strategy (SIHCRS) for Edo State:

First, the Edo State Government, in partnership with the Federal Government, should renegotiate IFI conditionalities for SDG alignment (SDG 17), pursuing SDG bonds and blended finance instruments as alternatives to conditional lending that constrains fiscal autonomy. Second, higher education curricula should be redesigned for local labour market alignment (SDG 4; SDG 8) through a comprehensive curriculum audit aligned to the specific skill demands of the state's agricultural, agro-processing, construction, and health care sectors, with mandatory entrepreneurship and vocational skills modules at all tertiary institutions. Third, a State-funded Professional Retention Scheme should be established to provide competitive salary supplements, professional development funding, and research infrastructure grants for medical specialists and university academics (SDG 3; SDG 4). Fourth, agricultural value chains and agro-industrial zones should be developed with targeted investment in the rubber, oil palm, and cassava value chains, prioritising value addition at the state level and binding local content requirements for agro-processing FDI (SDG 2; SDG 8; SDG 9). Fifth, environmental accountability for extractive industries should be enforced, mandating adequate remediation of oil-impacted farmland and water bodies, and negotiating community development agreements that directly fund SDG 3 and SDG 4 outcomes in host communities (SDG 14; SDG 15).

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