

## Nigeria: rightly taking its place on the world stage

Nigeria is emerging as a world power. It has great intellectual, cultural, and social capital, as well as financial assets. It dominates west Africa, having more than half of the region's population, and has the highest gross domestic product on the continent. The population of more than 200 million is projected to double by 2050, and to reach 733 million by 2100—making Nigeria the third most populous country in the world, after China and India. This rapid population growth has been accelerated by falling infant mortality combined with a steady birth rate and can create a demographic dividend for Nigeria. But to take advantage of this situation, appropriate investments in health, education, and skills need to be made. Published today, *The Lancet Nigeria Commission: investing in health and the future of the nation*, views this human potential and extraordinary opportunity through a health lens, telling the story of Nigeria as shaped by the country's history and present circumstances. Written by a team of experts working at institutions across the country, and members of the diaspora, it has been led by Nigerians for Nigerians.

This potential might not be realised if the country does not address intractable poverty and extreme inequality. Recent trends in health outcomes, as detailed in the accompanying Article published today, record 20 years of increased healthy life expectancy (although it is still low within the region, at 56 years), reductions in mortality for males and females of all ages, and rises in health expenditure but, overall, health outcomes are still poor. Nigeria has repeatedly failed to realise the health gains promised by multiple political leaders, and this failure is holding the country back.

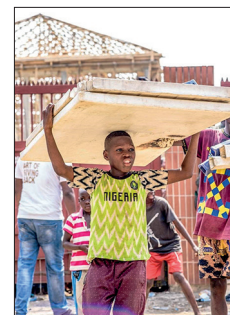
How can Nigerians ensure that Nigeria's opportunity is realised? The Commissioners call for the creation of a new social contract that redefines the relationship between citizen and state. They argue that health has, to date, been neglected by successive governments and consequently the citizens of Nigeria, and must be recentred as an essential investment in the population—one that will reap political and economic benefits. Doing so could also help forge a new national identity, which has often been fragmented for historical reasons, beginning with its colonial-drawn

borders and challenging federal system of governance. The Commissioners propose a "One Nation, One Health" policy to attain universal health coverage, which would particularly benefit those segments of the population bearing the highest disease burden. Acknowledging the connection between Nigeria's citizenry and the environment and shared planetary resources, this policy could be applied at every level of governance—local, state, and national.

The Commission proposes a set of investment strategies that will have the greatest return, alongside advice on how to make best use of resources. The two underlying principles are prevention and rational implementation, which comprise a thoughtful balance of centralisation and localisation of every policy. Local governments would be empowered to deliver some aspects of health care to national standards. Increased financing will need to be substantial and in keeping with the growth of the country, and domestic investment will also address and reverse the inequalities that have arisen from colonial policies and foreign dependency. This development will also help to encourage and retain the natural talent that exists in the country. Human capital is Nigeria's most valuable asset.

What direction the country will take lies largely in the hands of politicians. Although the upcoming February, 2023 election could bring a new administration, obstacles remain in the underlying political culture. Structural issues have created a two-tier system, in which the revenue from oil is not directed to the government or the population, and services provided by the private sector are superior to state provision. Many Nigerians do not have access to the universal basics: health care, education (particularly for women and girls), clean water and sanitation, nutritious food, and basic levels of hygiene. There is also a need to create a healthier built environment, with sustainable policies to reduce indoor and outdoor pollution and ensure clean air. Nigeria is poised to define the future of west Africa, the African continent, and the whole world. The Commission lays out how best to realise that ambition: universal health coverage and better health for all Nigerians must sit at the centre of future policy.

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See [Articles](#) page 1117

See [The Lancet Commissions](#) page 1155