Children and youth dominate the Nigerian population with median age being 17.9 years.1 There is need to keep this bulging youth population healthy now and in the future. With the global surge in noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), it is especially important to promote an active healthy lifestyle among children and youth. According to the World Health Organisation,2 two-thirds of premature deaths in adults are associated with childhood conditions and behaviours. Such common behaviours including smoking, heavy episodic drinking and physical inactivity are associated with NCD risks, with 81% of adolescents not getting enough physical activity.2 An appraisal of physical activity through the Report Card will engender healthy youth population.

Methods

The 2018 Nigerian Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth (see cover page, Figure 1) is a build-up on the 2014 and 2016 editions of the Report Card. It considered the indicators specified by the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance.3 The indicators are the ones adopted for the Global Matrix 3.0 on Physical Activity for Children and Youth with focus on children within the 5 to 17 years age bracket. The 2018 Report Card graded core indicators including Overall Physical Activity, Organized Sport and Physical Activity, Active Play, Active Transportation, Sedentary Behaviours, Family and Peers, School, Community and Environment, and Government. Whereas the previous Reports Cards considered overweight and obesity, the uniqueness of the 2018 edition is the inclusion of Physical Fitness among the core indicators.

Following an extensive online (PubMed, Google Scholar etc.), and physical literature search across universities and relevant research institutions for unpublished resources covering the period 2016 to 2018, grades were allocated to each of the indicators based on the benchmark criteria approved by the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance.3 The grades ranged from A to D, then F and INC (incomplete) with A representing a huge success in the indicator.

Results and Discussion

The current evidence on overall physical activity for children and youth in Nigeria has witnessed a modest improvement compared to a downward trend that was observed in the 2016 Report Card. However, current data (Table 1) shows that from 30% up to 52% of the target population of children and youth are physically active.4,5 The improvement to grade of C for the overall physical activity may have been the consequence of a more synergistic action in the call for more engagement of children and youth in physical activity programmes.6–8

Government has a major role to play in making physical activity attainable to children and youth.9 Success in respect to physical activity in this population depends on several factors linked to governmental support in the form of legislation, infrastructure and creating conducive atmospheres for physical activity entrenchment. The Nigerian government has continued to demonstrate modest progress through the key stages of public policy making (i.e., policy agenda, formulation, implementation, evaluations and decisions about the future) with respect to school physical activity programmes especially through the Physical Education...
channel. Furthermore, approvals have been given to sport academies, empowerment of non-governmental organizations in grassroots sports, establishment of government owned public parks and recreational gardens and construction of model schools that have facilities for physical activity programmes.

Conclusion

Despite data paucity on important indicators for the Report Card, available data shows Nigeria is making slow but positive progress in physical activity of children and youth. Previous indicators did not nosedive, while some witnessed slight upgrades. Availability of data on those with incomplete grading will enhance future Report Cards.

References