

Results from Nigeria's 2018 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

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Introduction

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Google Scholar etc.), and physical literature search across universities and relevant research institutions for unpublished resources covering the period 2016 to 2018, grades were allocated to each of the indicators based on the benchmark criteria approved by the Active Healthy Kids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. In the year 2014, the overall physical activity was graded

as C only to slip to D 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 synergetic 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

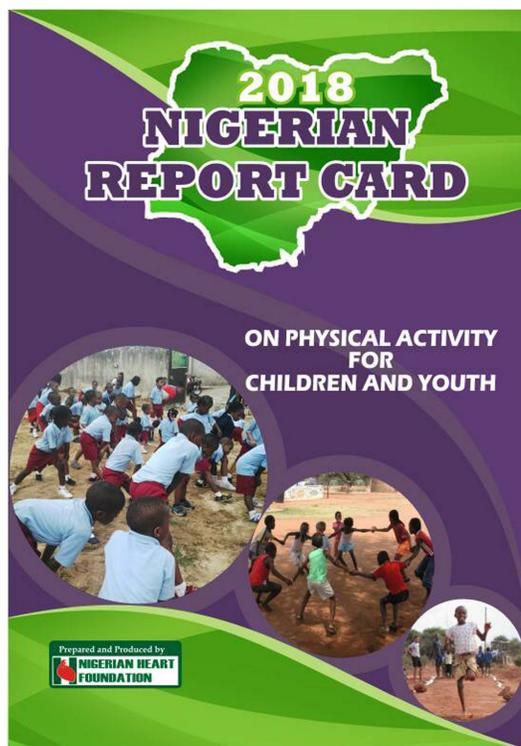


Figure 1 — Nigeria's 2018 Report Card cover.

Table 1 Grades and rationales for Nigeria's 2018 Report Card

Indicator	Grade	Rationale
Overall Physical Activity	C	30 - 52% of children in the target age bracket are physically active.
Organized Sport and Physical Activity	C-	39.7% of children and youth in urban population and 43.7% in rural areas participate in organized sports. It was also found that 40% of children in public schools and 80% in private schools engage in organized sports that involved football, table tennis and athletics. The gradual incursion of Sport Academies has helped in this regard.
Active Play	C	This grade was selected as Nigeria now has an improvement in overall physical activity and organized sports.
Active Transportation	B	Grade B was retained since there is no new data to suggest a change of grade from the previous report.
Sedentary Behaviours	B-	Sitting <2 Hrs/Day was reported among 21.1% of children and youth, 2-6 Hrs/day among 63.1% and >6 Hrs/day only among 15.8% of the population.
Physical Fitness	INC	There is no sufficient data to arrive at a grade for the target population. The only data available on fitness related parameters was on body mass index (BMI) relating to overweight and obesity. The team observed that the concept of physical fitness could not be solely adjudged on the basis of BMI leaving out other important components of physical fitness.
Family and Peers	INC	No data on this indicator for the target population.
School	C-	The team observed that school environment contributes to the overall physical activity and organized sports indicators hence a similar grade was allocated to the indicator.
Community and Environment	INC	No sufficient data on this indicator to inform grading for the target population.
Government	B	There is a demonstrated progress through the key stages of public policy making (i.e., policy agenda, policy formation, policy implementation, policy evaluation and decisions about the future) with respect to school Physical Education programmes, approval of Sport Academies, empowerment of non-governmental organizations in grassroot sports, establishment of government owned public parks and construction of model schools that have facilities for physical activity programmes.

channel. Furthermore, approvals have been given to sport academies, empowerment of non-governmental organizations in grassroot 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.

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