

Perception of Public Services Nigeria



Lexia

Study: Perception of Public Services

Commissioned for: The Global Initiative for Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

Conducted by: LEXIA

General objective

To understand people's perception of public services, particularly education and health, to strengthen the agenda of defending these services as a means to ensure human rights.

Specific objectives

- To explore the associations and meaning of public services for people.
- To understand the perception of the involvement of the private sector in these services, particularly those of education and health.
- To identify myths and popular beliefs existing around these public services-
- To explore the relationship between these public services and the fulfillment of their rights.
- To identify disparities and barriers in the access to these services by country and by specific conditions of individuals, including:
 - Physical or neurological disabilities
 - Gender identity and sexual diversity
 - Older adults
 - People at risk of multidimensional poverty
 - Women (vs men)
- To identify possible messages connecting with people and promoting the agenda of public services.

Methodology

Between **January 19th and 22nd, 2024**, 2 online group sessions were conducted in Nigeria with the following distribution:

Country	Profile	Age
Nigeria	Men and Women of Medium/Medium-Low SEL	36 to 50 years old
	Vulnerable groups (emphasis on Women)	26 to 35 years old

Table of Contents

1	Perception of public services in Nigeria	4
2	Differences in perception between education and health	19
2.1	Education	20
2.2	Healthcare.....	23
3	Motherhood and the burden of care	25

1 Perception of public services in Nigeria

High-quality, universal, and inclusive public services are essential for a fair and equitable society as they are key tools for ensuring the human rights of people in every country.

In this context, the *Global Initiative for Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR)* promotes an agenda that calls on governments to take responsibility of providing these services with the necessary characteristics to ensure that all people, regardless of their condition, can have access to them and that their rights are respected.

To achieve this objective, it is important to understand how people perceive these public services as a starting point to design communication strategies that can gain the support of decision makers and the general public alike.



Having access to quality services¹ is being able to afford them

The most important factor determining the quality of services that people in Nigeria receive is their ability to pay. The economic situation of people and families, which for most is limited, implies they are unable to afford private services.

In the face of this, they are forced to accept and make the most out of what the government provides, or find alternatives by themselves or through their communities, which is often the case.

“It is just lack of money that makes us send our kids to government school else we all prefer private schools.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

¹ For clarification and throughout the report, the term “public services” is used to refer to any services provided by the government and public sector; in some cases, the term does refer to all services, whether government- or privately-provided, which will be made evident by the context. Additionally, the term “private services” refers to any services provided by businesses and private sector. Informal services provided by the community are understood to be a response from individuals forced by the deficiencies of the public services system.

“Not all government schools are poor but it still cannot be compared to private schools because only the rich can afford that so I will continue to cut my coat according to my size.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“I have experienced a private hospital, if you have money, you will be treated properly and they usually pamper their patients, they are more empathetic unlike general hospital they speak disrespectfully to patients.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Only by paying can they expect and demand quality

Their personal experience with both public and private services, and the situation in which they live have led them to believe that quality is in direct relation to what they pay. The conditions of the services improve drastically when there is a commercial, consumer-business relationship whereby the provider is pressured to deliver the best service and the individual is entitled to expect so.

“I chose private because though it is expensive, they will give you what you paid for.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Because we are paying for the service whatever we want would be provided and the environment is comfortable you will see a television in the room and there is landline you can use to call nurses or doctors and they respond quickly but because we can’t afford it, we will continue using our herbal drinks.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Conversely, when there is a citizen-government relationship there is not only worse treatment from those delivering the services and limited expectations of quality from individuals, but it can even be seen with suspicion towards people’s intentions interested in receiving free services—implying that there is a biased assumption that they are using those services simply to get free things, and looking down on them for not paying for the services.

“I prefer private you have a voice and a right after all you paid for the service but government, they don’t care about you because you are not the one paying them your choice of staying or not is not a concern to them because they will still get paid and some would mock you that you are there for the free services.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

The type and quality of services varies drastically between different regions²

The experience that people have with public services is strongly contingent on the area they live in—rurality is an important factor in the access and quality to these services. In some cases, they do receive some essential service, but it is frequently the case that they will be lacking others. This also extends to quality as, even if they have physical access to infrastructure like schools and hospitals, the attention they receive in these varies widely.

In terms of access, the main barrier is determined by rurality, where there is a lack of the necessary infrastructure to provide services or, if there is, it implies additional costs such as long journeys to get there. Additionally, a frequent barrier to access comes from those directly providing the services, who refuse to provide it (until payment is given) or do not have the necessary skills to do so.

For quality, the main barrier is the treatment given by those directly delivering the services. Their rudeness or lack of interest make people feel mistreated and wasting their time—the fact that there is a school does not mean that there is education. Another barrier is the financing that public services receive, which impacts the available supplies needed to deliver a quality service (from appropriate desks in school to diagnostic machines and medicines in healthcare).

“I stayed around Igando area for like 3-4 years. For those 3-4 years, in a day we were not having lights for up to 2 hours. Somehow, we moved from Igando to Abule Egba in October. Impressive!!! I must say. I can estimate the lights we use a day for like 15 hours.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Electricity has not been stable, and it needs to be improved, but we believe it has been shared amongst areas, in some areas they provide electricity all through the night while some areas all through the day.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“For me we have good electricity, we sleep most times with electricity until 2pm, but we don’t have free borehole we, pay for water.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“I was still living in Ogun state, the school my children attended then, and that period my first son was in the school, if I ask him to spell his name he could not, I am just thankful that I left that state to Lagos and the government school close to where I live is far better and I have seen improvement in my kids.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

² Nigeria has a federal political system with 36 states. Public services, economic development, and quality of life vary widely between states as illustrated by the Nigerian Multidimensional Poverty Index (2022) published by the National Bureau of Statistics: in rural areas, 72% of people are poor compared to 42% of people in urban areas; additionally, 65% of poor people live in the North, while 35% live in the South. In terms of states, the incidence of multidimensional poverty ranges from a low of 27% in Ondo to a high of 91% in Sokoto.

“When I had this accident [*shows scar on the head*], bless God, I went during the time of the accident, both me and my wife, the ambulance that picked me up from that spot, we went to close to six or five government hospitals that they did not even try to attend to because they said, ‘No’. They started referring from one hospital to another.” *Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL*

There are tangible improvements through time, but only marginal

They have seen concrete examples of improvements through time in the services that they receive, and they express their appreciation for these changes. However, these improvements are only marginal to the extent that they refer to basic services that they should have, such as access to water, or to fixing issues that have gotten to the point where they are conditioning and limiting the effectiveness of those services.

Taken as a whole, this presents a situation of such scarcity and lack of minimum conditions that any change for the better, however small it may be, is noticeable and acknowledged. It is within this context that the perception of needing to pay to expect quality is grounded.

“Over two years ago, my mother-in-law was ill and when we got to the hospital, they said there was no bed space then she left, had a crisis, and died. So, after that, my sister-in-law was ill too. She went there and the services were super compared to years ago when there was no bed space, they’ve created more bed space. Also, general hospitals I would say they’ve improved almost 100% with their services and everything although they can still do better.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Maybe before, but in recent times, and I’m talking from my own experience, the first thing I would say is the one they said about not attending to you first before they collect money. In my hospital which is a general hospital, they would attend to you first, at least I have seen it happen on different occasions.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“The government tries for education, but most government schools lack chairs, for example my kids school some kids sits on the floor and now they are currently fixing planks because when there is a strong breeze when rain falls water enters the class and I get really worried for my kids whenever it rains so since I saw that they have started fixing zincs and planks I have been excited.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“I have experience water they provided free borehole on my street unlike before [when] we [had to] pay to fetch water, but it is free with the borehole they provided.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Discrimination is driven by inequality, not by identity

People do not see any form of discrimination based on their ethnic or religious identity³ in the way they experience public service. They do, however, equate inequality with a form of discrimination. The role that purchasing power plays in the quality of services received, and the ability to demand for it, is so prominent that this becomes a form of alienating people for their living conditions form accessing good services.

“No, they are treated equally. There is no tribalism.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“When my sister's husband was to have surgery, he was there before seven in the morning. And some people came like 10, 11. They were just going in, and they told us that there was no bed space. They didn't even attend to us till about five in the evening. What other definition do we have to give for that? Discrimination.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“A few, let me say years back, I lost a boy. I lost my child. It happened that they needed to do some things, which needed money. So, it was my mom who was shouting, please help her, she's not here again. Due to the condition of the baby, I wasn't, I don't know what is going on with him. So, my mom said, is it money you want? So, you shouldn't look at money first, though it's not all the hospitals. but there's a tendency that privates are more concerned about money.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Income and the ability to pay for services is also correlated with social capital and the wealth that can be gained from social connections. There is an evident difference in treatment and access depending on the people that an individual knows.

“The only issue is that if you go to general hospital for example they prefer taking care of someone they know more than you, except you know someone who works there they will attend to you quickly, but as a stranger they will stress you, they can even say the doctor is not available but the doctor, will attend to someone who came

³ Other forms of discrimination, particularly for being part of the LGBTQ+ community, were not discussed as expression of male or female homosexuality are illegal and punishable by law in Nigeria.

later than you only because they know the person.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Attention and service set private services apart.

Private services are generally regarded as better than government-provided ones. Except for a few specific instances and experiences from individuals, the overall preference is for private services, which is driven by the tangible difference in quality. This quality can be pinpointed to specific factors or criteria with which they evaluate the service. The only barrier to private services is affordability.

“They offer the best education in private schools, and you cannot compare a kid who attends a private school to a government school because they speak correctly, they are bold.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“For example, in my kids school the teacher speaks poor English, speaks more of pidgin English and our local dialect Yoruba but you can never see such in a private school.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Private hospitals because they attend to patients properly, treats patients nicely.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

A central factor on which the perception of quality in services is built is the attention and treatment that they receive. In education, this translates into more personalized teaching and smaller class sized, where children can be better taken care of. In healthcare, this is seen in the immediacy of care, essential given the nature of the situations in which it is required, and good customer service, which is characterized by nice attitude and empathy.

Attention and treatment are so strongly associated with quality in services, which is found in the private sector, that when public services display these characteristics, they are surprised by the fact that it looks like a private service.

“I’m with the private school. I’m a product of public school but I remember, even when I put my son in a public school. I took him back to private. Do you know why? Because she has said it, she has said it all, sir. The private teachers have the time to check on your child, you in fact get the quality of what you paid for.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“[Private schools] don’t have too much crowd in the class. So, the teacher in private school is more or less like a mother to the children.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL.

“I was going to do a complimentary test in this hospital last week. They gave me six months to come back to do a complimentary test and check myself. I asked them six months to check myself. I had to go to a private clinic, and I was checked immediately.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Even the one in Oregon that was recently converted to general hospital you will be treated properly if you go there, and you will think you are in a private hospital, so it depends on the government hospital you are patronizing.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Government-provided services are deficient.

Public services that are managed by the government are perceived insufficient and of bad quality. Any barriers of physical access, either by distance or costs involved, are not part of people’s discourse. Rather, the main complaints on the education and healthcare systems are related to their saturation, which leads to poor quality. In the face of a large demand from individuals who cannot afford to pay for private services, government-provided services are insufficient.

This situation is made worse by the fact that most of these services, even if public, are not free. The result is a perception of bad services for which they must pay, and they do not get the expected quality that is assumed to result from paying.

“I am a product of a government school so, I wanted my child to go to Lagos Model College but unfortunately the school fees have become even higher than in private school and it was terrible. The things we were supposed to do were too much, the protocols were too much for a government school. And I discovered that the classes were not enough. How can over 100 people be in a class? I mean, how do the teachers get to respond to them? How can they reach the students at the back?” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Government schools has too many students in one class about 56 in number and they have different characters.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“When my mum was sick, we took her to the hospital. We had to wait; they said the doctor was coming. We waited for hours. We needed someone to attend to her. At the end of the day, they said we needed to transfer to somebody that is sick and needed attention immediately.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Personally, I don’t go to the hospital I use herbal drinks because whenever I go to hospital there is always too many people but if I take herbal drinks or give to my kids they feel better after urinating because the herbal drink cleanses their system.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Intermediaries⁴ who deliver services between government and people drive service perception.

Given the importance of the attention and treatment received in their interactions with public services, the people who are at the end of the service delivery chain—doctors, nurses, and teachers—play a crucial role in the perception that is built.

Today, these people are the drivers of the negative perception, as they are seen as uninterested in providing a good service and lacking the minimum decency to deal with other individuals within these key services. In some cases, these intermediaries make things worse by engaging in acts of corruption for personal benefit.

Government is made responsible for structural changes and better management of resources, but it is these intermediaries who determine individual experiences and ultimately shape the current perception of the services.

“The medical professionals [that the] government are employing lack empathy and emotional intelligence, if you [go] to the hospital they speak rudely to you.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“The government brings drugs to hospitals and most of those doctors, will steal them, then take them to their private hospitals and refer you to go and buy them from them.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“They are ordered to distribute food items but the person in charge of that project can lack the conscience to give it out just like the government has instructed, so we ourselves are our problem we need to love each other more to let things work.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Oversight on services is key to create accountability and quality

In response to the disinterested and even negligent behavior of individuals delivering the services, people ask for oversight as a mechanism to pressure them into acting appropriately and responsibly. This oversight implies a chain of accountability from those supervising or in charge of specific places where services are delivered—schools and hospitals—and can be conducted by private third parties, civil society organizations, or the government itself.

It is assumed that, if people know they are being supervised and their compensation can be contingent on their performance, this will by itself create an important difference in the quality of public services. This should be applied both for public services, where there is mistreatment and negligence, and

⁴ The term “intermediaries” refers to all individuals involved in the chain of provision of services, from administrative officials in charge of overseeing institutions like hospitals and schools, to the teachers, doctors, nurses, policemen, road assistance, etc. who are actually delivering the services daily. All of these are grouped together in people’s discourse when criticizing their attitude and the treatment they receive from them.

private services, where there is a precondition of money before providing services, even in life-threatening situations.

“For me they should have people in place to inspect these teachers, I believe they will do better if this is done and the students will learn better.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“They do well with their teachings, but government schools can’t be compared to standard schools because they are not serious, nobody supervises the teachers so even when they are absent, they still get paid.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“I think there should be an association checking doctors who are not on the seat, when there is nobody on the seat to attend to patients, it’s very important.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“I will also use the place I know to as a case study. The medical director does the general inspection and makes sure he takes rounds, as big as the hospital is. Every day sometimes they don’t know the particular time he coming he does that twice, morning and night. So everybody is always on their toes to do the right things. So that would help if they can have that so that they know that if they don’t do the right thing, you are caught.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Not all government hospitals are bad maybe the bad ones were not always inspected they act anyhow they like because there was no supervision.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Private sector serves as a replacement of government deficiencies.

Faced with the deficiencies of government-provided services and perceived disinterest from those responsible of delivering them, people set in high regard private efforts to replace the void. This is also reinforced by the efficiency with which private businesses manage to solve problems that individuals experience and the difference in attention that they receive when using their services.

Individuals consider that, while the intervention of the private sector in compensating the governments lack of actions is positive, this also means that the public sector is exempt from assuming the responsibility of creating improvements itself.

“I would say the reasons why governments are not looking into the cases of education and some other factors, sectors, I mean, is because they have options [private offer]. If there are no options, I mean, people will sit up.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“See, these glasses I am wearing. There was a time when I wanted to get my glasses, so I went to LASUTH [Lagos State University Teaching Hospital]. They gave me six months to come back. Six months to come back to do my test and to get them. But before Christmas, in our estate, there’s one NGO that brought it there. You know, we have a group in our estate where they told us that one NGO was coming to test our eyes and give us glasses. So, before you know it, in a twinkle of an eye they were giving us glasses.”

“They were testing people. They were testing a lot of people there was no rushing. So, if the government can follow suit, it will be better. If you go to the general hospital for any check-up, they will give you one year. They will give you one year to come back.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Private companies are trying better than the government and why I said that is because during the covid pandemic, when government ordered lock down, they did not care about how the citizens would survive. But during that time, I heard about private companies who gave out food. Even Dangote [private conglomerate owned by businessman Aliko Dangote], I heard the company distributed food items in some areas and it was carried out orderly and not in a rush, they made sure everybody who came out got food items.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Private businesses are important contributors to society to the extent that they have a sense of social responsibility and an interest in creating welfare for all, which is not the case of the government. There is a valuable spillover of benefits from the private sector’s activities.

“Aliko Dangote [businessman] is interested in the roads like in Ondo state I might be emphasizing Ondo maybe because that’s where his company is but whenever he sees a bad road, he makes sure to do it.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“In terms of job creation, with my little research I have found out that the private sectors are always giving a better percentage compared to governments. And it’s not as if the private sector is better than the government sector because what you are getting in the private sector if you get it in the government sector it will be way better, but the private sectors are trying which is why there is less unemployment.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Private companies are trying, even this past Christmas they did lots of rice, chicken and oil sharing to people, so they are doing well for the society.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

However, the absence of the government and the strength of private businesses in these services can also open the door for the latter to engage in corrupt acts as they know that the government is not capable of reacting.

“The private sector sometimes are greedy because they know that the government is not in the place to do it. Now, because the government is not, they don't want to take responsibility because the government is not doing its work, he's taking advantage of to garner too much for himself.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Public and private services should coexist.

The combination of a deficient government and effective private initiatives in terms of services makes people believe that they should both coexist in an ideal scenario. Private services offer better quality and set the standard of how things should be done. The government can ensure that these high-quality services can be affordable for all people. This coexistence could and should be extended to cooperation.

“Private companies are trying but the government is not helping with the tax on them and why I said private companies do roads is because I have experienced two roads that private wanted to do but they said the tax the government is charging them is much.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“I think it should be free but even if it's not going to be free, it should be very affordable because they generate revenue from resources, natural resources. So, they should be able to give us free stuff also. Free education and free healthcare.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Let me bring up the suggestion of “togetherness”. I think the public and the private sector need to work together.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

People are disillusioned and disengaged with government.

People in Nigeria are deeply disillusioned with government and have little expectations of change in terms of education and healthcare—even if, at an abstract level, they consider that these should be provided with quality for free. They have experienced years of promises that are not kept and have not seen significant improvements that would suggest that anything is going to change.

This has led to a disengagement from the public sector and a generalized negative perception of its role in providing services. There is no relationship with government or commitment to the public. They do, however, want to be heard and valued.

“They know the truth, but they choose to listen to what they want and do what they want since we cannot challenge them.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“People complain even on news and they [the government] always watch and listen but do nothing.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Yes, the government should provide these services because during elections they always promise to deliver and improve the lives of the citizens, but they don’t keep to their promises once they win, they tend to focus only on their family, but we are surviving by God’s Grace.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“If it is not our right, they will not be making promises they won’t fulfill during elections.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“It should be free but it’s not possible for it to be free. It should be free but the government we have, not possible for it to be free.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“There should be a means of communicating with the government and let them hear us.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Perceived corruption does play a part in the disillusionment with the government, as it is seen as a pervasive problem that exists in all the public sector. Still, it plays only a minor role in the overall relationship that they have built with the public sector; the primary complaint is that the government officials do not care about the people.

“There is nowhere that there is no corruption. Of course, there is corruption in the government sector because no matter how much you can even monitor them, they will still do what they like. It’s the government they don’t care.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“On the aspect of the private sector, maybe for their gain, I would say no because the private sector has, if you watch it, it’s an individual, and that individual is a citizen like me and you. He feels for humanity. That’s why I said my own case. I was rejected by five public hospitals. Due to what reason? I don’t know. Then a particular individual who owns his private hospital felt this man’s life is important.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Anytime we hear of government giving out items probably in one primary school we will go there and only hear the government has distributed 5000 bags or wants to feed 10000 families, it would not even reach 1000 families or even 500 families and they will take everything to their houses the corruption is too much in the government.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“When they try to repair the roads, a certain councilor can come out and propose to repair it with 15 million naira otherwise it may not even be up to 7 million naira is it not a part of corruption? So, ‘we are the government, and we are wicked and corrupt.’” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Taxes as the basis to demand improvements

The most common departing point to demand changes from the government, given the premise that politicians do not care about helping the people, are the taxes that are paid by all people. They assume that the money collected by the government should amount to significant financial resources to at least make important improvements at a faster pace. At the moment, taxes become the strongest link mediating the citizen-government relationship.

At a secondary level, people do express demands for better public services as a right within their discourse. The fact that they consider that a fair and ethical system is one where quality services are offered to all without money as a barrier implies an indirect form of a right they demand.

“[We can demand better services from the government because we are] paying our taxes.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“It is our right; we pay tax, so what do they use it for?” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“I am a trader in the market and those government officials comes to my shop and if you don’t pay, you will not be allowed to sell, even if your stand is just an umbrella you will pay for the space, so it is our right, the tax we pay should be put into good use.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Individuals are forced to cope and solve their needs by themselves

Within this context of deficient public services and expensive private services, individuals are forced to take action to fulfill the needs that are unmet by the current offer. Whether it is by individual action or communal effort, people impose the responsibility on themselves and others of taking care of the education, health, and other services. They see this situation as natural and is part of their discourse when referring to public services.

This reinforces their precarious situation as it implies additional costs, either directly with money or in terms of the time they invest to solve the void left by the situation of services. While the burden of finding a solution by themselves is transferred to the individual, at the same time their agency is limited as they are unable to decide on their living conditions and the services they receive.

“You see, in some environments, the transformer will get spoiled, the community will contribute money for the transformer. They will contribute money for the wires, for the things they are paying for.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

In education, this translates into a prominent role of the family in complementing the child’s education and ensuring that they are getting the most out of whatever the government is providing. This responsibility is expressed as close involvement in the daily tasks of the student and the overall performance of the teacher.

“Education begins at home first. Those days, when we used to go to public school, you will not have a lesson teacher. It’s your mom who will tutor you on what you learned in school. So parents should train their children, all these motivations should start from home first.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“We parents should have time for our children. Whenever they get back from schools, let’s check their books and see how they are doing, maybe you are educated, you can show them how to do it better or raise early complaints to the teachers and they can do better.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

In health care, this means resorting to homemade solutions based on cultural tradition, particularly herbal drinks. These are provided by community experts at a fraction of the cost of going to formal healthcare institutions, allowing them to “avoid” the costs and mistreatment they experience with the latter.

“For me, when I start noticing a rise in body temperature of my kids, I look for lemon grass and mango leave, pawpaw and seven leaves of guava cook and soak in water and give to them to drink. After some time, they will urinate, but if after two weeks they don’t feel better I can go to a chemist with 500 naira, I can get drugs and that can sustain them till after six months.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“I also give my kids herbal drinks- The last time my son was ill, I went to the hospital: instead of paying attention to my son, they were more concerned about hospital cards and, even when you pay for the card, they take over 2 hours before providing one and another 5 hours before doctor’s consultation and my son is critically ill. How do I manage that? So, I prefer patronizing a lady who lives in my area to prepare a herbal drink for me and it cost less, about 1500 naira.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

The community is central to the social experience of education and health

There is a strong sense of community among Nigerian people; the network of people surrounding the individual play an important part in how the latter solves the deficiencies of public services. There is a collective experience of education and healthcare, and a sharing of important moments in life, driven by inherited knowledge, mutual assistance, and coordinated action of the community.

“Some of them [parents who are not educated trying to help their children] direct the kids to educated people around them for assistance.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Let’s go back to that idea of training our children at home. Let’s help the teachers then we can make it easier for them.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“There is a lady in my area called Auntie Nurse, she has a chemist. If you are sick, you can call her, she will come to your house and give you intravenous drip, injections, and you can pay her between 3000 - 5000 naira depending on the treatment.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“I gave birth in Redeem Church; it was sponsored by the church. When I want to do scan, I go to a lab. After birthing your child, you do thanksgiving in church.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Care as the driver of improvement

Parallel to the vision of a collective, a lot of weight is put on the importance of care as a driver for improvement. They believe that when people care about each other—whether it is the government caring about the people, the doctors about their patients, teachers about their students, as well as individuals about those who provide the services—and recognize others as individuals who also face hardships and precarity, then everyone will be better off because their actions will be influenced by their attitude of caring.

While this process is triggered at the individual level through empathy and the recognition of the other’s needs, it requires a society-level shift to care in an interdependent network of people who take care of each other: there is a public duty to ensure people’s wellbeing instead of it being an individual burden.

A corollary of the perception of a government that doesn’t care about its people is that, in return, people don’t care about politicians and only highlight their negligence and defects, they are apathetic towards the government.

This also underscores the importance of attention and good treatment in determining the quality of a service, regardless of the physical and resource limitations that may exist.

“I think the government should work on mostly is they should try to put the people into the heart.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“I support my child’s teacher sometimes: I buy tops, detergents, and give her and she looks after my child. I cannot support government.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“When I was in Apapa, there is a general hospital my sister gave birth, so they recommended that operation should be done on her. She was not attended on time, a waste bag was kept on her chest and no instructions was given, she was just abandoned and few days after, when she started feeling better, she vomited and the cleaner broke loose screaming at her, why she vomited. And one of my brothers now shouted back at her and asked her if she couldn’t see that it was out of her control and clearly it is caused by her ill health.

I walked to the cleaner who had just shouted at my sister and asked her if she doesn’t get paid, and she was like: if only I know the last time she was paid. We even began giving her money and before we left the hospital, we gave her the leftover meals. During this period, we noticed they started attending to us nicely.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

2 Differences in perception between education and health

All the elements discussed in the previous section apply to both education and healthcare systems. The main differences in perception between the two public services are centered around the intermediaries who deliver the services.

In **education**, teachers are generally considered to be capable and prepared to ensure a good education for children but are unable to do so because of the conditions in which they have to work.

For **healthcare**, even if they have the technical knowledge in medicine, doctors and nurses are criticized as being incompetent in terms of service and humane treatment of patients, albeit with the understanding to some extent that their working conditions provide little incentive do act otherwise.

Additionally, the nature and context in which these services are delivered are a relevant frame to understand these differences in perception. The public education system is comparatively slightly better than that of public health when compared to private-offered services because education is a long-term process in which each person can influence the outcome, whereas health is a situation of imminent risk for which very specialized knowledge is required.

What is needed to improve

To improve public services in both education and healthcare, it is necessary to work in three main areas:

- **Physical conditions and resources.** There needs to be an investment in infrastructure and supplies so that there are the adequate conditions to provide a good service. This also implies setting the conditions to increase the offer. Both are prerequisites to change how intermediaries deliver government services and improve perception.
- **Personnel.** This is the central pillar of improvement and the key to creating quality services considering the importance of intermediaries in perception and experience.
 - First, there should be more personnel as part of increasing the offer to cope with overwhelming demand.
 - Second, professionals delivering the services need to be well compensated and receive an income that both allows them to have decent living conditions and incentivizes them to do their best effort at work.
 - Third, there is a need for soft-skills training that emphasizes the importance of humane treatment and good service, and it should be reinforced periodically.
- **Oversight.** Even when the working conditions of the people delivering the services are improved to be conducive to good-quality treatment and attention, there should still be some form of supervision to ensure that intermediaries are performing correctly. This could either be internal or, preferably, from a third party that is trustworthy.

2.1 Education

Education is considered an important tool for the wellbeing of all Nigerians to the extent that it forms the next generation while it prevents children from engaging in illegal or negative behaviors at an early age. It is a long and low-intensity process, in which the outcomes are seen in the long term, even if its quality is measured on a day-to-day basis with what children are learning. Also, it does not imply situations of vital urgency, nor does it have indicators as clear and categorical as a person's health.

A deficient system, unable to cope with demands, leaves teachers in a precarious situation

The conditions in which teachers have to educate are inadequate to the point of it being impossible to expect them to do a better job than the one they currently do. The number of children is simply too large and the infrastructure and supplies too little to have a different result.

It is necessary to help them directly by giving them better wages and additional support such as housing, and indirectly by creating the conditions in which they can deliver a quality education: better school buildings, enough desks, more educational resources, smaller class sizes, etc.

“They have teachers, but they don't have time. You can't teach children alone, you have to have a relationship with them like, okay, I know this child. So, if a child is missing in the class, they cannot know because there are too many. I'm telling you

that the least you can see in the class is 80.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Teachers should be taken care of. For example, when we were coming, we saw police quarters; I believe this should be done for teachers, [but] I have never seen. As far as government is taking care of you, tell me why the teacher will not take care of our children in school.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Teachers should be well paid, just like the politicians too. And the government should invest more in the annual expenditure or the budget for the year, it should increase education in the budget, annually.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“For the teachers, I feel some of them are overused. You see a teacher teaching four to five subjects. What's that for? And you are paying him or her peanuts. It's not nice. They should employ more labors so that the job will be easier.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“They need more space. They have teachers. They have good teachers.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“For the government to improve more on our education system, let them put more funds as in more funds, let them create more classes, more schools. Let them make it convenient, and comfortable. One of the reasons why the private are getting a little better than the government is that they have types of equipment like computers, and libraries.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Government should try and provide material from computers in the lab, skeletons in science laboratory for research, as a student you cannot graduate from a school that does not lack material and not be smart, unlike what we have present: I doubt you can find functional computers in government schools, and it is not good because the child's brain can't be smart.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Prominent role of the family and the community

As stated above, individuals impose a large responsibility on the parents to complement their children's education, which is reinforced by the deficiencies in the government-provided system. It is also expected that parents have a continuous supervision of the child's progress and the teacher's performance. This responsibility falls primarily on the mothers (further developed in the following section), but there is also a strong sense of communal assistance from others who are more educated.

“We parents should also be intentional with our children's growth instead of relying only on teachers, when your kids are back you can ask them about homework, this

will make the child to do and be better.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Proper” English as an indicator of good education

The most mentioned criterion to point out the deficiencies of public education is language, where the knowledge of correct English is a symbol of good education. On the other hand, Yoruba and pidgin English are implicitly considered of secondary value or even ignorant. This use of “proper” English is associated with a successful professional life within the framework of the hegemonic economic system.

“For example, in my kids school the teacher speaks poor English, speaks more of pidgin English and our local dialect Yoruba but you can never see such in a private school.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“When I got there [to the school], I was shocked to see the teacher, despite me been a high school dropout, but starring at what the teacher wrote on the board I could tell it was not English but Yoruba.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Famous individuals as success stories of public education

An important argument for defending public education among people are famous individuals who went to these schools and became iconic examples of what can be achieved without the need of attending private institutions. The very deficiencies of public education are used as an explanation for that success: those limitations become character builders that make individuals be more persistent and determined.⁵

However, there is also the consideration that public education has deteriorated through time, and that what were considered correct practices then are no longer articulated with the modern world.

“You know, while we are growing up like they were saying, no classroom. Sitting on the floor builds you up. 90% of our sports administration and sportsmen are from public schools you see most of those people like you are saying, are from public schools. How many of them come from private schools?” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Sometimes I complain to my husband that I wish for my kids to attend private schools, but he is always against it and makes examples of top leaders like the president Bola Tinubu who attended a government school, but I always make him to

⁵ Another important criticism that was made of the contemporary education system, particularly by men, is the banning of harsher punishments on children, including physical punishment, as a medium to build character and determination.

understand that life has evolved, and the standard has dropped since the time they attended a government school.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

The social cost of deficient education

An education system that falls short and is unable to cope with the demand has important implications that extend beyond the individual's life and become a social cost that leaves everyone worse off. Education is not only key to allow people to have better professional opportunities but also prevents children from engaging in illegal acts, forced by the conditions of necessity that are imposed on them.

“The cost of education of sending my children to school is at a higher rate. Whereby the tuition fee they pay has gone up, you know, times three of what we normally pay before. So, that affects the educational sector in Nigeria. Whereby, you know, you see parents not sending their children to school anymore. They just want them to go and learn through it. And by so doing, you are taking these children, you know, back to the street again. Whereby they will become miscreants, touts and all the rest of them.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“I had a very good chance to see a young boy driving a tricycle and this police officer, because the guy lost a break when he wanted to make a U-turn, instead he was slapping this boy and took him to the police station, and I was like ‘this is a young boy that is trying to make ends meet for himself.’ So, if you take this back from him and you see him tomorrow on the street stealing. The same government will criticize this boy. So, our government needs to work on that area. Let them put the masses at heart.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

2.2 Healthcare

Health, as opposed to education, is a service that is required in many acute emergency situations. It has very clear indicators as the presence of symptoms and consequences that can be both immediate and severe: in the worst case, death. It also requires very specialized knowledge, which limits the ability of individuals to compensate for deficiencies of public services and leads to powerlessness. Taken together, these characteristics explain why empathy and humane treatment are put at the forefront in the evaluating the quality of this service.

Public hospitals prioritize bureaucracy and payment

People have experienced repeatedly a public healthcare system that is more concerned about paperwork, bureaucratic processes, and payment before the health of the patient, even if it is a life-threatening situation. The scarce resources and supplies that public hospitals have make things even harder, and there is a clear demand for more investment and offer, but it is the attitude of the people

delivering the services and their emphasis in getting paperwork sorted out first that generates the most annoyance and complaints.

“They don’t attend to sick patients until they are paid, they should put an end to that because negligence and delay can kill.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Payment before treatment it’s very wrong. It’s very wrong before the person will run around looking for money.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Another thing is that someone will be dying, and they will be waiting for police reports.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“They should provide drugs, and equipment, provide enough bedding for the hospital, make space for the patients, and pay their doctors. Not to allow them to travel out. You should pay your doctor well.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Timing and treatment differentiate private healthcare

With time as a key variable when facing health situations, the immediate treatment that private institutions offer is an essential differentiator that underscores the shortcomings of the public healthcare system. This immediacy is complemented, and goes hand in hand, with humane treatment from doctors and nurses. Together, these two convey the message of putting life first and caring about the people—even if its is paid for and at a higher cost, or, as mentioned before, precisely because of it.

“They said I might be dead or whatever while I was still unconscious. To the last hour, when they took me to LUTH. LUTH is a government hospital in Yaba. Immediately I got there, they said there was no bed. The next thing they told my mum was if they have to give me a space, there is another space at the back in which only the bed alone is close to 200,000 [naira]. But do you know that eventually, when they finally rushed me to the last hospital, which was a private hospital, before my mum was still asking for the price, he said, no ma, life first, we’ll talk about the money later.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

Community-based, traditional remedies as solution

Facing a precarious situation, individuals, particularly mothers, find an alternative in herbal drinks provided by a specialized person within the community and based on inherited traditional knowledge. This becomes a solution because it offers a counterpoint to the major barriers experienced with the available formal offer: it is low cost, avoids unnecessary bureaucracy, doesn’t involve waiting and

mistreatment from unknown, uninterested individuals, and it comes from a trustworthy source within the community.

“For me, I will continue with my herbal drink, because I cannot remember the last time I visited a hospital.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

3 Motherhood and the burden of care

Women, especially those who are mothers, due to their assigned social role are generally the most involved in people’s experience with public services.

They are the ones responsible for ensuring the wellbeing and development of their children, which implies that they are the ones in charge of making up for the public services’ shortcomings. Within this context of precarity, their agency is limited, including by their husbands, as they must adapt to prioritize their child’s wellbeing. In this sense, public schools offer a temporary “relief” for mothers as their child is taken care of, albeit deficiently, during a part of the day.

“I would turn my wife into a teacher [if all private schools disappeared]. I think that would be better, because what is the purpose of sending my child to school when he can’t learn? The environment is not conducive.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“Some mothers, they don’t have time for their children. All that they do is, early in the morning, she takes her children to school. Some parents leave as the children are still sleeping and come back when the children are in bed. So, they don’t have time to train them, but if a child goes to public school, they will be trained.” Men and women, 36 to 50 years old, Middle-Low SEL

In this responsibility of caring for their children, mothers are more sensitive to the day-to-day risks that the deficient system of public services poses. Because of the unequal distribution of domestic and care responsibilities, it is women who are responsible for sending and receiving their children from schools daily, or ensuring as best they can that they learn from their homework. In doing so, they experience their children’s interactions with public services and the risks they must face as part of the systematic deficiencies. This includes smaller hazards such as getting wet due to poor infrastructure conditions to more severe risks like sexual abuse for young girls within a context of permissive misogyny.

“I also prefer private schools sometimes when I am home and it rains, I get scared for my children, and I pray for Gods protection. Sometimes they get back home and their bags are wet because the class get flooded with water, but if I have money, I

can afford a private school to give them a better life.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“My neighbor for example, his children attend private school. When they are back, you will hear, go and meet mayor or aunty Damola to teach you your homework, so it must not always be a male neighbor since you are insecure about your girl child.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

They experience firsthand all the implications of the situation of public services to the point where they prefer having their childbirths, a milestone in life and a delicate health situation, outside of formal healthcare institutions. While this certainly responds to cultural traditions, it is also indicative of the absence of other *real* alternatives where they feel safe, respected, and accompanied.

“Even my childbirth, it was in a church for my first child and my second child was at home.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

“I have had both Alagbo (Traditional Medicine Seller) and hospital experience for the birthing of my kids, but I prefer Alagbo (Traditional Medicine Seller) because there is something special about the roots and herbal drink they offer, it works exactly on what you want.” Women, 26 to 35 years old, Middle-Low SEL

In their position as primary caretakers of children who interact the most with public services, mothers can play a strategic role in the construction of the community’s perception of these services and creating collective action to demand for improvements.

Additionally, in the multi-faceted activities with many roles that they fulfill, they are the first ones to be empathetic with the people who deliver the services and recognize the hard conditions in which they have to work.