Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria: Importance of Partnerships

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Abstract: The need to consolidate and complete the development progress driven by the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and ensure that no one is left behind led world leaders to gather at the UN Headquarters in New York in September 2015 to adopt a new program on sustainable development. The SDGs provide a more ambitious international framework for driving progress between 2016 and 2030. A review of the MDGs implementation in Nigeria reveals that the country registered mixed results across the goals, geographic areas and gender groups. Even though, there are some progresses on some indicators, many of the goals and targets were not met. This is in view of the fact that the Nigerian Government did so many things in order to achieve the set goals. The debates surrounding the SDGs have mainly concerned with the setting of goals and indicators while less attention has been paid to discussing the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders towards achieving these goals, and how to best implement this universal framework at the local level. Given the scope and ambition of the SDGs, it is clear that governments alone cannot achieve the agenda. Therefore, building vibrant and systematic partnerships with other stakeholders is a vital prerequisite for the successful implementation of a transformative agenda to accelerate poverty reduction and sustainable development goals. The objective of this paper is to explore the role of CSOs, VOPEs, private sector and the media towards achieving the SDGs in Nigeria.
Keywords: sustainable development, MDGs implementation, framework.

INTRODUCTION

The need to consolidate and complete the development progress driven by the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and ensure that no one is left behind led world leaders to gather at the UN Headquarters in New York in September 2015 to adopt a new program on sustainable development. This new Development Agenda includes 17 new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will guide development policy and financing for the next 15 years (i.e. until year 2030). The SDGs provide a more ambitious international framework for driving progress between 2016 and 2030. The aim of the 17 SDGs (see Table 1 in the Appendix) is to secure a sustainable, peaceful, prosperous and equitable life on earth for everyone now and in the future. Like the MDGs, the SDGs are not legally binding; they represent a political commitment to development by all UN member states [1]. Ultimately, these universal goals according to Sachs [2] are expected to create a benchmark that ensures the balancing of economic development and global environmental goals with poverty reduction objectives.

A review of the MDGs implementation in Nigeria reveals that the country registered mixed results across the goals, geographic areas and gender groups. Chintuwa [3] argued that despite rapid advances by some countries that show that MDGs are achievable, most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa including the populous nation of Nigeria were unable to mobilize resources, political and financial support to meet specific global challenges, especially the fight against HIV/AIDS and weak fragile economies. Even though, there are some progresses on some indicators, many of the goals and targets were not met [1]. Uneze and Adeniran [4] also identified Nigeria as one of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that performed dismally on the MDGs, despite its high domestic revenue.

This is in view of the fact that the Nigerian Government did so many things in order to achieve the set goals and also specifically address the problems of poverty reduction, education, gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, combat HIV

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[1] Nigeria's Road to SDGs-Country Transition Strategy October 2015

And AIDS, malaria and other diseases and ensure environmental sustainability in the country, some policy initiatives have been put in place such as National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and these were designed to drive the long term goals of poverty reduction, employment generation, wealth creation, and value reorientation in the country. Given the scope and ambition of the SDGs, it is clear that governments alone cannot achieve the agenda. Government needs to facilitate participation of some key stakeholders like civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, media and other relevant stakeholder such as Voluntary Organizations for Professionals Evaluation (VOPEs). Unfortunately, the debates surrounding the SDGs have mainly concerned with the setting of goals and indicators while less attention has been paid to discussing the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders towards achieving these goals, and how to best implement this universal framework at the local level [5].

One of the key drivers of community mobilization is the CSOs; this is because most of the CSOs represent the needs of underrepresented communities and regions. This makes them critical partners in ensuring that SDG strategies target the needs of all segments of society and ensuring accountability for SDG implementation. Second, CSOs have extensive experience in delivering services to the poor and can recommend appropriate interventions in different parts of the country. An examination of MDG-related implementation practices in South Africa revealed that CSOs played a critical role in advancing these goals by effectively articulating the needs and aspirations of the poor, fulfilling critical service-delivery gaps and promoting "good" governance practices [6].

One of the reasons the MDGs were not achieved in Nigeria is low awareness. Many people did not get to know about the MGDs until 5 years after implementation commenced. The media has played a pivotal role in achieving considerable progress towards achieving the SDGs. This is because the media have power of inclusivity; they can reach out to many people "so that no one is left behind". The media could play accountability role by asking state governments questions on how their policies and plans is aligned to the SDGs. The media are crucial in national development since they influence public opinion, behavior and attitudes of the public.

One of the lessons from MDGs is the sporadic and restricted involvement of private sector. There has been increasing consensus that the private sector has to be more involved in the SDGs implementation, particularly as economic growth, trade and jobs are high on the agenda. This is because the private sector plays a key role in development. Yet discussions on a new framework have to date mostly included development practitioners, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and have largely excluded the private sector [7]. UNIDO [8] argued that partnering with the private sector is the foundation of any successful large-scale development strategy. UNIDO [8] further stated that shared nature of the global development challenges facing the world today calls for collective action that is inspired and shaped by the challenges and opportunities of the next fifteen years. Therefore, building vibrant and systematic partnerships with the private sector is a vital prerequisite for the successful implementation of a transformative agenda to accelerate poverty reduction and sustainable development goals. For instance, to achieve the ultimate goal of poverty eradication and sustainable development in each of its three dimensions, policymakers will need to reflect on policies and collaboration mechanisms for enabling private sector actors to make a contribution to sustained economic and industrial growth and job creation, and to achieve shared progress in a socially inclusive and environmentally sound manner.

Another key lesson learned from the MDGs underscore that high-quality; disaggregated data is essential to ensure equitable progress against goals and targets [9]. Experience from the implementation of the MDGs reveals the absence of established baseline data for monitoring and evaluation process for tracking progress despite the fact that the process of managing a successive project requires monitoring and evaluation. The VOPEs that usually have great mix of experienced evaluators both locally and abroad including informal network of public, private and academic evaluators could support in developing a national monitoring framework and accompanying set of national indicators. Therefore, VOPEs could support in collection of data which could be used for setting benchmarks for SDGs and also for tracking the progress of implementation of SDGs and evaluation of same. Given the foregoing, the objective of this paper is to explore the role of CSOs, VOPEs, private sector and the media towards achieving the SDGs in Nigeria.
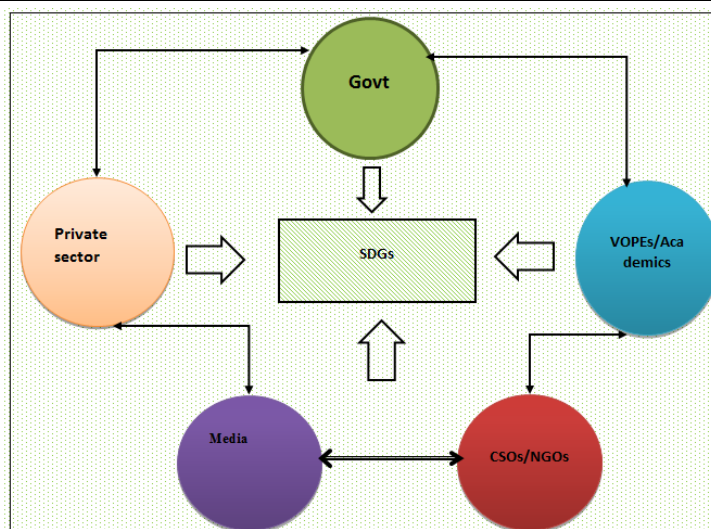
Fig-1: Strategic Framework for Partnerships to achieve SDGs
Source: Authors' conceptualization

Importance of Partnership to Achieving SDGs

Successful partnerships could bring each partner's core competence and experience to the table, building synergies to co-create something new and impactful for sustainable development. Partnership is crucial for the achievement of the SDGs. This is because SDGs represent the commitment of every country and the entire world to objectives, which reflect some core human values. SDGs affect every life on the planet and every one need to participate in the process so as to influence its direction, nature and success. Partnership is necessary for SDGs as the goals represent a too big and too complex a task to be left to government alone. Partnership brings actors, even those who have traditionally held opposing views, together and contributes to a unifying force for SDGs. One major contribution of partnership is that various partners with their diversified expertise and experience for instance VOPEs could bring different value-added to the monitoring and tracking process, which would create a strong synergy in initiatives towards achieving SDGs. Also, because civil society organizations work at the grassroots and have experiences in mobilization, they could uniquely bring the masses to participate, which in turn creates sense of belonging and encourage demand for transparency and accountability. Partnership can also bring sectoral coherence as various actors work in diversified sectors.

Private sector for instance play vital role in economic development of a nation. According to African Development Report [10], the private sector dominates Africa's economy. A report by Australian Government stated that private sector generates 90 per cent of jobs, funds 60 per cent of all investments and provides more than 80 per cent of government revenues in developing countries. This make private sector an important Government partner in improving intra and inter sectoral coherence and coordination towards attaining the SDGs.

Partnering with Private Sector

Private sector could support in mobilize recourses and employment creation hence increase in aggregate consumption. The private sector has been recognized to play a key role in development. It accounted for over 80 % of total production, two-thirds of total investment, and three-fourths of total credit to the economy over the period 1996-2008 [10]. Business productive activities are central to local economic growth, as they are a source of jobs; investment; knowledge and innovation; and goods and services provision [11]. In many instances, the private sector has acted as a contributor to achieve development objects through mobilizing resources to support national sustainable programs, fostering inclusive economic growth, creating opportunities for employment, and serving as a driver for transferring technology and innovation. Creating incentives to attract the private sector to partner with other actors, will allow for governments to benefit from an increase of entrepreneurial enterprises, which in turn will mobilize more technology and resources to generate innovative solutions to critical development issues.

However, there is a need for government to provide enabling environment and think of how to appropriately incentivize partnerships and ultimately investors to put money into sustainable development. The environment must be stimulating and this can only be achieved through good governance, transparent public institutions and the rule of law. Government investment in development can further help to stimulate private sector financing, and generate incentives to fund projects. For instance, the Ministry of Agriculture can partner with the private sector to undertake the development of large commercial farms. The

government could allow investors in the projects to be given certain year's renewable lease on government agricultural land and provided responsibility in developing, financing and operating the farms. This is crucial as the SDG12 (Sustainable consumption and production) and some cross cutting targets of SDG8 and SDG9 are specifically important to the Private Sector's roles.

Partnering with CSOs to Achieve SDGs

The inclusion of CSOs as partners in the implementation of SDGs is imperative, for these actors play crucial roles in the society as agents of accountability and service delivery. In the African context, the inclusion of CSOs is important because governance throughout the continent is described as being "bad" and of low quality [12], whilst not enough effective institutional spaces have been created by governments to allow CSOs to engage with and act on global development issues. CSOs have been identified to play critical roles in advancing the MDGs by effectively articulating the needs and aspirations of the poor, fulfilling critical service-delivery gaps and promoting "good" governance in South Africa.

CSOs have become important channels for delivery of social services and implementation of other development programs, especially in areas where government capacity is weak or non-existent [13]. The liberalization policies in Nigeria have led to decentralization or even privatization of social service delivery, which has resulted in a larger role for CSOs. Engagement with CSOs is a critical underpinning factor in: building the climate for investment, job opportunities and sustainable growth, and investing in poor people and empowering them to participate in development. This is particularly relevant to promoting public sector governance, empowerment, security, social inclusion, education, and health.

The goal number one of SDG is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. CSOs actions are needed to strengthen the political role of the poor and to make state institutions more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the poor. Processes of accountability and legal institutions defending the rights of the poor and vulnerable members of the society must be strengthened. Social barriers to poverty reduction, such as discrimination against women in the job marketplace, need to be removed. Civil Society Groups could engage policy and decision makers to make this a reality in Nigeria. CSOs can give voice to the concerns of primary and secondary stakeholders, particularly poor and marginalized populations, and help ensure that their views are factored into policy and program decisions. There is need for CSOs to advocate for states that have development plan to align their plan with the SDGs and look for area of convergence so they can meet the SDGs as they are implementing their development plan. For states that do not have development plan in place, CSOs

can advocate for the need for their yearly budget to align with the SDGs and also ensure states work towards meeting those targets.

What CSOs could do is to understand SDGs and align their activities with the SDGs so they can engage the government and look for issues that have traction so other players like private sector can engage in because one of the shortcomings of the MDGs is the minimal involvement of the private sector in the process. In addition, CSOs can promote public consensus and local ownership for reforms and for national poverty reduction and development strategies by creating knowledge-sharing networks, building common ground for understanding, encouraging public-private cooperation, and sometimes even diffusing tensions.

CSOs and Media Partnerships for Advocacy and Awareness Campaign

At several times so many developmental initiatives were lost due to lack of awareness and knowledge among other factors [14]. Connelly, Doyle and Dwyer [15] in their study found, that there exists a high level support for development initiative like MDGs, but with a relatively low level of knowledge. In other words, public awareness of the goals is minimal but the very few who are aware of the goals lend support to the possible achievement. Campaigning for SDGs is thus critical – first, to create awareness and hope in favour of its importance; second, to mobilize policy support and resources for it and third, to identify actors and forge partnerships for implementation. Many government agencies and parastatals including private sector are not aware of the SDGs and even when they are aware they either lack understanding of what SDGs stand for or have apathy towards the SDGs. International development agencies have been supportive in creating awareness, but there is also equal need for CSOs to use their broad networks to engage in awareness campaign and sensitization of the general public. To achieve this, CSOs can partners with media organizations. As an addition to the above role, CSOs can also strengthen and leverage on the impact of development programs by providing local knowledge, identifying potential risks, targeting assistance, and expanding reach, particularly at the community level.

CSOs could engage the media to air and feature TV shows, radio interviews and articles about the SDGs, and providing special training to journalists on the SDGs to ensure objective reporting. They could conduct intensive SDG training for government officials to strengthen the knowledge of public servants on the 2030 Agenda. Media could use social media such as Twitter to hold regular question-and-answer sessions between the government and the public. Media has played a pivotal role in achieving considerable progress in achieving the SDGs in Nigeria. The role of both news media and social media is central to raising

awareness and providing better understanding of the agenda for Sustainable Development

Partnering with VOPEs and Academics to Achieve SDGs

Voluntary Organizations Professional Evaluators (VOPEs) is a professional body that has great mix of experienced evaluators both locally and abroad including informal network of public, private and academic evaluators. According to UNICEF [16], VOPEs is established by evaluation practitioners, that is, people who make their living by doing or commissioning evaluations, who self-organize to discuss and share professional experiences and challenges and to jointly advance the profession and develop professional standards. VOPEs do organize events like conferences, workshops and seminars, and publications which provide platforms for professional exchange. This exchange according to UNICEF [16] advances the professional capacity of more experienced evaluators and the learning of those who are new to the profession. VOPEs can serve as training platform by supporting appropriate training and capacity building programmes need of delivery staff and other stakeholders in order to enhance their productivity and efficiency in implementing SDGs programmes and projects.

Ajiye [17] argues that Nigeria does not have adequate data or systems to collect and analyze data and this makes planning and implementing measures to meet the MDG targets particularly difficult. Barthes, Howard and Phillips [18] states that the disappearance of disciplined collection and analysis of data for national planning and development hinders the efforts to plan and track progress towards the MDG targets because the available is not reliable or consistent. This problem was attributed to the fact that the capacity of institutions to gather data is very weak, and as a result the data available are not very reliable or consistent. For instance, assessment of progress towards achieving the MDGs since 2006 and the recent assessment of the Conditional Grants Scheme (CGS) consistently reflects the inadequacy of data [18].

This underscores the critical need for quality data both for planning programmes and projects, and for monitoring. VOPEs can support data collection just as the "traditional" forms of large-scale data collection take a number of years to complete and analyse, which ultimately delays action for those in need as reported by Sustainable Development Solutions Network [9], the new improved information technology, such as the innovative use of mobile technology in collecting data, if the associated challenges can be managed adequately can be adopted by VOPEs as adaptable tools for data collection, monitoring and evaluation of processes related to the implementation of the SDGs.

The SDGs, targets and means of implementation are thought of as universal, indivisible and interlinked. Each of the 17 goals has a set of targets. In each set, at least one target involves learning, training, educating or at the very least raising awareness of core sustainable development issues. Education has long been recognized as a critical factor in addressing environmental and sustainability issues and ensuring human well-being. In this regards, academicians have vital role in achieving SDGs. In the process leading up to the SDGs, numerous actors throughout the world participated; this is in view of the recognition of the role of research in contributing to development goals. Research based knowledge is crucial for all the 17 goals. Global education monitoring report [19] showed how research and research based knowledge, in interaction with other parts of our knowledge society, is a precondition for all of the goals to be realized. The report, however, also argues that this inter-linkage between the different goals "through research and knowledge" has been poorly understood (pp. 10, 11). The SDGs are given a universal validity differing from the previous MDGs. Thus national commitments within all countries drive the process. Still, the primary goal is to contribute with knowledge about how we must interact across borders to reach these goals without leaving anybody behind, and by sharing the burden equally.

Partnership for Monitoring and Evaluating SDGs for Accountability

To achieve the SDGs, successful execution of projects that have direct and indirect link to the SDGs is necessary. The SDGs are ends, and the projects are the necessary means to these ends. Thus, the processes of managing projects require monitoring and evaluation. There is need for proper monitoring of projects under the SDG. Project monitoring means the assessment of the performance of a project to ascertain its conformity with stated objectives or goals. Monitoring is very relevant and vital process for ensuring continuity, feedback for planning future projects and achieving sustainable development generally. Effective Monitoring process properly instituted or incorporated into the design or planning of an infrastructure project will create feedback and learning culture from the project inception to completion by all stakeholders thereby promoting the benefit of continuous learning, better communication, planning and coordination on government policies and programs.

As was the case for the MDGs, monitoring of the SDGs is expected to be performed by national statistical offices with the support of various UN agencies. However, Nigeria like many other countries were unable to access the capacity necessary to collect, analyzes, and disseminates the data required for reporting their progress on the MDGs. There is concern that the SDGs will suffer similar shortfalls in regard to capacity for monitoring, as there are now even more

goals and targets which must be monitored. CSOs and VOPEs can play monitoring and evaluation role by ensure the implementation of the SDGs on yearly basis. Arowolo [20] argues that CSOs have the important role of directly monitoring the local implementation of the SDGs.

According to Motala *et al.*, [6], CSOs can produce shadow reports, particularly when it believes that a country report is inadequate and does not highlight the plight of the poorest and most marginalized citizens. One clear instance of this was a case of Lagos State Civil Society Partnership (LACSOP) which technically analyzed the Lagos State 2014 budget and documented report of findings with key recommendations representing people's charter. This report informed the content of Lagos State House of Assembly 2015 Appropriation Bill as well as the budget submitted by the Executive through the Ministry of Economic Planning and Budget [21]. Also, VOPEs can support in monitoring different developmental projects for accountability and to ensure that standardization and project specifications are adhere to.

Meanwhile, achievement of SDGs involves context-specific challenges. Countries need context-sensitive measures that track efforts to attain goals, and evaluation methods that help determine what is working, for whom, under what circumstances, how and why. This is where evaluation comes in. Evaluation is define as episodic (not continuous as the case with monitoring usually midterm and at end of the project) assessment of an ongoing or completed project to determine its actual impact against the planned impact (strategic goal or objectives for which it was implemented) efficiency, sustainability, effectiveness [22].

The importance of evaluation is to assess the relative success of program in meeting the stated objectives and also to identify what can be improved upon in the plan or program. Evaluation helps one to understand change, both anticipated and unanticipated, and plan for what happens next. It does this by establishing why the level of performance is being achieved, what difference is being made, what has been learned, and what to do next in the implementation of a policy or programme [23]. Malaolu and Ogbuabor [24] argued that one major challenge in impact evaluation which cut across developing countries including Nigeria is paucity of skilled evaluators. Hardlife and Zhou [25] state that monitoring and evaluation is a technical field, which demands much of skilled personnel.

It is critically important that those engaged in evaluations have the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to support effective practice, which is evaluation capacity. Thus, VOPEs being group of skilled evaluators can support in evaluation of projects that are linked to the SDGs. VOPEs using adaptive management can help governments to explore emerging and alternative ways to meet objectives and targets, using knowledge from monitoring and evaluation to develop new understanding and appropriate ways of acting and also maintaining stakeholder involvement in follow-up and review processes that will help national governments select the most relevant indicators, take informed decisions and foster widespread ownership of the development agenda.

CONCLUSION

Multi stakeholder partnerships will be crucial to leverage the inter-linkages between the SDGs to enhance their effectiveness and impact and accelerate progress in achieving the Goals. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are a key driver in successfully formulating a more holistic development framework that will produce more sustainable and transformative outcomes in the SDGs. Harnessing the full commitment of various actors, particularly engaging with civil society, media, private sector, and VOPEs is crucial in advancing the deliverability of resources and for increasing the effectiveness of SDGs. Expanding the role of the these actors engaging in partnerships is pivotal to promote the exchange of ideas, technical expertise, and financial resources necessary for the overall success of the SDGs. Government need to play a pivotal role to enable an environment conducive for engagement with SCOs, VOPEs, media and the private sector in order to drive the implementation of development programs which are aligned with national priorities.

Government need to consider creating spaces, platforms, and road maps for CSOs and media to engage easily in a range of partnerships. Governments also need to recognize the strategic benefits of partnering with civil society organizations and increasing individual participation to better evaluate the community's needs and better monitor progress of development programs. Civil society organizations have played a key role in monitoring existing commitments, mobilizing programmes, and providing input to bolster progress on attaining the internationally agreed upon development goals. The World We Want 2015 campaign is an example in which partnering with individuals at the grassroots level has helped to bring the priorities of people to the forefront of the SDGs processes and have further strengthened the unified vision for the new development agenda. Gauging the knowledge and expertise of civil society organizations should be mainstreamed within the SDGs.

Appendix

Table-1: Sustainable Development Goals

Goal	Indicator
Goal 1.	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
Goal 2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
Goal 3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
Goal 4	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all
Goal 5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
Goal 6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all
Goal 8	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
Goal 9	Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
Goal 10	Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
Goal 11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
Goal 12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
Goal 13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Goal 14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
Goal 15	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
Goal 16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
Goal 17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Source: Sustainable Development Solutions Network

The private sector and the external donors should be deeply involved in resource mobilization. The government at all levels may take the first step in reforming public administration and the legal framework, and civil society and international organizations may join them in assisting them in these areas as well as in developing democratic institutions. One important issue is that not every actor has to be involved in every task; rather there should be effective partnerships on the basis of comparative advantage of each. Governments can bring about change, not by acting alone but by working together with other actors with civil society in the broadest sense. Governments can define norms and principles, and plans of action, after carefully listening to the views of civil society. But then they need to work with appropriate partners to put those norms into practice.

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