



The NGO and the SDGs: Lessons for Leadership and Sustainability

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INTRODUCTION

Over the next decade, developing countries are expected to strive towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and sustainable development comprises economic sustainability, social sustainability, and environmental sustainability (Goodland & Daly, 1996; Moldan et al., 2012). In such countries, NGOs play an active role in actualising SDGs and the number of established NGOs keeps increasing. Nevertheless, the rising number does not always mean a greater contribution to development (Brass et al.,

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2018). It seems that deficiencies in leadership and governance capabilities of non-profits challenge the achievement of the Goals—they hinder sustainable development.

According to a non-profit sector leader in a developing context (Nigeria), “leaders help themselves and others to do the right things. They set direction, build an inspiring vision, Leadership is about mapping out where you need to go to as a team or an organisation and it is dynamic, exciting, and inspiring”.¹ Indeed, expectations from leaders in this sector are often higher than for leaders in the rest of the private sector. They operate in a high-trust arena due to their avowed social motivation—the passion to provide basic amenities or services or to champion “policy advocacy and public campaigns” for social reform (Lewis, 2009). Also, due to the importance of their societal transformational roles, CSO and NGO leaders are usually held to higher standards than their corporate and public service counterparts since their ethics can drive or hinder the achievement of development goals in a very direct manner. Hence, they often espouse a value-based leadership approach which emphasises a requirement for ethics on the part of the leader of the organisation (Fayolle & Matlay 2010) and his team. This style of leadership places importance on the ethical values that enable the leader to promote “human flourishing” while focusing on achieving the NGO’s purpose (Dawson & Bartholomew 2003). The value-based leadership approach also encourages consistent administration of the organisation based on the culture and values upon which the organisation was founded (Fayolle & Matlay 2010).

It is not surprising then that when trust is broken in the non-profit sector, this causes development setbacks. Leadership training for this sector has to be robust for technical competence as well as for ethical competence. Good intentions are not enough; they must also be effectively implemented—governance structures need to be in place to ensure their internal and external sustainability as development agents. Of particular importance are those NGOs, currently understudied (Marchiori & Buzzanell, 2017), that are established to promote environmental sustainability. This is, first, because continuous degradation of the environment threatens economic and social sustainability in the present; and second, because without environmental sustainability, the living conditions of

¹ An interview respondent on the topic.

future generations will be adversely affected (Goodland, 1995; Moldan, et al., 2012).

Our chapter seeks to grasp the ingredients for responsible leadership and governance in the non-profit sector through the networked interfaces between ethics, enterprise, and impact for sustainable development in order to reveal the distinctive challenges of a developing context. We are guided by five broad inquiry areas: What do leadership and governance look like for NGOs in West Africa and what are the gaps? What governance structures are in place? What challenges do they face to their own sustainability, both internally and externally? How has technology been or can technology be harnessed to bridge their leadership and governance gaps in order to drive truly sustainable development? And, lastly, what can their journey tell us about the future of the nonprofit sector in the region more broadly? Given the nature of these questions, this study employs an exploratory approach, first examining literature on NGO leadership and governance and their contributions—potential and real—to sustainability, and then moving on to examining field data from semi-structured interviews of four NGO leaders working for environmental sustainability.

Thus, in this chapter, we begin with a deep dive into understanding the relationship between NGOs and the SDGs by reflecting on NGO nature and history, then we consider various themes related to the promotion of environmental sustainability, before discussing the findings from the interviews. The insights revealed can guide NGO-leader training globally as well as indicate the governance imperatives especially for NGOs involved in promoting environmental sustainability. Also, with a better understanding of their challenges, it will be easier to conceptualise and design technology to ensure the sustainability of the NGOs themselves through strengthening their leadership training content and governance structures.

THE NGOS AND THE SDGS—A FLAWED RELATIONSHIP?

This segment examines the nexus between Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and the actualisation of SDGs, with emphasis on environmental sustainability. To achieve this objective, the following themes are examined in detail: first, historical development of NGOs, highlighting factors that led to the emergence of NGOs with respect to developing

countries. Second, issues on global goals, that is, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are raised, and the ensuing discussion is focused on why SDGs are important for securing a better world for the next generation. Lastly, the role of NGOs in achieving SDGs is highlighted. Overall, this segment of the chapter illustrates how the activities of NGOs contribute to or undermine the actualisation of SDGs and acts as context-setting before evidence from deep interviews with four Nigerian NGO professionals in the environmental conservation sector is brought in to further understand the leadership and governance issues that NGOs have.

NATURE AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NGOS

NGOs are non-state actors within the development space, being organisations whose primary activities have humanitarian rather than commercial motives (Dupuy et al., 2016), such as advocacy that is pro-poor or protective of the environment, or community development projects or basic social services (Ebrahim, 2003; Werker & Ahmed, 2008). NGOs worked with activists for the abolishment of slave trade in 1807 in Britain (Werker & Ahmed, 2008), and the quest to rebuild Europe after World War II led to an exponential increase in NGOs (Matanga, 2010; Wright, 2012) whose responsibilities were mainly the provision of relief packages. The reconstruction lasted for few years and then some NGOs shut down while others reshaped their core objectives to justify their existence (Matanga, 2010).

Given the success recorded with the European countries through NGOs, NGO coverage soon expanded to other geographical locations outside Europe, especially to developing countries. Wright (2012) asserts that the interest of NGOs shifted to the Third World countries in the 1950s and 1960s due to perceiving them as underdeveloped, these included countries in Africa. In the 1980s, following the adoption of structural adjustment programmes and to complement government capacity for effective design and implementation of poverty alleviation schemes, NGOs grew in prominence in Africa (Matanga, 2010). Thus, during the 1980s, NGOs often served as the citizen's voice in development planning (Smith, 2010). Studies have shown that the nature of activities by NGOs in African countries were similar and mostly driven by the development agenda of their donors, for example, in Tanzania (Mercer & Green, 2013); Ghana (Arhin et al., 2018), and Nigeria (Smith, 2010).

Once the erstwhile Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), were replaced with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the relevance of NGOs further increased and their activities extended to include the promotion of transparency and accountability, provision of basic services, empowerment of youth and women and the protection of the environment (Mercer & Green, 2013). Their numbers also grew and, therefore, studies to understand their operations and role in fostering development have also increased (Ariti et al., 2018). Likewise, there are many studies around the sustainability of NGOs given their reliance on foreign donor funding in the face of declining foreign assistance (Appe, 2019). This concern for sustainability is an additional reason to give more importance to leadership and governance issues for NGOs, especially along the environmental dimension which is easily neglected in Africa due to other competing priorities.

Advancing Environmental Sustainability

Since 1982 when the term “sustainable development” first appeared in the World Charter for Nature, concerns arose to ensure that current economic activities does not deprive the next generation of a conducive environment (Griggs, et al., 2013; Hak et al., 2016). In addition, challenges like deforestation, air and water pollution, climate change, and loss of biodiversity were highlighted as real threats to a sustainable environment (UNEP, 2019). Discussions at the United Nations Rio + 20 Summit in Brazil in 2012 led to the adoption of the conference outcome document “The Future We Want” (UN, 2012). Thereafter, an Open Working Group (OWG) was constituted and charged with the responsibility of developing a set of SDGs. This effort resulted in the report “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” in September 2015 (Appe, 2019; Holden et al., 2017; UN, 2015). Global acceptance of the discourse came in in September 2015 when United Nations member states consented to shape their development agenda and policies for the next 15 years with the 17 SDGs in the “Transforming Our World” report (Fig. 13.1). The 17 are no poverty, zero hunger, good health, and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, information and infrastructure, reduced inequality, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption



Fig. 13.1 The 17 SDGs (*Source* United Nations Sustainable Development Goals infographics. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.imsa.edu/unsdg_infographics/)

and production, climate action, life below water, peace, justice and strong institution and lastly, partnership.

Goals 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, and 15 (see Fig. 13.2) aim to protect the environment (Holden, et al., 2017) for future generations (Goodland & Daly, 1996; Moldan, et al., 2012). This figure shows that six out of 17 SDGs are related to the environment, an indication of the high priority given to the environment by the developers of the goals.



Fig. 13.2 SDGs and the environment (*Source* Guyana benefits from UNEP funded project on environmental SDGs. Retrieved from <https://doe.gov.gy/published-content-details/-Guyana-Benefits-From-UNEP-Funded-Project-On-Environmental-SDGS/5c865f95d1b7cd3ba211537e>)

NGOs and Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability can be achieved through advocacy and awareness, two functions associated with NGOs. Hayman (2019) and Hege and Demailly (2018) highlighted four ways through which NGOs might contribute to the realisation of SDGs: by (i) developing the goals, (ii) monitoring the goals, (iii) implementing development activities and (iv) advocating on behalf of people and the planet. Already, NGOs had participated actively in the articulation of the 17 SDGs (further divided into 169 targets and 303 indicators): delegates from over two thousand NGOs from 157 countries had come together for that purpose. Beyond that design stage, they could contribute to the actualisation of SDGs by monitoring the progress made towards achieving them—by data collection and analysis. In the effort to do this, NGOs at times form a coalition that meets regularly to share insights about the goals and highlight factors easing their progress and constituting a bottleneck. In addition, NGOs assist the government to design and implement policies to support the goals (Appe, 2019). This interface is critical; for instance, Ariti et al. (2018) show that NGOs promote the implementation of environmental policies in Ethiopia by filling the gap left by government and private sector interventions. The insights gained during the development of the goals and the data gathered during monitoring of goals both put NGOs in the best position to advocate on behalf of people and of the planet.

Shandra et al. (2008), using data for 61 countries over the period of 1990 to 2005, found that NGOs—environmental NGOs and women NGOs—help in reducing deforestation. This is consistent with earlier findings in Shandra (2007). Such empirical evidence indicates that NGOs play a vital role in actualising SDGs and has led other researchers and developmental professionals to reflect on the future of NGOs—their sustainability, accountability and resilience (Appe, 2019; Hayman, 2016). After all, despite the positives, NGOs' positions as non-state actors could be mismanaged or abused and so they also require oversight; for example, the Ethiopian government at one time had to implement policies to constrain NGO activities. Nevertheless, NGOs remain vital for driving the SDGs' progress because of their unique traits—being non-partisan, non-profit, and close to the grassroots where the impact is expected to happen (Arhin, 2016).

Environmental Sustainability in Africa: The Contribution of NGOs

Environmental challenges in Africa are associated with the heedless exploitation of natural resources and the resultant degradation of the environment. In Ghana and Nigeria, the environment of people residing close to the locations of exploration of gold and crude oil, respectively, have become polluted and their sources of livelihood through farming and fishing have been disrupted. Health is also affected. NGOs have been proactive in seeking redress. In Ogoni, Niger Delta area of Nigeria, Ken Saro-Wiwa led a non-violent movement to protest the continued operation of Shell in the area² (Idowu, 1999; Oluduro, 2012). Denedo et al. (2019) also document the important role NGOs played in reducing environmental degradation by advocating for the adoption of more environmentally friendly modes of operation.

Fonjong (2006) shows that due to the effective integration of local communities as stakeholders into the protection and management of forest resources, there was a decline in deforestation in Cameroon, arguing that NGOs' enlightenment activities that empowered the communities were instrumental in achieving this. Other innovative efforts of NGOs include Living Earth, Sustainable Agriculture and Self Help (SASH) and Society for Initiative in Rural Development and Environmental Protection (SIRDEP) (Fonjong, 2006). In Ethiopia, NGOs also contributed to redesigning environmental policies by bringing up new approaches based on their closeness with the affected communities (Ayana et al., 2018a, b).

Adonteng-Kissi and Adonteng-Kissi (2017) and Tuokuu et al. (2018) highlighted how environmental NGOs are increasing environmental friendliness in gold mining operations, through advocacy. While the change in operational methods is a long-term goal, the short-term goal of NGO advocacy is to get the mining companies to take responsibility for the adverse effect of their production processes and the loss of livelihood of people residing in neighbouring communities. In reaction, some companies have begun to institutionalise corporate social responsibility initiatives, seeking to create alternative sources of livelihood for the people (Adonteng-Kissi & Adonteng-Kissi, 2017). Similarly, Harvey et al. (2019) show that NGOs are the knowledge hubs for climate change in Africa and

² Shell Petroleum Development Company commenced production of oil production in Nigeria in 1958.

they are supporting the effort of policymakers to design and implement adaptation policies as well as enlighten the citizenry about actions that contribute to climate change.

CHALLENGES FORESEEN AND UNFORESEEN—KNOWN ENABLERS AND INHIBITORS

There is a growing body of literature highlighting the challenges undermining the efficiency and effectiveness of NGOs or in some cases causing their failure. These challenges can be divided into two: sustainability (of the NGOs), and relationships (with the government and the benefiting communities). Both are examined below to understand why NGOs are performing or underperforming in advancing environmental sustainability.

Sustainability of the NGOs

In this context, sustainability would mean continuity in the operations of the NGO and a prevalent threat to this is lack of finance (Appe, 2019; Fowler, 2016). Since NGOs charge little or nothing for the services they render, they rely on donor agencies or developmental partners, international or local. In Africa, many NGOs depends on international donors like DFID and CORDAID. In some cases, distrust of the system works against them. For example, a prospective donor might deny funding for research into policy impact out of the fear of NGO collusion with the government (Ariti et al., 2018). As a result of aid reduction or shifting aid architecture, many NGOs are unable to finance their projects due to the withdrawal of funds by the international donors (Fowler, 2016; Banks et al., 2015). This limits the scope of activities they could carry out. Incidentally, the situation has forced NGOs to consider new revenue sources such as government agencies, private sector, and local philanthropy, and some authors argue that the shortfall has made some NGOs levy the users of their services (Appe, 2019; Pratt, 2016). For NGOs involved in environmental advocacy, this changing situation adversely impacts their work.

Arhin et al. (2018) identified strategies used by NGOs in Ghana to cope with the declining flow of financial assistance from international donors. These are (i) diversifying donor profiles, (ii) cost-cutting,

(iii) private sector partnerships, (iv) credibility building (v) visibility-enhancing, and (vi) collaboration with other NGOs. Arhin (2016) worries that cost-cutting strategies might result in high turnovers of competent staff and the closure of programme, thereby weakening the institutional capacity of NGOs to contribute to realising the SDGs by 2030. Likewise, Banks et al. (2015) argue that this scramble for funding means that the use of the funds obtained is more likely to align with the objective of the donor than with the real needs of the host communities. The local NGOs might abandon their initial activities, with their independence in terms of programme design and implementation having been eroded.

Apart from the funding issue and perhaps as part of the solution to it, the sustainability of NGOs depends on the quality of their leadership and their governance structures (Arhin et al., 2018). NGOs with leaders that are educated and flexible are more likely to establish long-term relationship with their international donors, thereby guaranteeing their operations (Ariti et al., 2018). Similarly, the activities of NGOs require the coordination of permanent workers and volunteers. If the leader of a NGO were unable to effectively coordinate the workforce, staff commitment would reduce, thereby threatening the sustainability of the organisation. This, therefore, suggests that after the successful establishment of a NGO, leadership quality is important in realising NGO vision.

During the 1980s, some NGOs were established in African countries with the aim of fostering accountability and transparency in the execution of government projects (Ebrahim, 2003; Werker & Ahmed, 2008), perhaps because of accusations of funds mismanagement (Arhin, et al., 2018; Harsh et al., 2010; Smith, 2010), which created donor mistrust and limited access to funding to finance planned activities. Fortunately, where an NGO has gained credibility, it will easily find funding even in the presence of stiff competition (Aldashev & Navarra, 2018). In brief, the absence of good governance has the power to undermine the smooth operation of NGOs and in turn undermine their effectiveness in promoting sustainable development for the planet.

Relationship with the Government or the Benefiting Communities

Beyond their participation in the development phase of the SDGs, NGOs' responsibilities within the SDGs framework can be divided into three, namely, monitoring, advocacy, and the provision of services (Arhin, 2016)

to support the actualisation of the global goals by the expiration of the 15-year timeline in 2030. A strong relationship between NGOs and key stakeholders—the governments and members of the host communities—is vital for empowering them to play these roles. For instance, da Costa (2018) asserts that strong collaboration with the government will enable an NGO to achieve her mission with ease because she would enjoy government support in the execution of her activities or programmes. It appears that the breakdown of a cordial relationship between NGOs and government is caused by several factors, of which the two recurrent in the literature are financial dependence on the government and lack of transparency (Banks et al., 2015; Jepson, 2005; Wood, 2016).

Financial dependency of NGOs on government is likely to make them less effective in demanding for tough changes in government policies that might promote environmentally friendly practices (Miltin, et al., 2007; Bank et al., 2015). In other words, if NGOs rely heavily on the government for financial assistance, their activities are more likely to be aligned to government interest. While such NGOs may receive much support, their ability to establish responsible leadership may be compromised and implementation of environmental sustainability policies may be less likely to be effective. Da Costa (2018) provided evidence showing that activities of small NGOs that collaborate with governments with weak governance system are likely to be determined by those governments. To retain public trust, NGOs have to be careful about this. Three factors that promote NGO success within the SDGs framework as described in da Costa (2018) are clear mission and vision statements and robust governance structures. These could help ensure that collaboration with others, such as with government and funders, can neither sway the priorities of the NGO nor derail it from its purpose.

Conversely, Jepson (2005) highlighted how lack of accountability on the part of NGOs undermines their capacity to demand for accountability from other social actors. In Kenya, Wood (2016) linked weak relationships between government and civil society, i.e., NGOs, to a perception by the government that NGOs have little accountability and low legitimacy, perhaps evidenced in a tightening of Kenyan government policies to constrain NGOs. When an organisation is not transparent in its financial transactions, accountability will be suspect, thereby putting its legitimacy into question, which in turn lowers the capacity to engage in advocacy. Similarly, a lack of transparency erodes donor confidence, leading to demands for solid evidence for every minute expenditure

incurred. Jepson (2005) asserts that, for environmental NGOs to gain credibility with relevant stakeholders, especially with the public, they must be committed to highlighting their impact within the environment space through relevance, accountability, and integrity.

Finally, the success of the NGOs locally depends largely on their reception by host communities. The acceptance of NGOs by their host communities depends on their knowledge of the host community's culture and language and the appropriateness of the services rendered by the NGOs to real rather than perceived needs of the locality. For instance, Wondirad, Tolkach, and King (2019) using Ethiopia as a case study, found that the contribution of NGOs to the sustainable ecotourism in Ethiopia is hindered by poor communication between the locals and the international NGOs. Given that the international NGOs in question had little cultural knowledge of the host community, trust was difficult to establish.

COLLECTION OF FIELD DATA

After the insights from literature and to triangulate them, semi-structured interviews were held with four NGO leaders in the area of environmental sustainability. The interviewees got an email explanation of the research goals—to better understand their leadership experience and the mission of their environmental NGOs. Given that tackling environmental challenges involves addressing problems of high complexity, with an abundance of conflicting information and many interrelated factors, they understood that the researchers were interested in understanding how they as leaders navigate the challenges involved in advancing the environmental agenda. They were asked, among other things, whether they use the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework to drive action and to give reasons for their responses to this question. They were also asked to share their experience of leading environmental nonprofits in terms of the governance structures enacted in these organisations and the challenges around NGO operational sustainability. Each interview lasted about an hour. The interviews were transcribed and then content analysis was used to tease out recurrent concepts and meaningful convergences from the text.

DISCUSSION OF EVIDENCE FROM THE FIELD

The study analysis in this next segment of the chapter is based on interview data from four active stakeholders in the Nigeria environmental

sustainability space.³ Two of the interviewees are social entrepreneurs involved in recycling business in the two leading commercial cities in Nigeria, Lagos and Abuja. The other two interviewees are active advocates against further degradation of the environment. One is a journalist, and the other is a human rights activist. The analysis is presented below along four main themes: motivation for getting involved in environmental sustainability issues, governance structure and leadership style, sustainable development goals and pressing environmental issues in Nigeria, and lastly, relationships with government, communities and the future of NGOs that focuses on environmental issues.

Motivation for Engaging in Environmental-Related Activities

While each of the interviewees had divergent and highly interesting stories to describe how they began their work in the environmental space. A reoccurring theme is that all four had a keen interest in contributing their quota to ensure that Nigeria's environment remains conducive to human life. For instance, respondent 1, who is a journalist said, "the longer I stayed on the job, the more I became very passionate about reporting news on the environment". This person also said, "most of our colleagues did not want to stretch themselves ... I did not let that deter me, I got into some fellowship programmes, and I pushed further". Both statements show zeal for reporting environmental news and thus spreading the awareness of the need to take care of the planet.

In a similar way, respondent 4 said "when I lived in the US and I would visit Nigeria, one thing that ...disturbed me was ... the ... mess. So, if I had friends who wanted to come ..., their impression would be that Nigeria is a dumpsite" ... "So, ... the ... environment needed to be cleaned". The mission to provide information about the environment or to reduce its deterioration was voluntary for each of them. They could have chosen other societal issues to work on, but they opted to commit to environmental sustainability goals.

³ For scholarship and to present the information supply by the respondent as anonymous, respondent 1 is used to denotes the journalist, respondent 2 is used to denotes the human right activist, and respondent 3 is used to denotes the social entrepreneur that is engage in recycling business in Lagos and respondent 4 is used to denotes the social entrepreneur that is engage in recycling business in Abuja.

Governance Structures and Leadership Styles

Accountability is a bit weak among actors in Nigeria's environmental ecosystem. Comparing the responses of two of the respondents, it appears that the sources of finance largely determine whether an NGO would have a functional and effective governance structure. Respondent 2 has a board of two trustees, but Respondent 3 does not. In the latter's words, "above me, there is really no accountability structure, we do not have a board of directors for now, which I am happy about". This respondent viewed a board of directors as a source of delay in making decision: "we do not need a board of directors dragging us down with a lot of things". Conversely Respondent 2 had put governance processes in place: "we send reports regularly. We have general meetings with representatives from the communities as well". The divergence in views is probably due to the differing experience of the two respondents. Respondent 2 had more than two decades of experience in human rights advocacy whereas Respondent 3 had less than a decade of experience. In fact, Respondent 3 plans to have a board later: "... small companies need to take their time and grow but we are getting there; we are close to setting up a proper board". An understanding that governance structures and accountability is important in establishing transparency and gain credibility when seeking funding would increase the likelihood that an NGOs form a board of trustee.

With regards to leadership style, the two of the interviewees, who are serial entrepreneurs, exhibited a decisive leadership style such that they have a good working relationship with their workers yet easily disengage workers found unsuited to their roles. In the words of Respondent 4, "I think they would say I am a tough but fair boss", "but was not a fit for the role she was in...I let her go" and the respondent reflected that "it was a good case of not holding on to people who are not a good fit for the role on matter how bad you feel about it, although it is never easy". Similarly, Respondent 3 reported that "I have had to spend a lot of time developing and mentoring people to... meet my expectation...I fired about 20–30 people because they were not able to...".

Respondent 2, a human rights activist, described the basic qualities a leader should possess to include "to be consistent about the vision, story and their place in the space [and]... be open to learn at all time". Respondent 1 contributed that leadership is important and the person managing an NGO needs to be trustworthy, honest, and focused with

sound industry knowledge. Thus, they agree on the importance of certain values. Their leadership approaches are however varied. Respondent 1 focuses on building the support of people who align with his interests and goals. Respondent 2 believes that a leader ought to be “flexible” so long as there is no compromise on the end goal while Respondent 3 is not only interested in the growth of his staff but also personally fills in for them when they are slacking. Respondent 3 professes not to believe in hierarchy, and this helps “to build relationships with people I work with”. Respondent 4 is a “fair boss” and also not a “micromanager”. This respondent believes in “empowering my staff” so that they can solve problems, bring ideas, and rise to the occasion when needed in the company, without supervision.

Delving into a recollection of the most difficult decisions that they have each had to make, each had at one point or the other made tough choices, and their decisions at those moments reinforced their commitment to environmental sustainability. Respondent 1’s dilemma had to do with quitting a well-paying job to focus on environmental reporting. Respondent 2 had to come to terms with the fact that “there is a formal authority, there is a government whether we like it or not”, controlling the way things are done in the country, regardless of how right or wrong those things may seem. This respondent had decided to openly speak against people in government who are doing things that are wrong, sometimes to the extent of litigating. For Respondent 3, the difficult decision was whether to rebuild a plant that had been burnt due to a fire accident at the time or focus on waste management collection. The company the respondent works for eventually made the decision to rebuild the plant which eventually “gained us more capacity”. For Respondent 4, the decision was to let go of staff that were no longer productive in the organisation regardless of how good they are as individuals.

Sustainable Development Goals and Pressing Environmental Issues in Nigeria

All the respondents viewed the sustainable development goals as a brilliant idea, but some were sceptical about implementation. For instance, Respondent 2 said “when I look at the SDGs, all the goals are excellent but when I look at how they are going to be realised, I realise that they are a lot of ... traps, ... like climate negotiations”. Similarly, Respondent 1 shared that “I think it [the SDGs] are relevant, ...it depends on

implementation". Also, Respondent 3 said "I think it is helpful to attract investment. I pay attention to it; I want to know which SDGs we are able to meet". This statement shows the extent to which personal paradigms influences involvement in the environmental sustainability space: for this respondent, the SDGs represent access to funding.

Respondent 3 went further to state "we are [already] helping solve poverty, clean environment, so we do not have to try and meet those goals. [Yet] I feel it is a good measuring stick for any company to understand how they are doing overall". Respondent 4 has similar views on sustainable development, speaking highly of SDGs and the interlinks between the organisation's activities and the goals. This respondent said, "I tell people if we do our job well, we affect everything such as climate action, life on earth, life underwater, poverty, partnerships and sustainable cities". This reinforces the view of respondent 1 that, with effective collaboration among stakeholders, environmental sustainability is realisable.

On environmental issues confronting the country, we discovered that their opinion is partly informed by the environmental issues their organisation focuses on. For instance, Respondent 3 recycles, and mentioned plastic pollution as the major concern; and respondent 1 reports environmental news and identified climate change and its attendant effects on farming as the most pressing concern, before plastic pollution. Respondent 2 is a human rights activist and mentioned desertification, caused by ecosystem mismanagement. Respondent 4 said "people don't sort their waste. So, everyone has one bin where they put paper, plastic, [and] *moimoi* leaves and it just makes it more difficult to be able to recycle". This makes waste collection difficult and leads to blockage of drainage channel leading to flooding.

All four rely on technology a lot and this positions them well for improvement in governance. The ongoing pandemic further accentuates the importance of digitalisation for the country. For instance, Respondent 2 previously sparsely used technology but since the commencement of the pandemic, this has changed and "I see technology playing a [much greater] role in organising". Respondent 3 said "technology is the backbone of our organisation. Everything that we do is based on technology. Technology helps us to track all our customers". This is a confirmation that technology is an enabler, and its effective usage is expected to enhance productivity.

*Relationships with Government, Communities and the Future
of NGOs that Focuses on Environmental Issues*

The respondents maintain a working relationship with the government in an attempt to understand government plans as well as influence government actions. Respondent 3 said “we have ... made sure that, whatever we have done, we carried the government along”; in fact, that NGO’s founder currently works with the government in an advisory capacity: “our founder now works with the government, so she is kind of helping us out a bit”. Respondent 3’s response suggests that the company has been able to strengthen its relationship with the government and learn from this how to improve the business operation. Respondent 2 also has a relationship with the government partly due to his advocacy engagement with National Biosafety Management Agency and National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency. During his interview, the respondent shared that “when we challenge the government, it is not negative. We want them to do the right thing, and when they do, we support it”.

Indeed, all four respondents’ engagement is driven by their passion to create a positive change to in Nigeria’s environmental space and make it more conducive for residents and visitors. This commitment is also reflected in their close relationships with the communities they serve. It is through this relationship that they were able to understand the needs of the people and the best way to alleviate their challenges. Respondent 3 said, “we have an end-of-year party every year and last year they had *asoebi*⁴ and really participated”. Similarly, respondent 4 said “our connections are from grassroots to national to global”. This statement is suggestive of the nested relationships that NGOs have in the bigger environmental ecosystem and in the individual communities and therefore of their sphere of influence in any efforts to raise awareness about or get commitment to sustainable development goals. This evidence from the field also is in line with the discussion of the literature, earlier in the chapter, about the importance of NGOs working well with their communities.

The respondents were asked about the future of NGOs in the environment space, their responses indicate that the ecosystem is yet to be saturated as more hands were needed given the enormous amount of

⁴ Same-fabric attire in various styles, worn by family and friends to show affection, cooperation, support and solidarity, mostly on festive occasions.

the activities that need to be executed. Respondent 3 said, “the future looks good, we are working on a very important project right now, we are trying to set up franchises across Nigeria and it is a really big project”. Similarly, Respondent 4 said, referring to mentees who are interested in starting up in the same industry “I let them know that they can start their own collection...they have learned the tricks of the trade”. Also, Respondent 2 shared that “the environmental space keeps widening because the problems keep getting [more] intractable”. On the quality required of NGOs that could join the ecosystem, they specified NGOs that place a premium on the following values: trustworthiness, focused, diligent and principled. For instance, there is a need for NGO to know that, to sustain their legacy, they should not accept funding from organisation whose values contradict what they stand for. Respondent 2 made it clear that “there are some funders we do not approach at all even if they are willing to give us funds. It is [part of] our agenda to take ... clean money”. Respondent 3 also said, “if a company comes and says they want to drill a bore-hole, for instance, we tell them we cannot because it is not part of our mission”. The benefit for an NGO to commence operation with honesty and integrity as strong values is that they build their network and earn trust. They also grow in competence and are more able to deliver on their commitments to their funders—private or public. Respondent 4 calls for more pro-environmental policies by the government to enhance their operations; with a very practical approach, this person said, “I wish that the government compelled everyone to sort their waste in their homes”. There would definitely be a huge multiplier effect if the government incentivised people to become more concerned about their environment. This is one more area where NGOs and governments can partner for achieving the SDGs.

CONCLUSION

While sustainability concerns heighten globally, the response of many developing countries is not as strong as one could hope for. NGOs typically have more meaningful interactions with the civil society and that is an advantage for the implementation of SDG goals across local and regional levels. These sorts of interventions sometimes come with challenges such as government bottlenecks, and local and regional stakeholders whose regulations or systemic barriers may obstruct efforts and synergies designed to benefit present and future generations. While each

country is responsible for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this should happen through collaboration among its people, local and national civil authorities, corporate sector, NGOs and other agencies. Each stakeholder has a role to play, and the resulting synergy would mutually benefit all parties. In this chapter, we first delved into literature to understand the role that NGOs have played in the past and continue playing in sustainable development. This archival data revealed the vital non-partisan, non-profit, close-to-grassroots role of NGOs as developers of the SDGs as well as monitors, implementors, and advocates. Some of the challenges faced by environmental sustainability NGOs as they carry out their roles were also surfaced in the literature—this included funding, leadership and governance constraints, with the latter two being shown up as enablers of funding.

Engaging four leaders of NGOs two of whom are monitors and advocates and the other two implementors of environmental sustainability SDGs, we then further explored these numerous challenges impeding the development and maintenance of a sustainability mindset by NGOs in developing country contexts such as Nigeria. Funding was again identified as an issue, yet the respondents' experience showed that the right leadership and practised values could help build trust so as to attract donor commitment. According to both the archival and field data, relationships between NGOs and the governments of their countries and between NGOs and their host communities are also important factors for success in their progress towards the SDGs. In this regard, values-based and responsible leadership was highlighted again as the way to build the right relationships by maintaining independence even if assisted by government funding as well as by earning government and other stakeholder trust through the putting in place the right governance structures. They also recognised that technology has helped and continues to help them to accelerate their growth and widen their reach, just like it does for for-profits.

Going back to the important theme of values as a foundation for NGO leadership and stakeholder trust-building, we also found that responsible leadership, honesty, accountability, transparency, consistency, humility (openness to continuous learning) and good governance structures stood out as leadership values contributing to the successful NGO and therefore to attaining the SDGs. At the same time, while the NGOs are already self-motivated to make a change for their countries, their governance structures are sometimes weak and could benefit from regulatory enforcement and more digitisation. They themselves pointed out the need for competence, enhanced technology, and sound industry knowledge.

The governments of African countries could achieve a lot by supporting NGOs working towards sustainability and by partnering with them. Trainers and teachers of sustainability courses as well as public and private sector advocates of leadership and sustainability may be able to input some lessons learnt from the above into their work. Ideas gleaned from the responses of our interviewees could be used to increase sustainability readiness and streamline NGO governance, with particular reference to Nigeria's NGO sector and its need to advance the SDGs. In addition, the good example of NGOs that have a sustainability mindset and do good work could spur other NGOs to adopt tangible sustainability practices as well.

Points to Ponder

- Despite the number of NGOs in Africa, there is still so much to be done. Why?
- What are the possible steps to further empower NGOs in the environmental sustainability space in developing countries so as to multiply their impact?
- What might be the parallels between the experiences of the interviewees in this chapter and NGO leaders in the social and economic sustainability arenas in Africa?
- What other roles can NGOs play so that they can truly advance the SDG agenda for their host or home countries?

Actionable Recommendations

<i>Private leadership</i>	<i>Public leadership</i>
Collaborate more and share resources between NGOs in the same sector or across sector, e.g., environmental NGOs can work together.	Design more pro-environmental policies and make them effective by monitoring compliance and punishing non-compliance.
Reject funding from organisations whose values contradict what the NGO stands for.	Engage with NGOs to partner with them and to support them in achieving the SDGs.
Stay focused on the mission and vision statements, maintaining their clarity and supporting them with governance structures.	Find out instances of rent-seeking opportunism within the public service that frustrate NGO set-up and progress and get rid of them.

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