



NIGERIA:

Engaging the Private Sector in the Voluntary National Review



'ERADICATION OF POVERTY AND PROMOTING PROSPERITY IN A CHANGING WORLD' IS THE MAIN SLOGAN OF NIGERIA'S 2017 VNR. PRIVATE BUSINESSES ARE A KEY DRIVER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CAN BRING FINANCIAL LEVERAGE TO THE 2030 AGENDA PROCESS. THIS IS WHY THE NIGERIAN PRIVATE SECTOR ADVISORY GROUP (PSAG) PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN NATIONAL SDG IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW. THE GROUP IS GUIDED BY AN INTERMINISTERIAL SDG COMMITTEE.

Nigeria's Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) 2017-2020 was originally not aligned with international development objectives. With the advent of the SDGs, however, the need increased to bring the ERGP in line with global goals as well as with other national plans, such as the Nigeria Vision 20:2020, which aims to make the country one of the top 20 economies in the world by 2020.

The private sector had played a key role in developing the ERGP and Vision 20:2020. Discussions on the SDGs in the newly established PSAG then became a driving force for making sustainable development

a core issue for the private sector. SDG profiling at company level has intensified this trend, which is also reflected in public opinion: a global SDG Engagement Survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in 2015 revealed that 58% of Nigerian citizens consider it important for the private sector to sign up to the SDGs, and 65% of them would like to see companies embed the SDGs in their business processes.

SDG monitoring to enhance visibility

SDG attainment depends on effective monitoring and evaluation. The PSAG consults with its members





to account for SDG-related performance of the private sector and also to convey a sense of representation and recognition to companies. To support this process, PwC Nigeria, a member of the PSAG, recently developed the SDG Reporting Tool, a localised instrument designed to help companies identify, prioritise and report their contributions to achieving the SDGs. Developing the tool became crucial since there was previously no central unit for the private sector to report SDG-related activities to the government.

The tool also serves the need of businesses to carry out reporting by themselves and to demonstrate to the public and other stakeholders what they are doing regarding the SDGs. There is a strong belief that the success of the PSAG largely depends on how well its members report on their work. *'It is key to have more and more players interested in the PSAG and other stakeholder groups. The goal is to attract membership,'* says Mories Atoki of PwC Nigeria. *'Profiling and assessing relevant activities is very important. The SDGs require evaluation mechanisms to be able to rate performance.'*

Catering to private sector needs

One challenge was how to create incentives for companies to join the PSAG. In Nigeria, responding to two business imperatives – security and resilience – helped encourage engage-

ment with the SDGs. First, businesses that align their strategy with national priorities are more likely to be licensed to operate and will also enjoy greater acceptance by citizens. Second, as governments are now using the SDGs to reform policies and regulations, businesses that are aware of and aligned with the SDGs are more likely to be able to deal with emerging policies, which makes for more resilient business models.

This was not fully clear to Nigerian companies when the PSAG first started its work. Its members agreed with the government about existing challenges, such as high unemployment or productivity deficits, but whether the ERGP or the SDGs would be able to resolve these issues was another question. Many companies seemed to assume that putting corporate social responsibility measures in place was enough to deal with sustainability. Nobody had assessed what the SDGs actually meant for their organisation or what gaps existed regarding meaningful indicators. *'PwC, through the PSAG, tried to whet the appetite of businesses to find out what the needs of the country are in relation with their own business goals and models,'* observes Atoki. *'And there was indeed a high degree of responsiveness in that regard.'*

The PSAG continues to advocate policies and incentives for the private sector to contribute to achieving the SDGs. Impact assessments and tax reliefs for accomplishments such

as job creation, food security or education are among the options under consideration.

From single-stakeholder involvement to multi-stakeholder platforms?

One of the PSAG's successes has been to engage many players in collecting information and committing to the process. A key success factor was appreciation of the reporting tools designed by PwC for the private sector, which may also be adapted to the public sector. Integrating contributions in one single reporting database is considered a realistic goal for 2019.

What Atoki would still like to see is for civil society, academia and the private sector to come together around the same table and discuss the SDGs from different angles. To support this process, she organised a session on Tracking and Reporting the SDGs at the annual Capability Enhancement Workshop for Nigerian journalists in 2017, providing information on the SDGs and on tools to navigate, track and report their attainment.

Overall, she concludes, *'If companies recognise how they can support achieving the SDGs, that is quite commendable. We are not there yet, but the fact that we are on the way is very valuable.'*



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