

## The Problematics of Capacity Building in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Arguably, the ability of a country to follow the sustainable development path and sustain same is determined to a large extent by the capacity of its people and its institutions as well as by its environmental resource stock and condition. Beyond the acceptance that capacity building (CB) is central to and therefore at the heart of development in a sustainable fashion, is the reality that capacity building initiatives and efforts in Nigeria have largely been a failure and by implication lacking in efficacy. This study, which relied on valuable secondary sources of data, examined the capacity building efforts in Nigeria. The study concluded with some valuable recommendations including a pragmatic and action-based approach that will be achievable through attitudinal change in the light of true commitment and support, real participation and synergy by stakeholders and collaborators that appreciate CB as costly investment with desirable returns beneficial to the quest for actualizing sustainable development in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** problematic, capacity building, commitment, support, Nigeria.

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## **Introduction**

Capacity building that encompasses a country's human, scientific, technological, organizational and institutional resource capacities and, as a consequence, is the totality of the abilities and potentials of a country in all ramifications is at the heart of and therefore critical to engendering development and sustaining it. In the face of the critically valuable role that capacity building is expected to play in the development process of any country, capacity building efforts in most of Africa have been largely a failure. In Nigeria, past capacity building efforts have not been really efficacious. Capacity building and utilization had, in fact, been trenchantly argued as the gap in Nigeria's development. The quality of technical knowledge and skills as well as the quantity of the available manpower has equally been adjudged to be grossly inadequate. The inadequate capacity has grossly affected the way public resources are managed and coordinated in the country. The unstable political environment in the past and the quality of political leadership has also made it difficult and arduous for the country to manage her resources optimally and achieve her goals. The implication of the above reality is that the ability to formulate, analyze and implement policies and programmes for the realization of development aspirations in Nigeria has been greatly constrained.

Essentially, capacity building programmes did not sufficiently focus on systemic constraints; rather it narrowly focused on sector specific issues (Oluwole 2013). The capacity to design and manage the implementation of complex reform agenda in the annals of a day-to-day operational system was not also integrated into the system of capacity building efforts. The general perception is that the lack of capacity to deal with economic and social development problems arose from two main sources: inadequate investment in institutions and processes that are

responsible for building capacity; and the gradual dismantling of the enabling environment for maintaining existing capacity. As a result of the inadequate involvement of the stakeholders, the civil servants, the Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) and the private sector, the reforms lacked ownership by the groups that have stakes in the outcome. Although different reasons ranging from weak implementation, poor discipline, inadequate expertise to the inability to make the reforms operational in the system have been adduced and four major constraints viz: human capital,/financial, infrastructural and institutional constraints have been identified as the hindrances to capacity building initiatives and efforts in Nigeria, the contention of this paper is that there has been true commitment and support dilemma which is the real constraining factor. The contention is planked on the reasoning that the lack of true support for capacity building in Nigeria is a product of and a reflection of poor realization of the real critical role that capacity building is expected to play in the country's sustainable development path.

### **Capacity and Capacity Building: A Conceptual Understanding**

Capacity is the process by which individuals, organizations, and societies develop abilities to perform functions, solve problems, set and achieve goals (IJNDP 2005). Capacity refers to the ability of an instrument or machine to produce the intended results. It also connotes the combined human skills and institutional resources in the private, public and voluntary sectors in any given country (IJNECA 1996a). From the organizational perspective, capacity has to do with the ability to achieve its mission effectively and to sustain itself over a long term period (Olowu 2000). It therefore follows that capacity implies the skills and capabilities of individuals and their ability to discharge appropriate tasks both presently and in the future. Capacity building, on the other hand, is

a critical element for creating an environment that is conducive to development in general and human and social development in particular (African Union 2005). Capacity building encompasses a country's human, scientific, technological, organizational and institutional resource capacities that are the totality of the abilities and potentials of a country in all its ramifications. It implies, in a broad development context, a dynamic process which enables individuals and agencies to develop the critical social and technical capabilities to identify and analyze problems and proffer solutions to them (Oni 2014).

Capacity building is equally the improvement in individual skills, knowledge and capabilities and the strengthening of institutions thereby ensuring coherence in policy making and implementation and promoting an enabling environment for people and organizations (Saussier 2004). Capacity building represents a basic way of thinking and its consequences which must be adhered to wherever the creation and extension of institutional and human capacities on a sustainable basis is envisaged (Vries and Sjaak 2002). Capacity building relates to the activities that improve an organization's ability to achieve its mission or a person's ability to define and realize his or her goal to do his or her job more effectively. For organizations, capacity building may relate to almost any aspect of its work: improved governance, leadership, mission and strategy administration including human resources, financial management, legal matters, marketing and the like. It entails a high level of sensitivity and intuition due to the fact that all capacity building measures, be they on the level of the state, the civil society or the private sector, have political implications and touch upon questions of power and vested interest. For individuals, capacity building may relate to leadership development, advocacy skills training/speaking abilities, technical skills, organizing skills and other areas of personal and professional development.

Focusing on the human dimension of capacity building, Obadan (2005) opined that capacity building is the process by which a nation develops and increases its human resource capabilities through the inculcation of relevant general and technical knowledge, skills and competencies to efficiently realize their goals. The emphasis is understandable because capacity building is not defined through the instruments used, but through its goals to enhance the capacity of the people and institutions to sustain and improve their competencies and problem solving capacities. Institutional sustainability therefore requires an enabling environment and nurturing conditions, socio-cultural aspects and the essential elements of the institutional system. From a country view point, capacity building is a long term, continuing process in which all stakeholders participate (ministries, local authorities, non governmental organizations, professional associations, academics and others). In this context, it is a choice development of the potentials of any given country in a specific field or in all areas including economic, political, socio-cultural and educational spheres of life. Notably therefore, capacity building focuses attention largely on institutional capacity rather than any of the main components that go into creating that capacity in any institution: materials, men or methods. This is important because of the tendency for many organizations to equate capacity building with training. Thus it is pointless to develop human capacity without developing the capacity of the institutions that would utilize these human capacities over a sustained period of time.

In sum, capacity building is much more than training and includes human resource development, organizational development, institutional and legal framework development, ensuring the availability of trained and skilled personnel, building of those skills which are interchangeable between occupations and which are basic to the development of any country, building a flexible and dynamic labour force with skills which

are adaptable to occupational shifts, technological changes and industrial growth; enabling employees to be responsive to demands by the public for new and improved services and to realize their own potentials to achieve self-sufficiency and self-reliance and to develop initiatives, ensuring that indigenous employees acquire as rapidly as possible the skills necessary for achieving social and economic self-reliance and identifying and preparing those with requisite potentials for future advancement and progression to enable them cope effectively with development changes and problems.

### **Capacity Building Efforts in Nigeria**

Efforts aimed at building indigenous policy analysis and management capacity in Africa started in the colonial period and was given great impetus by technical assistance programmes of bilateral and multi-lateral donors as well as the national development (plan) programmes of the various African governments. Such assistance programmes focused on a variety of institutions within the public sector, especially the civil service, the parastatals sector, agriculture and higher/technical education, etc, even though substantial inputs came from private foundations such as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. Successive governments in Nigeria since independence have taken capacity building initiatives as part of measures for enhancing efficiency in the management of the economy (FG 2011). Earlier efforts at capacity building involved investments in human capital; institutional building and practices. The broad objectives of the various initiatives at capacity building were supposedly the development of human and material resources in order to analyze, plan, implement and monitor programmes for purpose of national development. These past efforts were initiated to create a framework for the identification and analysis of problems and the formulation and implementation of solutions to enhance

sustainable human development. Such efforts were expected because at independence, there was an acute shortage of local expertise in such critical areas as accountancy, engineering, medicine, law, public administration and management. Expatriates held professional posts in the civil service, while foreigners dominated the commerce sub-sector. The level of literacy was abysmally low and institutional and infrastructural facilities were limited to the requirements of the colonial administration.

The post-independence situation stemmed from the low level of economic activities as the role envisaged for the colonies was that of producers of raw materials for the industries in Europe and available markets for finished products from abroad. The provision of infrastructures was therefore based on the need to create effective conditions for the colonies to play this limited role. All the same, the challenges of post-independence made it imperative for successive governments to embark upon massive expansion of formal educational institutions for human capital development. Investments in infrastructures such as roads, telecommunication and health facilities were also made with a view to increasing capacity, which had become a limiting factor for enhanced growth of the economy. The government also embarked on systematic institutional building in response to the new challenges offered by political independence. The involvement of government in almost all sectors of the economy led to rapid expansion of the public sector and this further aggravated the problem of low capacities in the sector, particularly as available resources became too thinly spread among the competing demands.

In a bid to deal with capacity building and development issues in the Nigerian economy, consequently, a number of management training and development institutions were established after independence. For

instance, the Nigerian Council for Management Development (NCMD) was established in 1972. The establishment of the Nigerian Council for Management Development was for the purpose of coordinating and stimulating management training and development programmes in the country. This was considered expedient because of the need to avoid duplication of efforts by providers of management training and development and to ensure that programmes offered reflected the needs of growing national economy. The Centre for Management Development (CMD 2011), which was meant to advise the government (through the appropriate ministry) on policies, plans and programmes for the enhancement of the country in all sectors of the economy and to formulate policies and guidelines for the coordination of management education and training activities in Nigeria, was established later in January 1973. The Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON) was also statutorily established by Act 39 of 1973 and was mandated, among others, to provide higher management training for both public and private sectors of the Nigerian economy (Ejumudo 2005). The National Centre for Economic Management and Administration (NCEMA), Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute (ARMTI) were also established to train middle and senior management staff in policy formulation and implementation in the areas of planning, budgeting, policy analysis, and public administration. Public administration institutes were also established as affiliates of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Special exchange programmes with overseas institutions such as the Royal Institute of Public Administration in London and Pittsburgh were also part of the efforts of Government at building capacity in the public service.

Other capacity building efforts included induction courses organized for newly recruited officers and seminars and workshops for the exchange



of information and experience for enriching the knowledge of civil servants and enhancing their productivity. Some of the Committees/Commissions set up by government to review the public service immediately after independence for effective capacity building and utilization in the public sector were: The Parliamentary Committee on the Nigerianization of the Public Service in 1960, A Survey of the Training Needs of the Federal Civil Service by Professor Wole in 1968, the Udoji Public Service Review Commission of 1974, The Dotun Philips Civil Service Reforms of 1988 and the Allison Ayida Review Panel of the Civil Service Reforms of 1995 among others. In fact, the recognition of training by government as an appropriate instrument of capacity building and utilization was further reaffirmed by the 1988 Civil Service Reform, through which all Ministries and Agencies of government were mandated to establish a Department of Planning, Research and Statistics in order to develop the necessary support and backing for capacity in policy analysis, planning and programme monitoring. The National Policy on Human Resources Development and Utilization which was introduced in 1991 was also expectedly aimed at creating national wealth through high productivity of the labour force and development and utilization of the country's human resource for achieving rapid, balanced and sustainable economic and social development.

In 1995, the Federal Civil service revised its guidelines for training in order to attain effective coordination and monitoring of the performance of the training programmes. One of the highlights of the revised guidelines was to make provision for the deployment of officers to posts in which the acquired training and skills could be optimally utilized. Another important revision to the guideline was the provision for each arm of the service to make annual budgetary allocation of a sum equal to at least 20 percent of its personnel costs for staff training and development. The efforts of Government at capacity building have

over the years had been complemented by interventions by donors agencies, particularly the United Nations Development Systems (UNDS), the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Children’s Educational Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO); World Health Organization (WHO); the Commonwealth and the European Union, and nongovernmental organizations such as the Ford Foundation, the Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA), the Department for International Development (DFID) and significant others.

### **Failure of Capacity Building Efforts in Nigeria and the Need for True Commitment and Support**

During the last four decades, evidence abound that development strategies have suffered from disjointedness, inconsistency and policy somersault (Oni 2014). The different approaches to development in Africa have all lacked one essential ingredient; they were not integrated to the extent that they did not incorporate as a central feature the building of indigenous African capacities, skills, knowledge and institutions. Capacity building has therefore seemingly been a patent gap and a desideratum. The experience of the advanced parts of the world clearly shows a gradual build up of their own capacities. And despite political ups and downs, these regions have managed to invest in both their human capital and institutions (Ejumudo 2005). As a consequence, they have been able to exercise more control over economic events. The story in most of Africa is in the reverse, for it has been a case of crisis management all along and. with a few exceptions, a crisis response by donors through short-term technical assistance

projects. Arguably, if local capacities are not built and sustained in Africa, there is no chance that the continent will develop as it should and as it must if it is to make it sustainably (Jaycox 1992).

In Nigeria, past capacity building efforts have not been really efficacious in facilitating sustainable development. Different reasons ranging from weak implementation, poor discipline and inadequate expertise to implement programmes, lack of feedback or evaluation to the inability to make the reforms operational in the system have been adduced. The programmes did not sufficiently focus on systemic constraints, but narrowly focused on sector specific issues with dysfunctional impact on the assumed sustainable development drive. The capacity to design and manage the implementation of complex reform agenda in the annals of a day-to-day operational system could not also be integrated into the system of capacity building efforts. The overall rating of the earlier reforms and capacity building efforts in Nigeria has been somewhat negative. As a result of the inadequate involvement of the stakeholders, the civil servants, the NGOs and the private sector, the reforms lacked ownership by the groups that have stakes in the outcome. Capacity building and utilization has been trenchantly argued as the missing link in Nigeria's development (FG 2011). The quality of technical knowledge and skills as well as the quantity of the available manpower has been adjudged to be grossly inadequate. The inadequate capacity has grossly affected the way public resources are managed and coordinated in the country.

The unstable political environment in the past and the quality of political leadership has also made it difficult for the country to manage her resources optimally and achieve her goals. Consequently, the ability to formulate, analyze and implement policies and programmes for the realization of development aspirations had been greatly impaired. The

general perception is that the lack of capacity to deal with economic and social development problems arose from two main sources: inadequate investment in institutions and processes that are responsible for building capacity; and the gradual dismantling of the enabling environment for maintaining existing capacity. Central to this failure is the weak human and institutional capacity building and utilization in Nigeria. Although four major constraints viz: human capital/financial, infrastructural and institutional constraints have been identified as the hindrance to capacity building initiatives and efforts in Nigeria (FG 2011), the contention of this paper is that there has been the true commitment and support dilemma which is the real constraining factor. The above contention is planked on the reasoning that the lack of true support for capacity building in Nigeria is a product of and a reflection of the poor realization of the real critical role that capacity building is expected to play in the country's sustainable development path. At the heart of genuine and sustainable capacity building in Nigeria is therefore true commitment and the attendant token support by government and sundry stakeholders or collaborators.

In the area of human capital, several constraints were identified (FG 2011). It was discovered that the duplication of institutions resulted in an over-bloated public sector, making it impossible for the public sector to attain the required level of training needs of the sector as the limited resources could not go round all the ministries and parastatals (Ejumudo 2005). In fact, inadequate funding was considered as a major constraint to manpower development in their various institutions. There was also widespread lopsided staff structure/composition and inadequate professional qualified staff with undue high concentration of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, apart from the prolonged embargo on employment of staff in the three tiers of government that made it impossible for the public sector to have a planned and phased exit-

programme for staff and succession plans for important positions in the ministries and parastatals (FG 2011). Equally, professionally qualified staff in essential areas was lacking and lack of functional and result-oriented training of personnel was considered a major set-back. Additionally, frequent changes of the chief executives resulted in instability in the system and culminated in lack of continuity, commitment, transparency and accountability, while the skills potential of most officers in the civil service are not optimally utilized. The lack of performance-oriented enterprise, budget planning and targets sadly made measurement of individual performances irrelevant and low civil service salaries caused rapid turnover of staff with skills that find high demand in the private sector (e.g. accountants). In fact, low salaries together with the absence of a merit system and a general lack of accountability did not encourage performance and there is clear indication that most public sector officials engage in commercial activities like buying and selling of wares in their offices during official hours leading to double loyalty, conflict of interest and low productivity.

Concerning infrastructure, inadequate physical facilities was have plagued the operations of the institutions. Facilities such as computers, data bank, telephone, vehicles, electric typewriters, etc. were grossly inadequate and when available, were either not functioning or available to the officers who needed the equipment most. The public sector has a history of being incapable of carrying out necessary maintenance of the machinery and equipment and out-contracting is not encouraged even when in-house expertise is not available (Ola 2010). Factors such as lack of spare parts, lack of skilled manpower to repair facilities and negative attitudes of people to government property contributed to the problem of poor maintenance culture in the civil service and inadequate involvement and encouragement of the private sector to perform activities that the public sector does not have the required skills also

constrained capacity building efforts. In the context of institutional capacity, inconsistent policy design and poor operational performance resulted in weak implementation capacity and coordination. Lack of visionary leadership in most of the institutions also appears to be a major constraint; management is weak and could not provide leadership and strategic direction to the staff, while project ownership was lacking on projects completed with grants and loan funds, thereby making project impact and sustenance doubtful. There is equally pervasive corruption in all sectors of the economy, including inflation of government contracts, fraud, bribery, extortion, favouritism, falsification of accounts, abuse of office, etc. Poor conditions of service and poor remuneration are also major factors militating against transparency and accountability in the public sector.

On the whole, the efficacy of the critical role of capacity building in facilitating sustainable development in Nigeria depends on the intervening role of true commitment and support that will manifest in the real involvement and participation by the various stakeholders and collaborators, significant and valuable allocation of both financial and time resources and the creation and sustenance of a climate that will be genial for the budding and thriving of capacity building in its quest for sustainable development. A corollary to the above necessary condition is true realization of the potency of capacity building in engineering and actualizing development on a sustainable basis. This contention transcends beyond the superficial human capital/financial, infrastructural and institutional constraints explanation for the failure of capacity building efforts in Nigeria. The above reality will require a virile, revitalized and reinvented public service that would tackle the problem of inefficiency, ineffectiveness, waste and low productivity and poor capacity utilization and become a willing ally in the activation of the private and civil society sectors as partners and collaborators rather than

threats and competitors. Without the envisaged true commitment and support for real capacity building initiatives and efforts by the sundry governmental and non-governmental stakeholders and collaborators in Nigeria, development and its sustainability will be a mirage and the journey will be tortuous.

### **Conclusive Remarks and Recommendations**

Capacity building that encompasses a country's human, scientific, technological, organizational and institutional resource capacities that are the totality of the abilities and potentials and implies a broad development context, a dynamic process which enables individuals and agencies to develop the critical social and technical capabilities to identify and analyze problems and proffer solutions to them does not only affect processes, procedures, policies, management strategies, individuals, organizations and institutions, it is equally critically relevant to sustainable development in Nigeria. In between capacity building and sustainable development in Nigeria all the same, is an intervening variable or factor: true commitment and support by the various stakeholders and collaborators that is also critical to the facilitating role of capacity building in actualizing sustainable development. While there has been several capacity building initiatives and efforts in Nigeria, the somewhat failure of the collective enterprise does not only render secondary the superficial human capital/financial, infrastructural and institutional constraints explanation for the failure of capacity building efforts in Nigeria, it calls for a pragmatic and action-based approach that will be achievable only through attitudinal change conceptualized in the context and light of true commitment and support. Achieving sustainable development through capacity building with the intervention of true commitment and support will not only require real involvement and participation by the sundry stakeholders and

collaborators, allocation of valuably significant financial and time resources and genuine realization of the potency of capacity building in actualizing sustainable development, it will also demand developing the tremendous potentials that exist in Nigerian institutions which can be tapped for the development challenge and the synergy and connection between the formal institutional structures transplanted from outside and the informal indigenous structures on one hand and between the governmental sector and non-governmental sectors.

Again, since capacity building (CB) or better still the mobilization of available capacity for effective institution building requires heavy investment in finance and time, it is absolutely necessary for the various Nigerian stakeholders to appreciate the fact that CB is costly and that they must invest in it. This is especially as returns are desirable and beneficial to the quest for actualizing development and sustaining same. Besides, since Africa's poor institutional capacity compounded by wars and social conflicts is regarded as one of the most important explanations for the continent's lack-lustre development performance, the major development challenge facing Nigeria dictate that all segments of the society and at all levels will have to play their part and must be given the opportunity to do so. They will require a virile, revitalized and reinvented public service that would tackle the problem of inefficiency, ineffectiveness, waste and low productivity and poor capacity utilization and become a willing ally in the activation of the private and civil society sectors as partners and collaborators rather than threats and competitors. The private sector would have to play a more significant role than they had hitherto with a genial facilitating climate created by the governmental stakeholders where the people that should offer tangible investments in priorities that are identified by them should actually become partners in the development process. Finally, there is the need to enhance productivity and efficiency through



appropriate and updated research and development as well as consistent human resource training and development. This will also require redefining the purpose and content of education and its curriculum as well as proper nexus between educational institutions, public and private sector organizations and their environments and the changing needs of the Nigerian economy and development path.

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