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TOPIC:

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND ACHIEVING THE SDGS THROUGH COLLABORATIVE SYNERGY AMONGST GOVERNMENT ENTITIES, PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE CIVIL SOCIETIES

Abstract
This will be a succinct work which shall examine the effects of collaborative relationships among public, private and nonprofit actors on the drive towards national growth and development. It will determine the essence of collaborations for nation's building and sustainability. A critical factor in establishing collaborations is a conviction about the need to engage with other partners, over providing solutions to identified social-problems, provided that the social problems are quite complex to be addressed by one sector independently. The study will highlight the initial practical recommendations that can emerge from the collaborations on building trust and commitment among partners that contribute to the sustainability of cross-sector collaborations. It will investigate the nature of the relationship among the public, private and nonprofit sectors, and the extent to which, from the perspective of the local actors, these collaborations can be associated with the creation of public spaces where public value is developed and democracy strengthened. In carrying out the above, the presentation will discuss burning issues and handle questions such as: How do the various relationships between the public, private and social sectors promote social transformations that strengthen the public sphere? How is commitment for action constructed and what

factors enable sustainable cross sector collaborations? How can the African nations achieve and maintain greater commitment and synergy among partners in cross-sector collaborations to achieve more effective results and develop such nation that delivers to the needs of the people? What Major steps need to be taken to combat existing levels of inequalities, particularly on gender? What are the major derivate in enhancing equal participation and women empowerment in Africa? Further to that, the discuss will look into the necessary mechanism for progress, and how to engage in the mobilization of actors in order to make the social problems visible, to engage relevant actors in order to elevate the identified social problems into the public agenda, create spaces for open debate with the participation of various actors from diverse perspectives which can help in getting majority determined to support its eradication.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Democracy is one of the universal and indivisible core values and principles of the United Nations. It is based on the freely expressed will of the people to determine their political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives. It is closely linked to the rule of law and the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Nations of the world at the then Millennium Declaration committed

> *"to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development."*

The leaders of nation therein, resolved

> *"to strengthen the capacity of all our countries to implement the principles and practices of democracy and respect for human rights."*

Added to that also, was the commitment by them:

> *"to work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in all our countries"* as well as *"to ensure the freedom of the media to perform their essential roles and the right of the public to have access to information."*

Further to the above, on yearly bases, Nations come together to reaffirm their commitment towards enduring democratic principles that will stand the test of time, and meet the desires and needs of the governed. Indeed, these closely interrelated or interconnected commitments require integrated designs and approaches for actualization. Democratic governance feeds into economic and social policies that are responsive to people's needs and aspirations, that aim at eradicating poverty and expanding the choices that people have in their lives, and that respect the needs of future generations. In essence, therefore, democratic governance is the process of creating and sustaining an environment for inclusive and responsive political processes and settlements. They demand collective actions by all parties and stakeholders for them to be fully implemented in other to have a nation that respects human rights, promotes enduring democracy and strengthens good governance.

At the close of the Rio +20 Conference in June 2012, quite before the advent of the sustainable development Agenda, Jo Confino, the Chair of Guardian Sustainable Business, noted:

> *"the most often used phrases in the many meetings I attended [were] the need to create 'coalitions of the willing' and a recognition that 'all issues are inter-connected' and cannot be viewed in silos".*

The Sustainable Development Goals seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals, and complete what the MDGs did not achieve. They seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible, and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development which are: the economic, social and environmental. In achieving these, unique goals the UN is determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the people, especially, the poorest and most vulnerable, and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people. The same global call and spirit of partnership is demanded at the national local and community levels in all countries, particularly developing economies like ours and the other African Nations.

1.1 The Sustainable Development Goals

The year, 2015 became a momentous year for change. It was a pivotal year in human history turning the tide on the major social, economic and environmental issues of human times. With the ratification of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), business modalities, and developmental activities and trends got the potentials to fundamentally shift. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ushered in a new era of global development objectives that ambitiously aim to reduce environmental impacts, eliminate poverty, increase economic opportunities and create sustainable wealth for all around the world.

The active participation of businesses and Civil Societies and aligning with governments on positive change are principle drivers in achieving these goals. High level of SDG awareness amongst the actors, and adequate highlights on the opportunity to convert this awareness into action became very crucial. The Civil Societies and the private sector play crucial roles in helping nations meet the SDGs. Now, more than ever, there is a greater need for alignment, measurement and communication through the sustainability reporting process to enable a strong public, private, and civil society sectors contribution to the actualization of the SDGs.

One major mechanism imperative for SDG achievement, is therefore, the establishment of new and concrete platforms for joint engagement of International Agencies, Governments, Civil Society, Businesses/Private Sectors, and Communities in sustainable development pursuits.

In essence, collaborative synergy or partnership continues to be seen as one of the few models that could catalyze solutions to the sustainable development challenges that we face at the speed and scale that we need. What then do we mean by Collaborative Synergy?

1.2 Collaborative Synergy:

The term "collaboration" is used synonymously with the words, cooperation and partnership. Collaboration means assisting one another to achieve specific objectives.

Collaborative Synergy is, therefore, a process where independent organizations intentionally work together to attain their objectives for mutual benefits. It is an interactive process which engages two or more participants who work together to achieve outcomes they could not ordinarily accomplish independently, in an open, integrated process (operational, procedural and cultural) that fosters knowledge, influenced by a transformational leadership that encourages participants to expand connections beyond typical boundaries and achieve required outcomes.

Collaborative synergy involves a governance system or arrangement where public agencies work directly with non-state stakeholders (like the private sectors, the civil society organizations) in a collective decision making process in order to make or implement public policy. It may be either issue based or multi-sectorial based. In issue based collaboration, attention is given on diverse aspects of one issue such as education, whereas in multi-sectorial based collaboration, focus is concentrated on different issues in order to achieve one objective. Again, collaborations may be either for formulating public policy or for implementing public policy. Collaborations can come in diverse forms. Under the collaboration banner there are diverse arrangements in terms of the nature and number of organizations that can be involved.

Collaboration may be initiated by government or by civil society, or some times, by the private sector. When one actor compels other actors to engage in collaboration then it is could be regarded as "forced marriage". Often times, civil societies initiate collaborations with governments. The Government-Civil Society collaborations most times, are of basically of three kinds. In the first type, the Civil Society (CSO) helps government to introduce participatory approaches in different development projects. In the second category, the civil society facilitates the implementation of large government programs, while in the third type of collaboration, government and CSOs originate alternative delivery systems and frameworks in order to provide certain types of services to certain classes of people.

Collaborative Synergies between government and civil society are essential and helps in proper utilization of the comparative advantages derived from both government and civil society. On one hand, government has the authority to formulate public policies but lacks the capacity and the resources to implement the policies. Thus, on the other hand, civil society though not empowered to make laws and rules, has the capacity to mobilize citizen, urban and rural people and can work effectively at the grassroots level. As a result, through collaboration civil society gets an opportunity to expand the scope of their operations, to broaden their

influences and to participate in the formulation of public policy, whereas government can implement public policies effectively and efficiently, neutralize potential opposition and maintain a society that feels the impact of good governance.

2. BUILDING A COLLABORATIVE SYNERGY

A collaborative synergy becomes imperative where each actor admits the fact that individual sector strength is not sufficient. The starting point is the fact that the Government alone cannot solve acute social problems such as inequality and poverty. Recognizing different actors' interests demands great effort from each partner and attention throughout time. Thus, in building collaborative synergies partners should be aware not only of what unifies them but also of what separates them. It is essential to recognize conflicts within these collaborative relationships to build trust among partners. Thus, the following factors should be considered and determined for a successful synergy.

a. Acceptance and Respect of Differences Among Partners

Collaboration is most effective when parties are focused on addressing a single issue, rather than a broad set of topics. A central element in the sustainability of relationships among sectors which must be noted in the Collaborative initiative is the clear identification and understanding of the benefits and challenges for each of the engaging partner. The starting point of collaborations is the acceptance and respect of differences among partners, as well as the clear understanding of the interdependencies that attract partners to the collaboration. It is imperative to recognize and respect the actors' differences in ideologies, values, interests and practices. Having a common cause among actors from partnering sectors is an essential condition for the emergence and sustainability of cross-sector collaborations. There is also need to buttress the effects of commitment to a common cause, and the mobilization to advance such in the public agenda plays the pivotal role of the convening leader.

b. Identification of Social Problem

A crucial aspect of the emergence of a collaborative effort and the achievement of greater commitment by partners is the need to make the social problem highly visible in the region in focus. This is so because, a critical factor in establishing collaborations is a conviction about the need to engage with other partners, provided that social problems are too complex to be addressed by each sector independently. Generating interest, resources and a commitment to action from

civil society, the public sector and the corporate world is fundamental. Therefore, an important step in the construction and sustainability of this type of relationships is the creation of public agenda, in which the presence of the State is essential for giving the collaborative initiative broader legitimacy. The common theme among partners emerges from the social, economic and political context and problems affecting a community or country and the need to act together to solve those identified problems.

There are some major factors here: ensure that the issue or problem is truly important to people, and make the problem identification process as participatory as possible. This will require careful facilitation to ensure stakeholders agree on the selected issue.

c. Communication of the social Problem

Once an issue is decided upon, convene a forum between government and civil Society or Private sector representatives working on the topic identified. In this forum, the issue or problem should be analyzed: looking at causes, implications and current initiatives to address the issue. Creating a shared understanding of solutions, goals and hopes for the future is essential, with a clear focus on how open data can help. Through this process, both sides and all sides to the collaborative synergy will be able to understand the other's role in addressing the problem and at the same time identify data assets that need to be proactively disclosed to tackle the challenge.

d. Determination of Operational Mechanism

Investing time developing a system for execution and cooperation including explicit and clear rules for interactions among partners are fundamental conditions for building confidence within a partnership. Equally, showing how the design and implementation of governance structures operate are crucial elements of building and sustaining cross-sector collaborations.

e. Consideration of the need for Expanded Synergy

Peradventure, the Government and CSO representatives are the key stakeholders in the synergy, it could also be worth a while, looking at the added value inviting other stakeholders from outside these groups might bring. These could be private sector organizations, other Developmental Agencies, Citizens and others that have relevant expertise or experience in the identified topic.

In a world where partnering now sits at the very heart of international efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, few organizations can afford to ignore the culture, mindset and skills required to build and manage great

collaborations. Fox, J. in his 1993 works on "The politics of food in Mexico: state power and social mobilization", had noted that in developing countries, states may be able to initiate distributive reforms but their capacity to carry out reform programs largely depends on the mobilization of the beneficiaries themselves. In a world of plentiful opportunities, the challenge is to assess those opportunities and select the ones that are going to deliver maximum added value to the work in focus.

It's not just about getting partnership right, but about getting the right partnership.A combination of factors means convergence is becoming increasingly important, and in the development sector where the focus rests heavily on impact, some surprising cross-sector alliances are emerging.

Poverty and inequity and other social economic, political or environmental issues remain serious challenges for sustainable development. The public, private and not-for-profit organizations are responding with new models of partnership. Sometimes, people ask, business and charity – who does more to reduce poverty? However, I presume what should really be essential here are results and impacts.

The impacts of cross-sector corporations or collaborative synergies in developing countries are really huge. One fact is that their presence is beneficial in so many ways. It creates jobs, aids in lifting people out of poverty, and assists in injecting wealth into the economies, rekindles trust of the people on government, as well as ensures sustainability of developmental dividends.

In any case, however, while Civil Society Organizations endeavor to fight for human rights, environmental concerns, and better lives for all, and hold businesses and government bodies accountable, one major challenge they encounter is funding, and that limits their speed and impacts.

2.2 Engaging Women in the Synergy to actualize the SDGs

Women make up half the world's population, but don't really share half of the world's wealth, well-being and opportunity. Two-thirds of the world's poor are women. A lot of people still live in poverty, without enjoying a life of dignity. Women are closest to these persons. Women also majorly face inequalities, and disparity in opportunities, wealth, power, and even unemployment. Global health issues hit them the most, even as they face natural and man-made disasters, conflicts and insecurity, violence and extremism, and numerous impacts of climate

change and environmental degradation. Women are disproportionally being exposed to precarious living conditions, diseases and unmitigated disasters and attacks. In decision making cadres, women are rarely represented.

They encounter inadequate representations on issues bothering on their livelihood, thus, limiting their voices. Even the media remains a male-dominated sector in much of the world. All these contribute to women's voices lacking a crucial amplifier to put their concerns on political agendas and unleash the development potential of their ingenuity. Yet, it is evident that globally, women are great organizer, innovators, conservators and community builders. Women Organizations are a huge force to synergize with. They are the closest to the families, and communities, and understand better, how social problems can be tackled. Engaging Women Groups in collaborative synergies are critical as they hold vital keys to eradicating or solving major social problems.

Further to that, Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goal is a stand-alone goal, and still cuts across all the other seventeen goals of the SDGs.   Achieving gender equality and women empowerment is a stand-alone goal. It is also part of all the other goals, with many targets specifically recognizing women's equality and empowerment as both the objective, and as part of the solution. It goes to show that deep legal, legislative, or policy frameworks are needed to ensure women's rights and leadership around the world.

There is therefore, no how the SDGs can be fully actualized without the adequate engagement of Women as collaborators in the pursuit of the Agenda.

3. COLLABORATIVE SYNERGY AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

We may agree that most times, Politicians are so busy fighting for their jobs that they hardly seem to notice that they risk going out of business. Democracy, in such situations, go on the wane, as the needs of the people are critically neglected. Common to all these is a progressive loss of vision, of long term planning and solutions, with politics used just for power acquisition. Thus, collaborative synergy becomes imperative, as it contributes to fostering inclusive and democratic governance in all African Nations by bringing key actors in a common forum.

The collaboration creates a multi-stakeholder forum that builds synergy among actors by providing effective platforms for cross-sectorial learning, raising and sharing concerns and resolving conflicts. Supporting and promoting collaborative

synergy at all levels of resource governance institutionalize democratic practice and enhance stakeholder ownership as well as accountability in all tiers of governance. Building the capacities of these multi-actors and empowering them can ensure their active and meaningful participation in nation building process that strengthens inclusive democratic governance. Thus, encouraging and institutionalizing collaborative synergy at all tiers of governance is an imperative action. It is paramount to the actualization of the sustainable development goals.

Collaborative synergy in governance in effect, is crucial for very many reasons. Some of which are:

i.   Consolidating a fledgling Democracy

Civic engagement and citizens' participation perform critical functions in consolidating a fledgling democracy as well as rejuvenating and deepening a decaying democracy. It encourages the general public to become involved in the political process and the issues that affect them, as it endears the community to come together to be a collective source of change, political and even non-political. It complements the role of the existing institutions of representation conventionally available in democracy. Most notable are political parties, sectorial movements, and interest groups. In most democracies, civic participation which can take the form of voluntary associational activities, formal or informal participation in public policy forums, social movements, or "direct action," including popular protests, performs important functions of interest collection, articulation, and representation.

 Again, civic engagement and participation help to detect and identify new issues and interests that have at the time being, been ignored, underestimated, or underrepresented by the previous regimes or political parties.

Further to that, they provide channels for self-expression and identification that are more proximate to individual citizens, in effect, allays citizens' sense of alienation and political apathy. Most established democracies have long suffered from plummeting voter turnout and political indifference among the citizenry. In this context, civic engagement and citizen participation can serve as an effective antidote to political apathy and an instrument to rekindle citizens' interest in politics and policy making.

 Equally, citizen's participation stabilizes expectations within social groups and thereby supplies the state with more aggregated, reliable, and actionable information with which to govern. It inculcates democratic norms amongst

citizens. They are important instruments of enhancing the performance and quality of democracy. At the same time, civic participation provides important reservoirs and sources of potential resistance to arbitrary or tyrannical action by rulers.

In general, collaborative synergy in governance through civic engagement and citizens' participation effectively complements and reinforces electoral politics in democracies, and also contributes to the production and delivery of desired goods and services to the people, thus lessening the burden of the government.

ii. Shift from a bureaucratic administration to a more representative administration.

Civil society plays a critical role in strengthening democracy in that, it brings about the movement from a bureaucratic administration to a more representative administration. Civil Society Organizations bring about active co-operation and enhanced commitment to progress. They encourage the divergence from the traditional regime-driven policy process to one where there is a multiplicity of negotiated determinants of the problem identification, formulation of policy principles, setting of objectives, development of options according to agreed criteria, and the formulation of an implementation strategy. This ensure true democracy, as the way through which this is carried out, and their positive contributions at various stages in the process of execution goes in line with the demands of democratic governance. The dynamism of linkages as underscored above, surely ascribes to democracy as being about collaborations and partnerships of all stakeholders in an endeavor to bring about synergies of efforts and resources, with the people in focus.

The collaborative relationship between and amongst stakeholder- civil society organizations, communities, private sector organizations and the government, strengthens democracy through fostering of complex relationships among all the stakeholders, from the most powerful titans to the poorest and most vulnerable people on society's margins. Above all it would be wise to recall that democracy is universally recognized ideal. It is a basic citizens' right which should be respected and adhered to, and which should be exercised under conditions of freedom and equality. Therefore achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between and amongst all- women and men in diverse sectors, in the conduct of the affairs of society.

4. ACHIEVING AND MAINTAINING GREATER COMMITMENT AND SYNERGY AMONG PARTNERS IN CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATIONS

In order to achieve more effective results and develop such democratic national governments that delivers to the needs of the people cross-sector collaborations among the Public, Private and Nonprofit Sectors can be enhanced as follows:

➢ **Dynamism:** There is need to realize that collaborations or partnerships are dynamic in nature and are in constant development. Instances may arise where partners may leave and some others move in closer, depending on contextual factors. These changes in the level of commitment by partners are not necessarily bad for the collaboration, provided they are addressed with careful attention.

➢ **Clarity of Purpose:** There should be clarity about the common cause of actions, and concise ways of engagement must be formulated in a manner that has visibility within and outside the collaboration. Effort should be dedicated at creating a public agenda which makes the social problem visible and mobilizes resources, efforts and interest from all relevant partners, and even beyond participants in the partnership. It may also be imperative for partners to contribute time, resources and attention to producing new knowledge about the problems to be addressed by the partnership, and use this knowledge to construct a public agenda.

➢ **Genuine Commitment:** Government commitment is vital as that will aid in providing legitimacy to the Collaborative initiative. The beneficiary communities should equally be made to be part of the collaboration in order to ensure sustainability and ownership. The governance structure should be made clear and explicit rules placed in place in order to achieve consensus at all times, and also make credible decisions and plan collective actions. The responsibilities and roles of partners should be defined without ambiguity, and expected out-come, set. These will help in tackling the identified social problem, and the proper handling of the agenda or problem in focus is an essential factor to improve trust, coordination and accountability in the collaborative initiative.

➢ **Value and respect:** Value and respect are paramount. Actors in the collaborative synergy must be able to recognize singularities, logics, values and rationales of various partners. They should equally be able to understand different actors' interests and the associated benefits and challenges each party may be faced with while engaging in the collaboration. There is therefore, need to spend time to conduct a systematic dialogue about partners' motivations, their assumptions on the social problem to be addressed and its solutions, their resource needs as well as their expectations. In an event where there are diverse logics of actions in the collaborative relationships, a neutral person or organization who is equally committed to the pursued goals may be hired by the parties to manage the relationships between the partnering sectors in order to ensure they do not depart from the pursued goals of the partnership.

➢ **Communications, Feedback and Evaluation Mechanism:** These are vital tools for effective collaborative synergy. It is essential to develop communications mechanisms both within the initiative for partners and outside it to communities and other stakeholders. Feedback and Evaluation Mechanisms are crucial. There should be need to inquire constantly about the impact of the collaboration on the beneficiaries and this information should be utilized as a guide on the actions of the parties, as well as a focal point for identifying problems and resolving conflicts among participants. There should equally be an evaluation tool that goes beyond efficiency and efficacy criteria but should at the same time, include determining the effectiveness and impact on the beneficiary populations.

5. CONCLUSION:

Increasing instances of Civic Participation and Civil Society-Government collaborative synergy in the promotion of democracy and provision of welfare in major developed nations clearly demonstrate that, in the rapidly globalizing world of these days, it is difficult for the government to deal with all policy issues alone. It is imperative to involve civil society and public sectors, as well as engage citizens in the policy-making process. Facilitating and deepening collaborative relationships between the Government and other sectors are very vital for political, social and economic growth and sustenance. The partnership is important for making democracy work better, resolving most profound problems more effectively, and increasing national competitiveness.

In any case, for success to be recorded on collaborative Synergies, the governance system should provide clear guidelines, procedures and processes to make collective decisions, achieve consensus and plan actions. This implies a clear definition of how decisions will be made, the roles and responsibilities of each partner, the mechanisms for coordinating actions and the accountability lines within the collaborative initiative, as well as the need for mutual respect for all actors.

It is equally essential to develop a communications mechanism for information flow within and outside the partnerships. Whether partnering with a Civil Society Organization, Government, or Private Sector Organization, shared purpose and the transparent exchange of information are important pre-requisites for collaborative synergies. Furthermore, collaborative synergy in governance through civic engagement and citizens participation effectively complements and reinforces electoral politics in democracies, and also contributes to the production and delivery of welfare goods and services, thus lessening the burden on the government.

Indeed, competent management and utilization of private sector participation, civil society Organization, and Government collaboration will prove to be the key to effective governance in the years to come. That will also serve as an important mechanism of developmental plans, strengthening the nation's democracy as well as enhancing any weak welfare system. The synergy will contribute immensely to increasing the transparency, responsiveness, and accountability of the government and improving the quality of the policy-making process, and promote civic participation in governance, and in all be a veritable tool towards actualizing the Sustainable Development Goals.

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