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## The Power Sector Reforms and Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects

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### ABSTRACT

The push towards the realization of sustainable development has become more imperative with the United Nations' declaration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. The primary aim of the SDGs is to achieve a more sustainable and equitable future for all by the year 2030. The SDGs objectives are usually set out in the countries development plan but poor implementation has been the bane of achieving these objectives in a sustainable manner. One area that stands out as obstacle to the attainment the goals relates more to the power sector that has continue to perform abysmally in spite of the enormous resources being committed into the sector by successive administrations in Nigeria. Against this backdrop, the paper interrogated the on-going reform in the power sector using the new public management (NPM) as a hinch-pin. This descriptive research explored various reforms of successive government in the power sector using a desktop analysis. The paper concluded that a functional and reliable power sector is crucial for meaningful sustainable development and attainment of SDGs 7, 8, 9 and 13. Hence, the reality of Nigeria power sector is not ideal. This paper, therefore, recommends that a state of emergency be declared in the sector in Nigeria with the aim of revamping the sector through massive investment, technical training and retraining and development of the political will to do a complete overhaul. Unless, the recommendations are taken and acted upon, Nigeria efforts towards the realization of SDGs will remains a token gestures.

**Keywords:** Power sector, Policy reforms, Sustainable Development Goals, New Public Management, development

### Introduction

Nigeria is popularly acclaimed as potentially rich countries in human and material resources. The general expectations from Nigerians are that its political and economic elites would leverage on the vast resources available in the country to bring about sustainable development for the good of the country and its citizens. But one major factor that is central to the quest for sustainable development is the availability and sustainability of electricity supply across the country. Electricity plays a pivotal role in only in economic growth and development but in attracting foreign investments, job creation, and the endowment of entrepreneurial spirit in Nigeria and generally

social welfare and well-beings of the populace.

A cursory look at the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) declared in 2015 would show that Goals One to Nine of the SDGs require the availability of reliable and sustainable electricity power supply in order to achieve these goals. In the nuclear age the world finds itself, electricity is an indispensable factor in the socio-economic growth and development of any country. Electric power is an indispensable inducer of the industrial revolution and an industrial country is almost always a developed and politically strong country. Nigeria has always aspired to be one of the biggest economy and

political force in the world. But it has not been able to translate this ambition into concrete reality by providing to the society reliable and affordable power supply that can cope with the demands of contemporary socio-economic and political demands of a developing society.

Successive governments in the country have made frantic efforts to deal with the myriad of challenges facing the power sector with billions of dollars spent on different measures taken to correct its dysfunctionality (Igbokwe-Ibeto & Osakede, 2023). However, these would seem to scratch just the surface of the problems facing the sector. With the epileptic and sometimes total blackout being experienced by the citizenry and corporate organizations, many Nigerians are asking the question of when the power sector conundrum will be resolved. To rob salt on the injury course by a malfunctioning power sector Nigerians are being failed by the electricity distribution companies. Disco and many indigenous and foreign companies operating in Nigeria are being forced to go outside the country to seek for a better business environment.

In the context of sustainable development that has been embraced by most countries all over the world, it becomes imperative for the power sector crisis to be revisited in order to find path ways through which the SDGs could be achieved before 2020. It is against this backdrop, the paper interrogates the power sector reforms in the country and the normative and empirical obstacles standing against the availability of reliable power supply for promoting SDGs and higher standard of living for the citizens of the country.

To achieve the objectives set out in this paper, it is structured into the following sections. The first indulges in conceptual and theoretical excursion. The second examines the nature of the power sector, its reforms and the quest for sustainable development in Nigeria through the pursuit of the UN: SDGs. The third discusses the efforts of governments in the Fourth Republic to redirect the power sector through its reforms to deliver quality services to the different sectors of the society. The fourth analyses the obstacles facing the power sector in the

country in its efforts to deliver efficient and effective services to its clientele. The fifth provides the opportunities available to the country to deal with the hydra-headed challenges facing the sector, and then conclusions and recommendations were made.

## Conceptual and Theoretical Linchpins

The public sector is a broad term often used to explain the various government organizations from the presidency, state governments, parastatal, the armed forces, para-military forces, educational institutions, etc. Many public sector organizations have not been justifying their existence due to poor service delivery and failure to justify the huge financial input into their operations by successive governments.

Service delivery is, therefore, defined as customer's oriented service geared towards meeting their needs efficiently and effectively. Also, Onebrakpere, Nana and Odu (2018) conceive of service delivery as customer based service and its effectiveness. Mustapha, Edegware and Odu (2018) define service delivery as the scores of activities carried out by public servants towards ensuring the satisfaction of the citizens' welfare. The satisfaction of the citizens is the primary concern of public sector organizations including those in charge of providing electricity to the consuming public. However, over the years, the performance of the power sector has led too much to be desired. The poor delivery of electricity across the country has led to frequent outcry from businesses and other electricity consuming public. The current production capacity is a far-cry from what the country needs to ensure reliable and sustainable electricity.

This pitiable situation has not gone unnoticed by successive administrations in Nigeria. This has led to the introduction of several reform measures by these governments. What then is reform? A reform is a measure to bring about better performance of an organization. In the public sector, it is more appropriate to talk about administrative reform. According to Capano (2021) administrative reform is "a way to design and implement administrative policies

by introducing deliberate efforts to change the actual institutional arrangements, the processes, and the procedures of public administration”. Authors have generally described administrative reform as a turn-around maintenance process to re-engineer or fine-tune the structure, management and functioning of the administrative system with improved service delivery as the overall objective (Turner, Prasojo & Sumarwono, 2022; Dibie, 2014).

The ultimate goal of every production of goods and services is to ensure development. Development is a conceptual variable making it difficult to pin it down on any generally acceptable definition. However, development can be described as a process of social change in a system or society. Gboyega (2003) defines development as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. Here, development is seen as encompassing measures to improve every aspect of the material and spiritual well-being of all citizens in political society. However, this view of development does not tell us how this can be achieved.

Replay (1997) brings to the fore the use of the people’s culture as means through which progressive change is attained in a manner that the present stage of the citizens is progressively different from the previous one. Thus, development moves people forward towards a better state of being. The question of development has become topical issue because hitherto, development in the country has progressed in twists and turns, wasteful and lack focus. This led to the inauguration of sustainable development by the United Nations Charter on SDGs with Nigeria as a signatory.

## Theoretical Framework

In the era of the New Public Management (NPM) the market base principle is the major tool for analyzing public sector performance. In the paper, the Principal –Agency is applied to analyze the reform and performance in the power sector. The theory conceives government activities as contractual relationship between the citizens or government as the principal and bureaucracy as the agency. This separation

will help avoid private interest in the delivery of public services to clients of the sector. The rent-seeking or opportunistic behaviour of bureaucratic, there the compelling needs to contract out public service provision to agents outside the public sector. According to the theorist, “competition, delegation, performance and responsiveness offer yardsticks to regulate bureaucratic behaviour and generate improved outcomes to their operations (Sapru, 2012).

The results so far from the implementation of the Principal – Agency theory in developing countries like Nigeria would appear to be a mixed bag of the good and ugly. Generally, it has led to complex and fragmented service provision especially in the power sector. Cases of moral hazard, corruption, lack of institutional capacity, poor regulation and resource gap have attended this model of reform in the power sector. There are however renewed hope with better approach to the power sector management, the introduction of management and performance based reward system.

## The Development Drive of Nigeria

Successive governments have had well-articulated and lofty aspirations of developing Nigeria. In pursuit of this, development plans had been drawn in the colonial and post-colonial eras in the country. The development objectives of the country have long been spelt out. They include:

- A united strong and self-reliant nation;
- A just and egalitarian society;
- A great and dynamic economy;
- A land of full and bright opportunities for all citizens; and
- A free and democratic society (in Maduabum, 2014)

It is on the lofty aspirations that several development plans are erected. These plans were all encompassing and sought to bring about socio-economic and politico-cultural transformation of the country with particular focus on improving the living standard of the people. Many more plans have been initiated in the Fourth Republic such as: National Economic Development Strategy (NEEDS) and its state and local government counterparts in SEEDS and LEEDS

respectively. President Jonathan came up with Vision 2020. Under the Vision 2020 plan, the vision was that “by year 2020, Nigeria will have a large strong diversified sustainable and competitive economy that will effectively harness the talents and energies of its people and responsibly explored its natural endowment to guarantee high standard of living and quality of life to its citizens (Ojameruaye, 2015). This remains within the general framework for development in the country.

With regard to the power sector, the plan estimated that Nigeria will need to generate electricity in the range of about 35,000MW by 2020. The target is to grow in stored power generation from 6,000MW in 2009 to 20,000MW by 2015 (Ojameruaye, 2015). By and large, these projections have largely been unrealized. As Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) observed that “during these periods, Nigeria’s enormous oil was not in vested to build a viable industrial base for the country and for launching agrarian revolution to liquidate mass poverty”. Much of these problems could be attributed to the disjuncture between policy formulation and implementation. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are not only comprehensive but intertwined with global regulation, with a view to achieving enduring development for all times.

### **Development and Sustainable Development**

The term ‘development’ has been defined as a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of the individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development process and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting there-from. Albeit somewhat vague, this concept of sustainable development aims to maintain economic advancement and progress while protecting the long-term value of the environment; it “provides a framework for the integration of environment policies and development strategies” (United Nations General Assembly, 1987). However, long before the late 20th century, scholars argued that there need not be a trade-off between environmental sustainability and economic development. Economics of Sustainability By

utilizing economic tools, early theorists offered that policies to protect the environment could also promote innovation and turn a profit.

Sustainable development relates to the principle of meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2019). While the concept of sustainable development has been relevant since time immemorial, it can be argued that the relevance deepens with the dawn of every day because the population keeps increasing but the natural resources available to humankind do not.

### **The Sustainable Development Goals**

The Post-2015 Development Agenda was a process from 2012 to 2015 led by the United Nations to define the future global development framework that would succeed the Millennium Development Goals. The SDGs were developed to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which ended in 2015. In January 2013, the 30-member UN General Assembly Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals was established to identify specific goals for the SDGs. The OWG submitted their proposal of 8 SDGs and 169 targets to the 68th session of the General Assembly in September 2014. On 5 December 2014, the UN General Assembly accepted the Secretary General's Synthesis Report, which stated that the agenda for the post-2015 SDG process would be based on the OWG proposals.

The latest of such concerns translated into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The MDGs were a sequel to the SDGs. The MDGs marked a historic global mobilisation to achieve a set of important social priorities worldwide (Breuer, Janetschek, & Malerba, 2019). However, in spite of the relative effectiveness of the MDGs, not all the targets of the eight goals were achieved after being rolled out for 15 years (2000–2015), hence, the introduction of the SDGs to continue with the development



agenda. As part of this new development roadmap, the UN approved the 2030 Agenda (SDGs), which are a call to action to protect the planet, end poverty and guarantee the well-being of people (Akhakpe, 2020; Oleribe & Taylor-Robinson, 2016). The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. Here is a list of the 17 SDGs:

- i. **No Poverty:** End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
- ii. **Zero Hunger:** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
- iii. **Good Health and Well-being:** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
- iv. **Quality Education:** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- v. **Gender Equality:** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- vi. **Clean Water and Sanitation:** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- vii. **Affordable and Clean Energy:** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
- viii. **Decent Work and Economic Growth:** Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.
- ix. **Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure:** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation.
- x. **Reduced Inequality:** Reduce inequality within and among countries.
- xi. **Sustainable Cities and Communities:** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
- xii. **Responsible Consumption and Production:** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- xiii. **Climate Action:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- xiv. **Life Below Water:** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.

xv. **Life on Land:** Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss.

xvi. **Peace and Justice Strong Institutions:** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

xvii. **Partnerships to achieve the Goal:** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Each SDG encompasses specific targets and indicators that provide a framework for countries and organizations to work toward sustainable development in various areas. The SDGs emphasize the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental aspects of development and call for collaborative efforts from governments, businesses, civil society, and individuals to achieve a more equitable and sustainable world.

On a prima-facie basis these Goals appear to cover the central concerns of development in any society. Why some of these Goals may not be new to the development agenda of the country. The present realities demand that these Goals should be pursued corporately and currently. But if previous plan implementation is anything to go by, it would appear that this SDGs may go the way of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that recorded less than 60 percent accomplishment in Nigeria (Maduabum, 2014).

### Nature and Performance of the Power Sector

The power sector in Nigeria is the engine room of development in the country. There is hardly any aspect of societal life that does not need power supply to promote its activities. The power sector is the hub around which activities revolves. Given its centrality to the country survival, the control of the sector was put under the exclusive legislative list thereby giving the federal government control over electricity generation and distribution. The failure of the sector to keep

pace with increasing demand for power through expansion and heavy investments in capacity building, infrastructure development, training and retraining of its technical staff, the sector still experienced poor service delivery to households and business concerns across the country (Fayomi, Esse, Fakehinde, Onakwai, Oluwasegun, & Jen, 2022)

The Obasanjo Administration under the NEEDS programme sought to revive the sector by setting out the following objectives and vision for the sector:

- Industry where private sector participants will be involved in power generation, transmission and distribution;
- The coming on board of a strong independent electricity regulator;
- Improved management system that will translate into better performance;
- Improve service delivery to consumers;
- Taking electricity to the remote areas of the society;
- Electricity tariffs based on market forces;
- Introduction of greater competition in the sector;
- To bring about inflow of foreign capital into in the economy;
- Transfer of modern Western technologies into the sector;
- Eventually, reduction in cost of delivery of electricity to customers through efficiency in generation, transmission and distribution (FGN, 2006).

As has been the case in Nigeria, many good intended policies die with the government that introduced them. This was the case of NEEDS, SEED and LEEDS. They were abandoned when Yar'Adua came to power in 2007. His Roadmap for the power sector never truly left the drawing board before the sudden death of the president. Shortly before his election in 2011, Jonathan rolled out his roadmap for the power sector reform that culminated in the 2013 privatization of the sector (Ayankola, 2016). To be sure "the 2013 reform of the sector was guided by the Electric Power Sector Reform Act of 2005 which introduces competition into the Nigerian electricity supply market and comes along with its various components including corporatization, privatization and unbundling, vertical unbundling creates

separate generation, transmission and distribution companies (Fayomi, et al., 2022).

All together eleven (11) distribution firms were unbundled from the defunct state owned monopoly under the name Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) with one Transmission Company and six (6) generation firms, bringing the total of eighteen (18) companies or firms under the sector (Fayomi, et al., 2022; Ayankola, 2016). In giving these unbundled firms to local private investors, due diligence was not followed to ensure that they are competent bodies instead, like the industrialization programmes of the 1972 – 1974, they went to the cronies in the prescient and corridors of power. The frequent power outages, frequent collapse of the national grid, vandalization of power installation and poor funding have created the power conundrum in the country.

### **Power Sector Reforms: Issues and Challenges**

The Nigerian power sector has witnessed attempts by successive governments to attain stability. The democratic government of 1999 undertook rehabilitation of the existing power infrastructure. In 2004, the National Integrated Power Project (NIPP) was initiated to boost power supply by the launch of gas-powered stations. The National Electric Power Policy (NEPP) of 2001 resulted in the Electric Power Sector Reform (EPSRA) Act of 2005 establishing the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC). The EPSRA provided the statutory basis for the privatisation of the power sector. A key step in this plan was the setup of the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) and subsequent unbundling into 18 successor companies (Fayomi et al., 2022).

The implementation of the Roadmap for Power Sector Reform of August 2010, (the Roadmap) led to the privatisation of the power sector on November 1 2013 with the formal handover of the successor companies to private investors as six generation companies (GENCOs) and 11 distribution companies (DISCOs) and the establishment of the Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN). This reform has certainly run into a dish. But it is still not clear what the problems of the sector are. Briefly, we will identify some of them.

Funding of the sector is of major essence in the pursuit of reliable power supply in the country. These who took over the firms in the sector lack the financial wherewithal to run the sector efficiently. Even with the government bailout funds, the sector still remain poorly managed raising questions as to how finances of the sector are managed. There are talks about waste and rent-seeking behaviours among the operators. The technical capacities of the firms are questionable. The needed foreign technical expertise is lacking in the sector which explains constant breakdown in power installation across the country (Fayomi, 2022).

Relatedly, enough funds have been committed into building power sector infrastructure in the country yet its infrastructures remains obsolete and inefficient. Vandalization of power sector installations is another major concern across the country. In the interior, this challenge would look insurmountable until there is better condition of living in the country. The source of power generation remains largely through gas and hydro sources (Igbokwe-Ibeto & Osakede, 2022). But there are others that need to be accessed for diversified sources to drive the power generation system in Nigeria.

## Power Sector and SDGs

The power sector plays a crucial role in driving the sustainable development goal (SDG) agenda. Here are some key areas where the power sector contributes to the achievement of SDGs:

### 1. Affordable and clean energy (SDG 7):

The power sector aim to expand access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy. This includes the promotion of renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, hydro, and geo-thermal, and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. This majorly encompasses increasing energy efficiency in generation, transmission, and distribution, thereby supporting sustainable development goal (SDG) 7 which aim to create universal access to affordable and clean energy.

**2. Climate action (SDG 13):** The power sector is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, yet, it also has the potential to

power micro and macroclimate actions. Many power companies are investing in clean technologies, transitioning to low-carbon energy sources, and adopting carbon capture and storage methods. By reducing emissions from power generation, the sector helps in mitigating climate change and supports SDG 13 objective which aims to take urgent action towards climate change.

### 3. Industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9):

Undoubtedly, the power sector is a key driver of development of infrastructure and industry. It provides electricity for manufacturing processes, transportation networks, and telecommunication systems. By expanding power infrastructure, enhancing grid reliability, and investing in innovation, the sector supports SDG 9's goal of developing resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and fostering innovation.

### 4. Health and well-being (SDG 3):

Access to reliable electricity has significant implications for health and well-being. The power sector supports SDG 3 by providing electricity to healthcare facilities, enabling the operation of medical equipment, and improving the overall quality of healthcare services. Electricity also facilitates access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene, which are critical for public health.

### 5. Economic growth and employment (SDG 8):

The power sector drives economic growth by providing reliable and affordable energy to industries, businesses, and households. It creates employment opportunities through power plant construction, maintenance activities, and the development of renewable energy technologies. By supporting economic growth and creating decent work, the power sector contributes to SDG 8's objective of promoting sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth.

## Conclusion

Overall, the power sector's transformation towards sustainable practices is crucial for achieving multiple SDGs, including those related to energy, climate action, industry, health, and economic growth. The privatisation experience in the Nigerian electricity sector did not go as planned due to legacy corruption, technical inefficiencies, the

selection of politically connected investors, and a privatisation strategy that failed to curtail sectorial corruption (Nwogbo & Ighodalo, 2021; Adeniji & Osisiogu, 2014). As a result, the power sector has been operating in a significant deficit since privatisation resulting in a low-level equilibrium where incentives to invest in and upgrade the grid are absent. Solving the liquidity crisis in the sector requires a long-term horizon and strategy. Capital infusion is needed to overhaul the efficiency of the grid from gas supply through to distribution. Conclusively, the power sector has been a major hindrance to attaining SDGs.

## Recommendations

The power sector plays a crucial role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as it directly contributes to multiple objectives such as clean energy access, climate action, and affordable and clean energy. Here are some recommendations on how the power sector can drive SDGs:

### 1. Increase renewable energy generation:

The power sector should prioritize and invest in renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, hydropower, and geothermal. Governments and utilities should establish favorable policies and incentives to encourage the adoption of renewable energy technologies and phase out the dependence on fossil fuels.

**2. Improve energy efficiency:** The power sector should focus on improving energy efficiency in generation, transmission, and distribution processes. This will not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions but also enhance the affordability and accessibility of energy for consumers.

### 3. Enhance grid reliability and flexibility:

Investing in modern grid infrastructure is essential to support the integration of renewable energy sources and ensure a stable and reliable power supply. Smart grid technologies and energy storage systems should be promoted to manage fluctuations in supply and demand and enable higher penetration of renewable energy into the grid.

### 4. Promote decentralized energy systems:

Facilitating the adoption of decentralized energy systems, such as microgrids and off-grid solutions, can ensure access to clean and affordable energy in remote and underserved areas. This can be achieved through targeted policies, public-private partnerships, and financial incentives.

### 5. Prioritize energy access for all:

The power sector should prioritize efforts to ensure universal access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy. This requires a focus on underserved communities and marginalized populations, promoting inclusive business models and innovative financing mechanisms.

### 6. Foster collaboration and partnerships:

Collaboration between governments, utilities, private sector entities, and civil society organizations is crucial to drive the SDGs in the power sector. Partnerships can facilitate knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and mobilization of resources to address common challenges.

### 7. Strengthen policy and regulatory frameworks:

Governments should establish robust policy and regulatory frameworks that incentivize sustainable practices and create a favorable market environment for renewable energy investments. This includes feed-in tariffs, tax incentives, carbon pricing mechanisms, and regulations promoting energy efficiency.

### 8. Encourage research and development:

Continuous research and development are essential for improving technologies, driving innovation, and finding sustainable solutions in the power sector. Governments, research institutions, and private sector organizations should collaborate to support research, development, and demonstration of clean energy technologies.

By implementing these recommendations, the power sector can contribute significantly to the achievement of SDGs by promoting clean and sustainable energy, mitigating climate change, enhancing energy access, and fostering economic development.



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