

**KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Sustainable Development (SD) is expedient in Africa. This expediency is necessitated by the challenges to put in place systems that guarantee improved living conditions in the societies across the continent. However, certain factors are militating against the realization of such a lofty and attainable ideal. Basic to these factors is the dire inadequacy of Knowledge Management (KM) systems and administration and Capacity Building (CB). There is a paucity of KM and CB which has made it problematic to attain social harmony, unity, order, and stability for sustainable development. Adequate establishment of KM and CB would create avenue for harmonious existence, coordination of thoughts and ideas, and ensure knowledge integration, which will go a long way to instigate human development. Understandably, there is certain intimacy, or organic, relation between KM, CB, and SD. Therefore, this paper argues that SD in Africa requires a sound culture of KM and CB to be in operation if she must meet her development needs and goals. It goes further to identify the means and important ways through which these requirements could be met.

**Keywords:** Knowledge Management (KM), Knowledge Management (KM) in Africa, Capacity Building (CB), Development in Africa, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development in Africa, Knowledge Management (KM) and Capacity Building (CB) in Africa

**INTRODUCTION**

The African continent is largely made of an amalgamation of heterogeneous and pluralistic societies. While such a multicultural nature could militate against the quest for social harmony and progress, it

could also be strength in the realization of human potentialities and development. This could be so if African governments and societies institute adequate KM processes and CB ideologies. This paper attempts to underscore in what ways KM and CB can combine to enhance SD in Africa.

The quest for development is an issue that bugs any human society that does not aspire for expiration. Such quest demands an enquiry into the developmental paradigms, measures, and factors for sustainable human development. This work identifies two basic factors that are necessary for sustainable development in Nigeria. The factors identified here are knowledge management and capacity building. In the current era of knowledge-driven societies, knowledge, and capacity building (CB) are critical resources for sustainable development. Capacity building enhances knowledge management.

The three basic concepts that need to be theoretically analyzed are knowledge management (KM), capacity building (CB), and sustainable development. The analysis of these concepts will show in what ways they are interrelated and how KM and CB could guide sustainable development. The position here is that there is an organic linkage between the two concepts. That is, knowledge management and capacity building have enormous propensity to aid sustainable development. Recognition and integration of this understanding in the African socio-political sphere would be very advantageous towards sustainable development in Africa.

## **THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

In order to put the notion of sustainable development into perspective, there is a need to understand what the concept, development, entails. An underlying assumption in the concept of development is the idea of a process. Development is a process that involves major changes in various aspects of human and social life: economic, political, institutional, cultural, etc. In his analysis of 'Society and National Development', Professor Olusegun Oladipo contends that to define national development, focus should be on the extent to which the institutions of a given society enhances the capacity of the people, as individuals and as a social collective, to ensure the conditions for the persistence of social life (Oladipo, 2008). In an attempt to expatiate this, he highlighted the idea of freedom and social decency as major factors and indication of the level of development. This implies that, for there to be development in the nation, there should be a concerted effort to establish institutional frameworks that would guarantee individual and social creativity, fulfillment, and provision of social amenities, education, health services,

security, shelter, and food for human healthy existence and fulfillment. It also implies that development necessitates an establishment of social framework for institutionalization of social values for social cooperation. Omotala (2006) sees development as an adequate empowerment of the state and society for proper distillation of their complementary responsibilities, institutional and governmental stability, and great latitude of autonomy for political community and its constituent parts, as well as individual members of such communities. This implies that for there to be development, there should be intellectual, moral, and social empowerment of the citizens. According to Sen (1990) development is comparable to capacity expansions. All these views on development reflect Walter Rodney's conception of development as increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, external well-being, and societies' capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships (Rodney, 1982).

These analyses imply that development is an increase in material and social life of the society. The material life is expressed in the economy, infrastructure, health services, electricity, telephones, transportation, housing, etc. The social life reflects in individual autonomy, freedom, creativity, self-discipline, knowledge, skill, and capacity. So a society develops to the extent that there is an increase, or improvement, on the material and social life of the society.

These analyses also show that development is not limited to material improvement in the social life of the society – moral, intellectual, and psychological social relations. In fact, development depends largely in these aspects of the social life. This is precisely because, without social coordination and cooperation in the society, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to socially engineer human development. Consider a situation where there is lack of freedom, peace, and mutual relations. It will be difficult to have both adequate social planning and strong social institutions that would direct the affairs in the society for social growth. In other words, there is the need for the establishment of social institutions and social values that would empower the citizens for social building and growth. That means there is the need for development of skills, knowledge, creativity, social cooperation, and morals for adequate human development.

Sustainable development, therefore, is the development that is stable, enduring, and consistent. It is a development that lasts and does not crumble in the face of formidable problems. Sustainable

development is a development that does not roll back or recede, even in the face of threatening reversal waves (Omotola, 2006). It is development that can guarantee the protection of the environment and resources today and tomorrow. It is also one that is self-sustaining and meets the needs of present and future generations (World Bank, 2002; Steer & Lutz, 1993). Sustainable development also promotes spatial, social, political, economic, and psychological linkages, not only among the different sectors of the economy, but also among the different regions of the national economy (Omotola, 2006). Sustainable development, therefore, implies interdependence of various strata of the society in the realization of stable economic, social, political, technological, and cultural development. Sustainable development is indicated by certain components, such as general human comfort, increase in educational level of the polity, high degree of economic comfort, low level of poverty, high level of equality, freedom, adequate management of economy, and so on. Thus, sustainable development indicates a harmonization of the values, powers, natural, cultural, and social resources for human well-being, both for the present and the future (Igberaese & Onyeaghalaji, 2009). These characteristics of development are indications of two factors that are necessary indices of sustainable development of which their maintenance and endurance are necessary for sustainable development. The factors are knowledge management and capacity building.

### **KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT (KM)**

Knowledge is, universally, the same: be it in a private sector conglomerate, government department, or in public sector. Notwithstanding, one way of looking at knowledge is to look at what it entails in governmental and organizational setups. In these sectors, knowledge can be categorized as: organizational memory, intellectual capital, and personal knowledge.

**Organizational memory:** This is a collection of best practices, heuristics, processed documents, and other texts that help define how an organization operates. Fundamental rules, office orders, rule book, office manual, and memorandum are few examples of organizational memory.

**Intellectual capital:** This is the intangible assets of an organization. This includes best practices, learning's, competencies, culture, and connections that enable and foster innovation, agility, awareness, adaptation, and corporate survival. This type of knowledge is produced during day to day working of the

organization across different units and geographies. KM plays a role in mapping, recording, evaluating, stewarding, marketing, and growing intellectual capital and knowledge assets.

**Personal Knowledge:** This type of knowledge is tacit in nature and resides in the minds of the knower. KM provides ways and means to capture such knowledge. Blogging, personal information management, and branding are some of the ways to capture and distribute personnel knowledge.

These three categories of knowledge demonstrate that knowledge is a tangible and intangible resource, which is basic to the functioning of an organization. It processes and refines information for day to day running of an establishment.

Knowledge Management (KM) is a comprehensive range of activities by individuals, organizations, and, even, the society as a whole. It is used to identify, create, acquire, organize, share, utilize, update, and sustain its knowledge for performance and growth (Igberaese & Onyeaghalaji, 2009). Girgis (2004) defines KM as the methodology for capturing, optimizing, delivering, and maintaining the information that is of value to the organization. Suurla, Markkula and Mustajarv (n.d.) view KM as a process where knowledge, skills, expertise, communication, and collaboration are cared for, administered, and steered with skills and wisdom in a goal oriented fashion by using different techniques and technologies. In another equally interesting definition, KM can be defined as the ability of an organization to create, share, and use the collective knowledge of its products, processes, and people to increase workforce productively and reduce activities that 'reinvent the wheel' (Fontaine and Lesser, n.d.). Knowledge management, therefore, is the coordination of an organization's tangible and intangible resource.

## **NEED FOR KNOWLEDGE BASED GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA**

Knowledge Management is a core competence that is increasingly differentiating the successful enterprises in the globally competitive economy of the 21st century (Kalia, 2007). KM could be seen differently in the government and in the private sector. In contrast to private sector, where the bottom line is always profit, the government's ultimate directive is to better serve its citizens with speed, certainty, and efficiency. Many of the developed governments across the globe have taken a lead in the implementation of KM systems and are reaping the benefits. The following are the motivations for implementing KM in governments in Africa, which make it a strong business case for implementation.

- KM ensures that the right information is delivered to the right person at the right time in order to make the most appropriate decision.
- KM helps to understand how knowledge is created, utilized and shared within an organization and in synergy with other organizations.
- KM helps avoid unnecessary work duplications, expensive re-invention, and repeated mistakes.
- KM saves organizations from inevitable ‘knowledge walk-outs’.
- KM promotes intelligent collaboration, both within and outside the government.
- KM promotes the concept of learning organization, therefore, contributing to the personal growth of employees.

## **CHALLENGES OF KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

In the day to day operations of effectively and efficiently using and managing organizational knowledge, a lot of challenges are faced. The understanding of these challenges will help the government and organizations in the new knowledge to deliver more, with the same or less resources. Some of the challenges are as follows:

1. **Resistance to share information:** The age long government and organizational processes do not aid knowledge sharing. The resistance to share information that could be beneficial to people in the discharge of their duties is mainly influenced by organizational culture. One of the main reasons why employees are not motivated to share information is the non-availability of proper tools and systems to manage and share knowledge and information.
2. **Defining knowledge for different audiences:** Identifying and describing knowledge for different group of audiences for the benefit of the organization is a huge challenge for KM implementation teams. Conducting a needs assessment and knowledge audit will go a long way in helping to choose the right set of processes and tools.
3. **Lack of processes for the conversation of tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge:** There are no formal processes, like end of project interviews, focused documentation efforts, document storage and archival mechanism, etc., to convert immensely, valued, tacit knowledge into well-documented, explicit knowledge. If such formal processes are put in place by organizations, they will be of great value in the present and future.

4. **Security issues:** Security of information is a very important issue which must be treated with high-priority. Privacy of personnel knowledge, acquired through experience and intuition, is a major cultural issue in KM, which implementers must take into consideration.
5. **The problem of capturing data:** Capturing of structured and unstructured data is a complicated and difficult task since information resides in a variety of systems.
6. **Creation of repositories without addressing the strategy to manage content:** Creation of repositories is a significant step towards storage and retrieval of organizational knowledge. Installing these systems, without addressing the content management strategy, can be a huge risk and critical failure factor in KM.
7. **An emphasis on formal learning efforts as a mechanism for knowledge sharing:** Although the usefulness of formal training programs is not questioned here, it is suggested that the reliance on these formal methods of learning should be reduced and a culture of more informal learning should be fostered within the organization.
8. **Failure to analyze and map KM system to users' needs:** A commonly committed error is to design a KM system without analyzing the user's needs. A standard KM system will be the one which enhances the productivity of users without ignoring their day to day work schedule.
9. **Organization's inability to motivate employees by addressing their knowledge and learning needs:** Employees drive the growth of the organization through their intellectual capital. A KM solution should look into the issue of workforce planning whereby employees' knowledge and learning needs are addressed and they are motivated to perform their jobs.
10. **Failure to evade re-invention of the wheel:** Organizations and governments in Africa are plagued by re-invention of the wheel syndrome because of the tendency to neglect earlier officers and starting from scratch. Hence, one of the challenges of KM implementation is to take into cognizance the already existing practices of the organization and integrate all the major and minor KM initiatives already initiated within the organization.
11. **Selection of right tools and technologies:** To ensure efficient flow and distribution and knowledge, there is a need for KM implementers to scan the market, holistically, to make informed decisions. This is necessary step after the identification of the right people, processes, and proper definition of knowledge for different audiences.

## **CAPACITY BUILDING (CB)**

Capacity building (CB) simply means a process by which knowledge and skills are built, utilized, retained, and nurtured with a view to providing an entity with the ability to respond to a development challenge. It involves building up the ability of a country's human, scientific, technological, organizational, institutional and resource capabilities, and basic national organizations in areas such as health, basic education, the rural and agricultural sector, urbanization, nutrition, and so on (Peteremode, 2008). CB encircles the human, scientific, technological, organizational, institutional, and resource capabilities of a country. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 1992) defines CB as "the process by which individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, and countries develop their abilities, individually and collectively, to perform functions, solve problems, and achieve objectives." A fundamental goal of capacity building is to enhance the ability to evaluate and address the crucial questions related to policy choices and modes of implementation among development options. This is based on an understanding of environmental potentials, limits, and needs, as perceived by the people of the country concerned. As a result, the need to strengthen national capacities is shared by all the countries in Africa. Many international organizations, including the United Nations (UN) specialized agencies, have provided CB to member countries in Africa, in areas that these agencies are technically competent or qualified; for example, WHO for health, FAO for rural sector and agriculture, etc.

Technically speaking, CB is much more than training. It includes three interdependent procedures and processes: *human resource development*, *organizational development* and *institutional and legal framework development*. Human resource development is the process of equipping individuals with the understanding skills and access to information, knowledge, and training that enables them to perform effectively. Organizational development is the elaboration of management structures, processes, and procedures, not only within organizations, but also the management of relationships between the different organizations and sectors (public, private, and community). Institutional and legal framework development is the process of making legal and regulatory changes to enable organizations, institutions, and agencies, at all levels and in all sectors, to enhance their capacities. These processes are important means of achieving capacity building in organizations, social, or governmental institutions.

For organizations, capacity building may relate to almost any aspect of its work: improved management, leadership, mission and strategy, administration (including human resources, financial management, and



legal matters), program development and implementation, fundraising and income generation, diversity, partnerships and collaboration, evaluation, advocacy and policy change, marketing, positioning, planning, etc. For individuals, capacity building may relate to leadership development, advocacy skills, training or speaking abilities, technical skills, organizing skills, and other areas of personal and professional development (Linnell, 2003). Capacity building is the elements that give fluidity, flexibility, and functionality of a program or organization to adapt to changing needs of the population that is served.

A fundamental mechanism for capacity building is partnership development. Partnerships, for example, can grant NGOs, local governments, and communities access to:

- innovative and proven methodologies,
- knowledge and skills,
- networking and funding opportunities,
- options for organizational management and governance,
- replicable models for addressing community needs and managing resources, and
- strategies for advocacy, government relations, and public outreach.

One can then ask: who are the clients of CB? NGOs, local governments, and communities are the main clients of CB, but private commercial sectors and central government also need the support.

## **CHALLENGES OF CAPACITY BUILDING**

The issue of CB is critical and the scale of need is enormous, however, appreciation of the problem is low, which makes CB implementation face the following challenges:

- The desire for change, progress, and development is not as strong as a result of the lackadaisical attitude of parties concerned,
- Improper development and organization of teaching and/or training materials,
- Training institutions are not easily accessible due to poor communication,
- The connection between needs and supply is weak,
- Alternative ways of capacity building are not adequately recognized, and
- There is no reasonable funding.

## **CAPACITY BUILDING, KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND THE AFRICAN SITUATION**

A critical look at the contemporary African nations reveals the need for sustainable development. This is exemplified by the fact that the African continent is befogged by increasing the problems of abject poverty, unemployment, different levels of demeaning inequalities, poor infrastructure, lack of social amenities, inadequate policies, and lack of adequate knowledge management, just to mention a few.

A look into the African history shows that some good investments, according to Genevesi Ogiogio, were made by African governments and their development partners in the first two decades after independence, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Some of the visible investments consisted of functional and effective public services, reasonably stable macroeconomic policies, functional socio-economic infrastructures, high quality educational systems, and responsive and effective healthcare delivery systems. However, systematic deterioration in political governance and the scramble for public resources led to the trampling and destruction of societal values, cycle of struggle for power, lack of transparency and accountability in all aspects of governance, corruption and inefficiencies in resource management, coups, counter-coups, and violent conflicts. Furthermore, systematic destruction of capacity resulted. Such destruction of capacity is reflected by the destruction of facilities and physical infrastructure through wars and violent conflicts, neglect of socio-economic infrastructures, massive emigration of professionals to developed nations, enormous deterioration of the quality and standards of public services, such as health-care delivery systems, as well as educational infrastructures and products. Again, worsening economic conditions led to widespread introduction and implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) in the 1980s that considerably raised poverty levels and aided the neglect of capacity and heightened brain drain. Quality and standards fell precipitously at all levels of the educational system, in health-care delivery system, and in public service delivery. Other socio-economic infrastructure for delivery of developmental services collapsed (Ogiogio, 2005).

Since the 1990s, some of these disconcerting trends have begun to change. Improvements have started to occur. African governments and the donor communities have been making concerted efforts to address the continent's capacity constraints. The efforts led to the establishment of the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) in February 1991 and a number of other capacity building initiatives. Multilateral and bilateral donors' technical assistance and lending programs, in support of capacity building on the continent, have also grown tremendously. Technical assistance to the African continent comes close to about \$5.8 billion per year. Unfortunately, a sizeable share of the technical assistance

does not go into capacity building. It is poorly coordinated, duplicative, and creates institutions that undermine sustainable capacity building efforts (Ogiogio, 2005).

Given this creepy situation, there is a need for a generation of adequate machinery for capacity building and knowledge for sustainable economic and social development. Such need also necessitates a sort of home-grown economy, with people-centered development strategies that would incorporate removal of inequalities, extensive education of the masses, and distillation of information. Such home grown development strategies, we argue here, necessitates adequate creativity, knowledge management, and capacity building.

### **KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT, CAPACITY BUILDING, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

One central argument of this paper is that KM and CB are necessary for sustainable development in Africa. Adequate KM and CB would foster relative political and economic integration, substantial cultural and ethno-religious affinities, institutional integration, and management of ideas. It would promote in the leaders, patriotic values, and commitment and instigate in them the capability and adequacy to manage the contradictions and national question arising from the management of a diverse, complex, and multi-religious societies and tribal sentiments. Through the coordination, communication, and dissemination of information and knowledge, KM and CB would help to obviate authoritarianism and insensitivity in the society. And through the adoption of the principles of information management, which would be the primary method for making decisions in the society, the society would institute national cohesion and social order. In this sense, KM and CB would become a strategy for the provision of the right knowledge to the right people at the right time, which will then help people to share and utilize this knowledge so that organizational and societal performances can be improved.

Through the principles and processes of knowledge generation, knowledge storage, and knowledge utilization, KM and CB facilitates creation, access, and reuse of the knowledge. Such processes involve finding out what the people in the society know, where the knowledge resides in the various sectors or organization in the society, how to locate people with specific knowledge, expertise, and experience, and how to share and utilize the accumulated knowledge (Tripathy, Patra, & Pani, 2007).

For sustainable development, there is the need to employ KM and CB professionals who could develop, resolve, store, and share knowledge. KM and CB professionals should possess excellent communication skills and abilities to offer specialist skills such as expertise in electronic systems and resources or experience of planning and delivering training. They should have skills in persuasion and reasoned argument in a changing and complex organizational environment and interpersonal communication skills for transferring tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge. They should be able to encourage people to identify and share relevant ideas, knowledge, and information. It has to be noted that people hesitate to share their knowledge because of insecurity and fear of passing their tacit knowledge to colleagues because it could lose its importance (Tripathy, et al, 2007). Overcoming this fear and motivating for such people is the biggest challenge of KM and CB. The professionals should be able to handle through human-centered approach. Nevertheless, this implies that the professionals cannot do it alone, regardless of their level of expertise. And that being the case, there is the need to understand the knowledge needs of the society, organizations, and the people or the individuals, especially through the help of the people. In other words, there should be cooperation between the professionals and the people, which will translate into the cooperation between the leaders and the citizens, among different organizations, tribes, and so on. This would help to create, transform, share knowledge, and enable utilization of knowledge.

From the discourse, so far, it could be systematically stated that the establishment and institutionalization of KM and CB in Africa would help to create knowledge-based communities, facilitate effective and efficient cultural changes, enhance communication across all levels of the communities, and utilize the appropriate technologies. The creation of knowledge-based communities would make information available about the community to all stakeholders of that community in a common language for all to understand. Stakeholders are defined as those individuals, groups, and enterprises (public and private) with a vested interest in the well being of that community, as a whole. By facilitating an effective and efficient cultural change, KM and CB would implement information systems that integrate data from all community operational systems to support and facilitate management for all types of community changes. One of the difficult community changes to manage is the change to the community street infrastructure. Situations do arise where agencies are required to handle community projects, like digging up the streets when laying underground cables. Quite often their activities are not coordinated. The ability to coordinate these activities between agencies is an example of community change management that requires KM and CB.

Furthermore, the enhancement of communication across all levels of the communities is a concerted attempt to provide the public community with access to the community information services and knowledge. It is necessary to make the information easy to access and train people to access the information they want, when they want it, and for issues that are important to them. By enhancing such advanced communication network, KM and CB provides the opportunity for the community stakeholders to make input into the policy establishment process for the community. Communication is a two way street; put differently, it is bi-directional. Through communication, citizens have access to information and can also make some input to important decisions.

In a civilized community, KM and CB would require the Internet as a means to transport information to all members of the community. The establishment of such standard in Africa would allow various agencies and organizations to integrate and share their information. Information integration enhances the ability for these organizations and agencies in the society to communicate with each other. This process would inspire and generate timely access to the more accurate information.

Thus, through the creation of knowledge-based communities, facilitation of effective and efficient cultural change, enhancement of adequate communication across all levels of the communities, and utilization of the appropriate technologies, KM creates an enabling environment for sustainable human development. It would create communities that are interested in education and informed the citizens and families with zeal for human development. It would create a ruling society that has human-centered policies and citizens with ideals for human development.

## **OUR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

KM and CB are our common responsibility that would help to obviate the impediment of non-accessibility, generation, and utilization of relevant information and knowledge by the citizens. It will create room for social integration, freedom of expression, and knowledge utilization that guarantees accountability and congruent political culture that can enhance political, social, and economic development. It will create literate and informed citizens that would cooperate for adequate and sustainable development. Through KM and CB, we would have common concern and responsibility in

Africa to create viable working principles of generation, codification, dissemination, and utilization of knowledge for economic growth, political stability, and human well-being.

## CONCLUSION

KM and CB are powerful strategies for enhancing productivity as well as creating a sustainable competitive advantage for governments, organizations, agencies and people in the global society. If we seek a sustainable future, we can apply KM and CB, their tools, and principles to create a society that is information based and knowledge enabled. We can use these tools to focus on applying knowledge to solve community, national, and global problems. They can be used to create community, national, and global networks for a sustainable future. While KM and CB could be confronted with challenges in their application in the quest for sustainable development, it is left for the society in question to develop new forms for KM and CB that would take care of its home grown problems. Nevertheless, KM and CB act as an internal mechanism for national and sustainable development.

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