

## MAINTENANCE CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

OKORO, CHARLES KENECHUKWU

Department of Philosophy,  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

[charles.okoro@unn.edu.ng](mailto:charles.okoro@unn.edu.ng); [kenecharles@yahoo.com](mailto:kenecharles@yahoo.com)

+2347032712275

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OBIORA ANICHEBE (PhD)

Department of Philosophy,  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

[Obiora.anichebe@unn.edu.ng](mailto:Obiora.anichebe@unn.edu.ng)

+2348037509221

### ABSTRACT

*The observable slow-paced development in most contemporary African countries has been linked to a number of factors, including lack of sufficient sense of commitment on the part of many African leaders and undue influence of their erstwhile colonial masters. The persistent resurgence of some development challenges is indicative of a more fundamental militating factor, namely, lack of adequate sustenance of the developmental strides; hence, the frequent redefinition of goals, from the pursuit of millennium development goals to sustainable development goals. Against this backdrop, this paper identifies the poor management of the available human and natural resources, exemplified in the lack of maintenance culture, as a very critical factor militating against sustainable development in Africa. Using the Nigeran experience as a case-study, the paper basically aims at a critical assessment of the general attitude towards the management of public assets and facilities with a view to highlighting its impacts on sustainable development. It equally aims at outlining possible measures to promote maintenance culture as a great value in public service. The idea of maintenance culture, in the context of this discourse, borders on management and resource control and correlates with the factor of continuity in administrative policies and programmes. Save undermining Africa's socio-political progress, the lack of maintenance culture is causally linked to other factors militating against sustainable development in Africa. Hence, it is a call to re-orientation and the imperative of value-driven and progress-based policies and programmes.*

**Keywords: Maintenance Culture, Sustainable Development, Continuity, Re-orientation, Africa.**

### 1.0 Introduction

There is no gainsaying the fact that many African countries are comparatively more disadvantaged than most of their Western counterparts and so generally trail far behind them in terms of development. Undue influence of their erstwhile colonial masters, incompetent, uncommitted and insensitive leadership, unbridled pursuit of material wealth, indifference to common good, unnecessary duplication of projects, worthless administrative policies and

programmes, weak institutions incapable of check-mating the excesses of those in positions of authority, have been identified as possible factors militating against development in Africa. Interestingly, slow rate of development in Africa is hardly linked to lack of sufficient human and natural resources. Indeed, many African countries are richly endowed with natural resources. In the light of this observation this paper identifies a more fundamental factor militating against development in Africa, namely, poor management of available resources. The lack of maintenance culture is used as a theoretical framework for assessing the import of this apparent deficiency. As an invariable precipitate of lack of commitment to public service, the negative effects of lack of maintenance culture cut across virtually all social institutions in African countries, taking its toll on both private and public sectors. Hence, there is an urgent need for re-orientation and attitudinal change, development of more effective management strategies, and the employment result-oriented approaches to the management of the continent's rich human and natural resources.

This paper basically aims at highlighting the fact that the observable setbacks in Africa is causally linked to the lack of maintenance culture and its allied effects. Using the Nigerian situation as a case study, this paper identifies the lack of maintenance culture as a factor militating against sustainable development in Africa. While highlighting the indicators of this challenge, it recommends some strategic measures for proper resource management and the achievement of sustainable development. Proffering some plausible solutions to this problem and recommending more effective administrative strategies, the paper ultimately contends that the promotion of maintenance culture is tantamount to fostering the project of sustainable development in the continent.

## **2.0 Maintenance Culture: A Framework For Sustainable Development Initiatives**

The concept of maintenance culture obviously embraces a wide range of development initiatives. Celestine (1989) identifies it as one of the major forces that catalyze the growth of economic, social and technological advancement of any nation. Basically, however, this discourse on maintenance culture borders on the importance of taking adequate care of private and public properties, facilities, infrastructure as well as policies and programmes of government and private establishments. In other words, the discourse examines the concept of maintenance culture in the light of its implications for efficient and prudent management of public and private resources.

Sustainable development borders on the imperative of envisioning and objective assessment of the potential impacts of individual or government decisions, policies and programmes on the diverse but interconnected sectors of the human society, the environment, and the economy. Every meaningful decision-making process, therefore, envisages the implications of such decisions in a particular sector for other sectors. A harmonious blend of the developmental strides in these sectors would make for a more comprehensive and holistic approach to development.

The report, "Our common future", (1987) published in recognition of Harlem Brundtland's role as Chair of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) and anchored on the imperative of protecting the diversity of genes, species, and all terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in nature, presents sustainable development as development that satisfies

the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy theirs. Stressing on the need to protect the quality of the environment by the restoration, development, and maintenance of habitats that are essential to species, the report highlights the fact that sustainable management of human, natural, and economic resources would satisfy the essential needs of humanity in the very long term.

As a correlate of long-term plan and sustainable development initiatives, maintenance culture could be demonstrated in public and private sectors, families, companies, associations, NGOs, territorial authorities, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, public institutions, etc. In fact, sustainable development initiatives must accompany any worthwhile development plan. In contrast to short-term goals that often serve as immediate remedial measures that eventually fizzle out like a candle in the wind, sustainable development emphasizes long-term plans bolstered by a culture of maintenance. Hence, the achievement of sustainable development objectives is often a function of management strategies that have long-term benefits.

The observable poor maintenance culture in Nigeria largely undermines the sustainable development efforts in the country since it entails always starting afresh, more or less, in all sectors of the country's life. Little wonder, the difficulty experienced in the achievement of targeted development goals and the frequent changing of such goals. As a result, the country often lags behind in the achievement of the Millennium development goals and sustainable development goals.

In effect, the lack of maintenance, in the context of this discourse, is a theoretical framework or a conceptual scheme for assessing administrative and non-administrative acts that directly or indirectly affect sustainable development. Maintenance culture, therefore, plays a pivotal role in fostering economic efficiency especially given its tendency to forestall economic waste.

### **3.0 Maintenance Culture: A Multi-Sectoral Feature of Sustainable Development**

Maintenance culture is undoubtedly a multi-pronged feature and key factor of development as it has social, political and economic implications. Against the backdrop of its multi-sectorial implications for development, Sachs (2015) contends that ending extreme poverty is achievable if its implications for such sectors as education, health, food security, climate change, biodiversity, and ecosystem protection are appropriately taken into consideration. In politics and public administration, for instance, continuity in the implementation of policies and programmes largely squares with maintenance culture. With an understanding of government as a continuum, every new administration builds on the successes recorded by a previous one. This not only makes for continuity but culminates in the sustenance the development gains already made for the society. Surely, unnecessary initiation of new policies, duplication of agencies and parastatals, abandonment of on-going projects, and improper implementation of existing objective policies and programmes, undermine the achievement of set development goals and ultimately stifle socio-economic and political progress.

Also, from the economic standpoint one finds a loophole occasioned by lack of maintenance culture in thoughtless approach to need fulfilment. Sometimes the choice of projects is not

made on the basis of actual needs; a considerable number of projects embarked on are white elephant projects. Little wonder, they add little or no value to socio-economic development. To further expose their irrelevance and status as economic waste, these are repeated as frequently as new governments come into power. The dwindling or even total lack of maintenance culture in Nigeria is also causally linked to lack of commitment to the common good, poor sense of patriotism, and selfishness, deficient sense of national pride and values. Indeed, where the individual considers the national resources as mere booty that must be shared, the authentic African communal spirit is grossly stifled. Adeleye (2009) links this lack of disposition to care for public facilities to high deficiency in infrastructural development in Nigeria.

More still, an objective and comprehensive assessment of the potential and actual effects of development policies and programmes on the economy, the environment, and society is critical to the achievement of sustainable development. Sustainable development involves considering environmental, economic, and social objectives when developing and implementing public policies and programs. It also involves considering the needs of the present as well as the needs of future generations. On this stress, Blewitt (2015:1) insists that the idea of sustainable development envisages that the future should be a better, healthier place than the present and the past. It envisions the possibility of a safer, less fanatic and fairer planet. Thus, integrated decision making and a long-term approach to planning are defining characteristics of sustainable development and represent the key management challenges.

Good maintenance culture has implications for any nation's economy. Recurrent expenditure on particular projects occasions leakage in the nation's economy and stagnates socio-economic progress. Improper care for the available resources depletes the economy and occasions economic loss. For instance, substandard projects, either due to incompetence or poor supervision, could amount to double expenses. Neglected or poorly managed public facilities are bound to deteriorate; hence the need for their frequent replacement.

The achievement of sustainable development, therefore, requires sufficient foresight and the adoption of future-oriented attitudes towards management of presently available resources; it entails a critical review of the management approaches, paying attention especially to their long-term effects. In other words, it requires a scientific, an objective, and logical, assessment of the actual and potential effects of current policies and programmes. It also necessitates capacity building on the part of the managers of such resources and their possible successors. This invariably implies that, in addition to the emphasis on competence, continuity is of immense relevance to the sustenance of any development initiative.

#### **4.0 Recommendations: Possible Strategies for Fostering Maintenance Culture**

As already observed above, maintenance culture squares with ensuring continuity in government policies and programmes. Unarguably, a number of remarkable efforts at achieving socio-political progress have been made in Nigeria. Such noble courses not only became efforts in futility but culminated in huge economic waste. For instance, a number of national conferences have been organized in Nigeria, the resolutions at which were never implemented. In addition to having the capacity to address current development concerns, government policies and programmes, as critical foundations of development, must be future-oriented. The people or the electorate must, through every possible legal means, rise and

demand proper accountability and transparency from public office holders, who are their representatives in government. They must prevail on the government to ensure project sustainability as this plays a key role in development. Hence, government must ensure that its projects are value-driven, people-oriented, realistic and ultimately sustainable.

Similarly, practical measures must be put in place to ensure proper monitoring and supervision of the activities of public servants to forestall mismanagement of public assets, facilities, and resources. Smith's (2003) insistence on the imperative of having minimum maintenance requirements for government establishments is obviously in order. Indeed, engaging in regular maintenance of public utilities, facilities and infrastructure is a more economical alternative to their frequent replacement. Accordingly, sufficient fund must be made available for the maintenance of public facilities. For instance, The Federal Road Maintenance Agency in Nigeria (FERMA) and similar agencies must be properly funded and supervised. The deplorable state of Nigerian roads, which a CBN (2003) report links to economic loss in the country, attests to gross inefficiency of this agency. In Nigeria, allowances for the replacement of furniture, vehicles, buildings, office equipment, etc take heavy toll on the economy. It is highly recommended that periodic audit be performed on all government properties with a view to assessing their current condition and to ensure that their custodians take proper care of them. Proper inventory must also be taken at every moment of transition by public office holders to prevent looting. Perhaps, penalizing poor handling or mismanagement of public utilities may forestall misuse, instill discipline and invariably encourage more careful handling. In addition, there is need for adequate security to guard against vandalism.

The use of energy saving devices and recourse to renewable energy sources also constitute efficient management strategies. Without the slightest attempt to inconvenience the user this attitude reduces cost and ensures optimal utilization of energy. Very often one finds the details of effective management strategies on the manuals of modern gadgets and appliances. Careful study of the instructions on such manuals could enhance efficiency and management. Proactive actions as common as proper maintenance and frequent servicing of gadgets or appliances and effective energy management could prevent the negative impacts of unnecessary wastage on the family finances, as well as minimize their possible damaging effects on health and environment. In fact, the use of environment-friendly and energy-saving or low energy-consuming appliances, switching off appliances when they are not immediately in use could ultimately bear on the project of fostering sustainable development.

Lastly, quality service delivery must be ensured through proper supervision. Such government agencies as Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON), Consumer Protection Agency (CPA), National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), vested with the responsibility of ensuring that high standard is maintained with regard to products, goods and services, must rise up to their responsibilities and duly penalize defaulters.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

Effective maintenance practices enhance the progress and growth of the human society. Maintenance prolongs the life-span of facilities and maximizes its benefits and profits. Indeed,

proper management of human and natural resources is key to sustainable development. Sustainable development initiatives both in public and private sectors should take into consideration the possible impacts of particular decisions, policies and programmes in the diverse sectors of any human society given their long-lasting social, political, and economic consequences. While taking care of the present needs of the human society, policy decisions must have an eye on their future relevance. Education, health, political, economic and related decisions must have long-lasting effect on the quality of life, health care, social services, culture and indeed the general well-being of the people.

In essence, there is an urgent need for strategy review with regard to Africa's approach to development. Sustainable development in Africa can only be achieved through a review of leadership strategies and proper re-orientation aimed at fostering maintenance culture, investment in people-oriented projects, and implementation of value-driven policies and programmes. Indeed, it is only through effective management of their super-abundant, rich human and natural resources, that the African countries assert their authentic existence, achieve sustainable development, and make meaningful progress in the global competitive world.

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