



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 17 – PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Transcript of interview with Dr Ohio Omiunu, law lecturer and researcher, Leicester De Montfort Law School

I feel like sometimes developing countries feel like the United Nations and the SDGs are not their priority. They are trying to achieve development and they feel this might be stifling, or they feel it might even be a conspiracy to set them back. You know, “reduce CO2 emissions” – they’re like OK, if we do that, that’s going to effect our ability to grow and become more industrialised. So I think priorities... it’s not really a priority on the agenda.

What sounds logical in terms of what’s needed to effect change across all different regions of the world doesn’t really translate to tangible, understandable objectives in developing countries. I’ll give you an example: Nigeria.

In Nigeria, you’d see that the use of plastics – plastic bags in shops – is not something that people are socially conscious about as a problem that affects everyone. And sometimes multinational companies actually leverage on such gaps to continue to default and it frustrates all the efforts we are trying to make on a global scale to effect change.

Academic researchers, we can be very critical at times, and a number of us tend to get involved in policy-orientated research. Every researcher should be involved in research that makes a positive change – that changes lives, that changes the way we do things, improves processes. My research focuses on trying to test if what we are communicating in terms of the needs of the world in the 21st century moving forward, is happening on the ground in reality.

So in the context of developing countries, my research tries to test and measure impact of the laws, especially international treaties relating to investment, to see if those laws and policies make sense to people in developing countries, where most of them (the laws and policies) are meant to be effected.

A good example is international investment treaty practice, and so one research project I was involved in with colleagues at the University of Liverpool and a colleague in Turkey, we looked at three countries. We found that when we talk about international investment treaty practice, and how it's meant to effect good governance, when we spoke to Government officials in these countries, they didn't even have an awareness of international investment treaty practice and how it translates to their day to day jobs and their day to day lives. Or functions when they interact with international investors.

Now the problem with this is that, they don't see it as their problem, they don't see it as relevant to what they do in their day to day jobs and if that continues to be the case there will always remain a gap between the amazing policies and objectives and aspirations we have - and we hope law will be able to change this - and actually what happens on the ground. There's a total disconnect right now.

We are in second phase of our project and we're putting to collaborative team of researcher across different disciplines so law, sociology, technology and what we are trying to do is we are trying to say not only should we be criticising the fact that there is a gap, but could we bring alternatives that could help to make law more effective?

So for instance in relation to a country like Nigeria, I mentioned that IITP is not something that even registers on the minds of Government officials. That creates an avenue for us to be able to do retraining or more targeted training that helps to make these policies reality and in a way they can relate with them, and that way, change can occur. We know that change will not always occur immediately, it will take time so we are looking to take our research and use it as a way to drive policy change in those countries.