THE ROLE OF THE ACCOUNTING PROFESSION IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: FOCUS ON AUDIT FIRMS IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) influenced the change of business processes in Nigeria and the world at large. Professional accountants contribute greatly in creating this change as they are involved in the financial activities in different departments of organizations. The study examined the contributory role of the accounting profession to Sustainable Development Goals. Its focus is the audit firms in Plateau State of Nigeria. The study used primary source of data. The data is collected by using semi structured questionnaire. A cross-sectional survey was adopted to enable the researchers collect data at a single point in time. To test the hypotheses, multiple regression analysis was employed through SPSS Version 23 analysis. Among others the finding revealed that internal control evaluation has a positive and significant relationship with Sustainable Development Goals among audit firms in Plateau State. Based on this, the study recommended that key stakeholders in the promotion of Sustainable Development Goals should advocate for strong internal control evaluation by audit firms. Government should intensify effort towards promoting corporate governance in corporate organizations as this will enhance transparency and accountability, and perhaps lead to peace and Justice, which is one of the components of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: Sustainable development goals, Accounting profession, Audit firms, Plateau State

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Globally, the accounting profession plays a central role in today's challenging environment, be it national or international (Zammit, 2013). Generally, the accounting profession is considered a respected leader in the growth of strong and sustainable organizations, and in financial markets and economies. The role of the accountant is a continuously ever-changing one and it is faced with a number of challenges and opportunities shaped by forces such as globalization, changing demographics and significantly increased business complexity such as the widening use of derivative (ACCA, 2006). More so, accountants are partners in nation building and they play a significant role in the economic development of any country. They are the indispensable members who frame the economic policies of a country (Bandyopadhyay, 2016).

Moreover, the relevance of high-quality corporate reporting in ensuring financial stability and sustainable development in general and in particular the achievement of the SDGs was officially recognized during the 32nd session of UNCTAD's Intergovernmental Working Group of Experts on International Standards of Accounting and Reporting (ISAR). Accountants are highly involved in this process. They measure, evaluate, and disclose the progress of SDGs achieved by the company. Accountants act as guides and translators of the Triple Bottom Line ideas using the language of corporate sustainability. Baker (2012), from the World Business Forum for Sustainable Development, notes that "accountants are going to save the world". Accountants minimize information asymmetry and assess investment risks, they create integrated reporting and integrated audit, they provide and test standards of sustainability accounting, the involve in reporting and auditing within the new business model. With specific professional skills and involvement in governance, risk management, business analysis, decision support, due diligence, anticorruption activities, and corporate transparency, professional accountants today are reassessing their roles because of the SDGs and corporate sustainability.

Consequently, The United Nation's (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) nowadays are generally recognized guidelines of the Global Development until 2030. They were adopted at the UN summit in New York in 2015. 17 goals were specified in 169 varied indicators. SDGs call governments, businesses, and the public from all the countries to intensify effort to resist climate changes, poverty, inequality, environmental pollution and other challenges of our time. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the SDGs aim at more active involvement of the business community, its innovation, and investment potential overcome these challenges by including them in business priorities. In particular, the achievement of the SDGs requires the formation of a pool of resources, comparable with 1.5 – 4% of global GDP. It emphasizes the need to attract business to government initiatives on sustainable development (Makarenko &Plastun, 2017).

Additionally, business leaders see the SDGs as new opportunities to develop their activities: 89% of CEOs noticed that commitment to sustainable development has a real impact on their industries (United Nations, 2016) and 71% of businesses already plan to take the SDGs into account in their activities (PwC, 2015). 17 SDGs and 169 indicators form a continuous basis for companies to create, and report their strategies. This will improve the companies' communication with key stakeholders. It will increase their loyalty and transparency about the business environment and quality management as a framework for corporate sustainability in terms of growth of legal, reputational risk, volatility of financial markets, and access to finance (UN Resolution, 2015).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Accounting profession occupies a key-place in the concept of accountability and transparency in the public and private undertakings; and hence, this noble profession should play a vital role in the economic development of Nigeria. Furthermore, transparency and accountability have over the years been recognized as instruments for reducing corruption at all levels both in public and private sectors. Lack of transparency in the public and private sectors possess a major risk to the efficiency of long-term economic sustainability and achievement of sustainable development goals. Unfortunately, the issue of transparency is a fundamental problem in Nigeria due to the high rate of corruption experienced in virtually all sectors of the Nigerian Economy. Corporate governance is a phenomenon that has recently attracted local and foreign interests due to frequent occurrence of corporate failures experienced by various organizations in both developed and developing countries like Japan and Nigeria. Some contributory factors to corruption in Nigeria include sudden collapse of several large companies, notable fraud and incidents of insider trading, the practice of shopping at places where auditors can be bribed, and lack of accountability by companies run by dominant characters.

In Nigeria, the limited scope of MDGs and failure of the program to achieve its developmental objective led to development and implementation of SDGs in 2016. The SDGs has been widely accepted as laudable for its wide approach to global development and sustainability (Akinloye2018). Scholars like Nilsson & Costanza (2015) and Gurbo (2017) have accepted the SDGs project as laudable because it is more inclusive, universal and creates global partnership based on the joint responsibility and obligation of all partners. The U.N general assembly adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, accompanied by a list of sustainable development goals (17 goals and 169 targets) which all countries of the world are encouraged to achieve by 2030. Attempting to achieve the SDGs in Nigeria isn't just a show of governmental and societal goodwill, it's also a strategy increasingly made by proactive, sustainable organizations. Making SDGs alignment part of their strategies and business models can help companies generate new revenue, increase supply chain resilience, recruit and retain talent, spawn investor interest, and provide license to operate. Such business organizations want to achieve the same ends as any other company by driving revenue growth, creating value, and accelerating business expansion. This underscores the importance of seeking to examine the role of the accounting profession in sustainable development goals of audit firms in Plateau State.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the role of the accounting profession in contributing to sustainable development goal. The study is guided by the following specific objectives:

1) To examine the relationship between transparency and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State;
2) To examine the relationship between auditing and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State;
3) To examine the relationship between internal control evaluation and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State; and
4) To examine the relationship between corporate governance and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State.

1.3 Research Questions

1) What is the relationship between transparency and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State?

2) What is the relationship between auditing and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau state?

3) What is the relationship between internal control evaluation and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State?

4) What is the relationship between corporate governance and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau state?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Concept of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The term sustainable development has been widely discussed over the past 20 years (Bebbington & Thompson 2013). The concept was raised for the first time at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012. The objective was to produce set of universally applicable goals that will balance the three dimensions of sustainable development which are environmental, social, and economic. Among the earliest and often cited is that "the development meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs" (World commission on Environment & Development, 1987). Thus, sustainable development goal is any human activity that nourishes and perpetuates the historical fulfilment of the whole community of life on earth. Sustainable development, also referred to as sustainability or corporate social responsibility in the context of companies, is often considered as a concept that accounts for economic growth and development in a way that effect on the environment is taken into account in the process of economic growth. Sustainability, according to Merriam-Webster (1999), is "of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged".

The Sustainable Development Goals are also referred to as 'Transforming our world', the 2030 agenda for sustainable development or the global goals (UN 2015). Sustainability is about using resources in a responsible manner that does not deplete the source for future dependents; "To be sustainable is to avoid collapse" (Thiele, 2017). According to Elkington (1994), Sustainable Development Goals include three dimensions – Economic, Environmental and Social. Hence, sustainable development is a state when resources are used continuously and exploitation of nature does not cause irreversible destruction. The ambition is to hand over the world to future generations with safe natural capital, preserved social harmony, and good conditions for economic performance (Schaltegger, Bennet &Burrit, 2006).

Based on the importance of Sustainable Development Goals, the public, private, and non-governmental organizations have been directly involved in the attempt to coordinate efforts regarding the sustainability agenda (the U.N. General Assembly resolution in 2010, "United Nations Millennium Declaration - General Assembly Resolution). This process was consolidated in 2015 when the U.N. General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, accompanied by a list of Sustainable Development Goals (17 objectives and 169 targets) that all countries of the world are encouraged to achieve by 2030.

2.2 Transparency and SDGs among audit firms

Professional accountants use information and provide management with high-quality reporting horizons which is the basis of the sustainable development strategy. The concept of transparency refers to the timely, clear, and relevant public reporting on its status, mandate, strategy, activities, financial management operations, and performance. Broadly defined, transparency refers to the degree to which information flows freely within an organization, among managers and employees, and outward to stakeholders (Bennis & O'Toole 2009). Transparency is a condition of communication between the company and the co-interested groups. The principle of transparency also relates to the openness of a public sector entity to it constituents. Good governance involves the right disclosure of important information to stakeholders to enable them access relevant facts and information on the performance and operations of public sector (institute of internal Auditors, 2012).

Transparency is one of the key steps to corporate governance; and it ensures that management will not engage in improper or unlawful behavior since their conduct can be and will be scrutinized. To achieve transparency, a company should adopt accurate accounting methods, make full and prompt disclosure of company information, and make disclosure of conflict of interests of the directors or controlling shareholders, etc. A key element of 'good' governance is 'transparency', which incorporates a system of checks and balances among the board of directors, management, auditors, and other stakeholders. According to the principles of corporate governance of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, 2002, organizations should clarify and make publicly known the roles and responsibilities of board and management to provide stakeholders with a level of accountability.

Accountability ensures that managers utilize the company's resources in the most efficient and desirable manner as well as for the most appropriate goals without improper regard for personal interests. Building a culture of transparency is a fundamental first step to achieving trust. Open and honest communication supports the decision to trust. Lack of communication and transparency creates suspicion. Transparency happens only when an institution creates a culture of candor and respect where stakeholders feel free to say the truth about their companies' activities to the board and management. If the executives are willing to listen to opposing points of view and promise to consider the merits of the arguments, they create a ground for transparency. Therefore, we hypothesized as:

***H_1*: There is significant and positive relationship between transparency and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State.**

2.3 Auditing and SDGs among audit firms

Professional accountants ensure high quality reporting for stakeholders and also ensure the transparent communication of the delivery of sustainable value to stakeholders (IFAC 2011 & 2015). Accountability and auditing, especially in the public sector, as emphasized by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987), is necessary for achieving sustainable development. Therefore, a mechanism needed to ensure accountability in the public sector should be available, and audit could be used for that purpose (Toepfer, 2004). The audit conducted in the public and private sectors undoubtedly has been used as the main element to safeguard accountability in the country. However, the role of audit in the context of achieving SDGs can be refined as a study by Morin (2008) shows; that despite having important role in the public sector, its contribution is minimal. Therefore, it is not surprising that the weakness of accountability continues to prevent the achievement of sustainable development goals (Najam& Halle, 2010). If audit cannot properly function as a mechanism to safeguard accountability, then the role of audit in contributing to the achievement of sustainable development goal may be questioned especially in the context of developing countries (Liu, 2009). Thus, the potential role of audit became the motivation for this study to explore the relationship between audit and SDGs in a developing country like Nigeria. This vision of professional accountants' functional roles and their positions clearly correlates with corporate sustainable development. Therefore, we hypothesize as:

***H_2*: There is significant and positive relationship between auditing and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State.**

2.4 Internal control evaluation and SDGs among audit firms

Internal control is a process designed to provide reasonable assurance regarding the achievement of objectives in the following categories: effectiveness and efficiency of operation, reliability of financial reporting, and compliance with applicable laws and regulations. Professional accountants protect natural, social, industrial and financial capital of the company.

Internal control evaluation is also a process accomplished by an entity's board of directors, management, and other personnel, designed to provide reasonable assurance regarding the achievement of objectives relating to operations, reporting, and compliance. This definition reflects certain fundamental concepts. Internal control is geared to the achievement of objectives in one or more categories: operations, reporting, and compliance. A process consisting of ongoing tasks and activities, a means to an end, not an end in itself achieved by people not merely about policy and procedure manuals, systems, and forms, but about people and the actions they take at every level of an organization. Internal control provides reasonable assurance to an entity's senior management and board of directors adaptable to the entity structure, flexible in application for the entire entity or for a particular subsidiary, division, operating unit, or business process. Also, accountants ensure the protection of sustainable value creation strategic, operational and financial risk, and compliance with regulations, standards and good governance. According to Kenneth (2012) internal control evaluation enhances objectivity, independence and professional skepticism on the representation of financial statements of companies. We hypothesized as:

***H_3*: There is significant and positive relationship between internal control evaluation and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State.**

2.5 Corporate governance and SDGs among audit firms

Professional accountants play the leading role in developing and implementing strategies, policies, plans, structures, and activities of the management and set a course to create sustainable development values: taking leadership roles in the design and implementation of strategies, policies, plans, structures, and governance measures that set the course for delivering sustainable value creation. The accounting profession continues to play an important role in corporate governance culture, having responsibilities towards public interest and towards a balance and sustainable economic development. Professional accountants should understand their role in ensuring that corporate governance is effective and efficient. The account expert or the professional account is also the basis for best practices in the context of proper corporate governance within a company, as the accounting profession has to take responsibility for promoting good practices in corporate governance (Iorgulescu&Marcu, 2015; Ionescu, 2015).

Anameje (2007) asserts that corporate governance is a system that ensures that directors and managers of enterprises execute their functions within a framework of accountability and transparency to promote investors'confidence in business enterprises, and stimulate as well as sustain growth of the economy. This explains why corporate governance has, in recent times, assumed global significance as a crucial tool for sustainable corporate performance. Corruption is almost becoming a way of life in Nigeria and it has reached a stage that it is becoming difficult to know who to trust and how to identify those with questionable character. The increasing collapse of businesses and the underpinning incidences of fraud which occur in Nigeria and around the world have raised doubts about the credibility of the financial practice of quoted company's. Corporate governance has been seen at the forefront of establishing standards of corporate ethics to reduce unscrupulous corporate practices while preserving a fair business environment. Corporate governance makes the quality of financial accounting information that the country uses at a certain point in time important. Corporate governance is also increasingly being considered as an important part of enterprise risk management (Adeyemi&Fagbemi, 2010). Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H_4: **There is significant and positive relationship between corporate governance and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State.**

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Institutional theory propounded by DiMaggio & Powell 1983, Scott (2008). The theory suggests that adherence to professional code of practice by members of a profession brings about similarities in behavior and practice by members of such a profession. The profounder of this theory also affirm that organizations engage in voluntary disclosure to avoid sanctions from regulatory agencies, cub environmental uncertainty, and gain normative support. Specifically, DiMaggio and Powel identified three sources of similarities (Isomorphism). These are coercive, normative and mimetic isomorphism. They say that normative isomorphism is associated with professional training by professional bodies such as the accountancy bodies; coercive isomorphism relates to rule setting either by government or management of an organization; while mimetic isomorphism is related to market competing, benchmarking and adaptive strategies when coping with uncertainty. In this study, the isomorphic influence that is most relevant is the normative mechanism. The accountancy profession lays emphasis on such values as integrity, professionalism, transparency and accountability. The profession tries to inculcate such values in its members through continuous professional education (MCPE). This is the case with the two accountancy bodies in Nigeria where the profession insists that members must earn a certain minimum credit through MCPE. The continuous knowledge update among professional accountants enhance their reporting skills that help in achieving the SDGs.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted survey design that is cross-sectional in nature to explain the role of the Accounting profession in contributing to Sustainable Development Goals. The population of this study comprises of 54 audit firms in Plateau State, (ananweb.org.ng>firms & ICAN Jos district). For the purpose of this study, the total population of 54 audit firms in Plateau State was adopted because the population is small. This is in line with the work of Popoola (2011) who pointed out that a researcher may study the entire population when the size of the population is small and when the resources (human, money and materials) available for the study are adequate. Sampling technique was not employed in this study because the researcher adopted the entire population. The audit firms' practitioners are professional accountants who are in the right position to provide relevant responses.

In order to collect data, questionnaires were issued to staff of the audit firms under study; and the information provided was considered relevant to this study. Primary source of data was chosen because it provides firsthand information and because it is used in gathering data for specific purposes and to solve specific problems. The questionnaire comprised of six-point scale questions. Stangor (2010) contends that scales consist of a series of items that indicate agreement or disagreement with the issue to be measured, each with a set of responses on which the respondents indicate their opinions. The questionnaire was made in sections. The first section sought to collect respondent's demographic data. The second section addressed questions regarding sustainable development goals and the accounting profession. The questionnaire was tested through a small sample of respondents to ensure its validity and reliability for achieving the study objectives. An alpha coefficient of reliability, also known as Cronbach's Alpha, was used to examine its reliability. Its calculation was based on the number of items and the average inter-item correlation, ranging from 0 for a completely unreliable test to 1 for a completely reliable test. Most scholars recommend a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.7 or higher (Leech, Barrett & Morgan, 2005). At the end, the data collected was used for significant discussions and to draw conclusions for this study.

3.1 Method of data analysis

The main purpose of this study was to analyse the role of accounting profession in contributing to sustainable development goal. From the study, the quantitative data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), software version 23. SPSS was also used to carry out descriptive hypothesis testing and multiple regressions analysis. After recovering the questionnaires from the respondents, they were sorted, serialized and entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 software. This process demands cautious attention as any mistake considerably affects the final statistical results. Editing this data adopts consistent checks and treatment of outliers and missing responses, normally done through SPSS. The data cleaning exercise was also carried out in order to establish the distribution of data to assess whether the assumptions of parametric data was tenable. Precise assumptions tested include normal distribution of the data, homogeneity of variance, the linearity of the data, and multi-collinearity as recommended by Field (2005).

4.0 RESULTS

This chapter discusses the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data. The data was gathered in the course of this research work through administered questionnaire. A total of fifty-four copies (54) of the questionnaire were administered to audit firm practitioners. Out of the 54 administered, only fifty- two (52) were completed and returned for analysis. This accounted for response rate of 96%. The analysis was carried out using the descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The respondents for the study were audit firms practitioners. The following table below illustrates the response categories of the practitioners in Plateau State-Nigeria.

Table 1: Respondents' Profile

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	34	65.4
Female	18	34.6
Total	52	100
Years of service		
1-5 years	11	21.2
6-10 years	17	32.7
11-15 years	10	19.2
16 & above	14	29.9
Total	52	100

Members of professional bodies		
Yes	49	94.2
No	3	5.8
Total	52	100
Professional bodies		
ICAN	30	57.7
ANAN	16	30.8
ACCA	3	5.8
OTHERS	3	5.8
Total	52	100
Educational Qualification		
Degree	21	40
Masters	23	44.4
PhD	8	15.4
Total	52	100
Professional training		
Accountants	51	98.1
Lawyers	1	1.9
Total	52	100
Marital status		
Single	15	28.8
Married	33	63.5
Widow	2	3.8
Widower	2	3.8
Total	52	100

Source: Field survey, 2018

Table 1 shows that the data collected is a representation of views of both men and women. The men were more and accounted 65.4% while the women accounted for 34.6%. This means that the practitioners in audit firms in Plateau State where the research questionnaires were administered are more of men. Furthermore, the table shows that the years of practice between 6-10 constituted 32.7%. This indicates that most of our respondents have been practicing for six to ten years. Similarly, the table above shows that 94.2% of our respondents which form the majority were members of professional bodies. This means that the respondents were right for the research. In addition, the table shows that most of our respondents were from ICAN firms (57.7%). Besides, 30.8% of the respondents indicated that they were practitioners with ANAN firms. Also, the table shows respondents with highest educational qualification where those with master's degree were 44.4% while those with first degree were 40.4%. This implies that the target respondents were knowledgeable enough to understand the questionnaire before responding to the questions, which accounts for a good response rate. Subsequently, in this table, the respondents' professional training reveals that 98.1% were Accountants while 1.9% were Lawyers. This implies that most of our respondents were professionally trained and had acquired the requisite knowledge to answer the questionnaires. Accordingly, the table shows that all categories of marital status were represented, with married respondents being the majority (63.5%). This suggests that a good number of those in practice were married people.

4.2 Correlation

Table 2: Correlation Results

	1	2	3	4	5
Transparency 1	1				
Auditing 2	.669**	1			
Internal control 3	.410**	.505**	1		
Corporate Governance 4	.523**	.430**	.252	1	
Sustainable Development 5	.345*	.487**	.645**	.246	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 reveals that transparency significantly correlates with Sustainable Development Goals ($r =.345$, $P\leq0.05$), auditing and sustainable development ($r = .487$, $P \leq 0.01$) are significantly correlated, internal control and sustainable development ($r = .645$, $P \leq 0.01$) are significantly correlated, while corporate governance and sustainable development ($r = .246$, $P \leq 0.01$) are not significantly correlated.

4.3 Regression

Table 3: Regression Results

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
1	.345[a]	.119	.102	.45298	.119	6.766	1	50	.012	
2	.488[b]	.238	.207	.42561	.119	7.637	1	49	.008	
3	.672[c]	.452	.418	.36462	.214	18.762	1	48	.000	
4	.673[d]	.453	.407	.36817	.001	.080	1	47	.778	1.913

The above table shows the model summary of the data analysis. The value of the R-Squared in a multiple regression model is the proportion of the total sample variation in the dependent variable which is explained by the independent variable. The closer the R^2 is to 1 or 100% the better the goodness of fit. The R^2 lies between zero and one because the sum of square error cannot be greater than the sum of square total. A value of R^2 that is nearly equal to zero indicates a poor fit of the OLS line. The coefficient of determination $r^2=0.453$ shows a 45.3% contribution of Transparency, Auditing, Internal Control evaluation and Corporate Governance in Predicting or explaining the dependent variable Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, based on the multiple regression result using SPSS Version 23, the model specifies for the data fits the data ($R^2 = 0.453$).

The findings of the study's first hypothesis states that there is significant relationship between transparency and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State. After running the analysis, the result indicates that Transparency and SDGs are not related and not significant (β=.052, P>0.05), therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between Transparency and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State is accepted. This means that variation in Transparency does not bring about any significant variation in SDGs. Hence, Transparency does not contribute significantly to SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State, Nigeria.

The second hypothesis states that there is a significant relationship between auditing and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State. After the analysis, the result indicates that auditing and SDGs are positively related but not significant (β=.234, P>0.05), therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between auditing and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State is accepted. Therefore, change in auditing does not bring about any significant change in SDGs. Hence, auditing does not contribute significantly to SDGs of audit firms in Plateau State, Nigeria.

The third hypothesis stated that there is a significant relationship between internal control evaluation and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State. As shown in the regression equation above, (β=.539, P<0.05) therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between internal control and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State is rejected. Meaning the change in internal control brings about significant change in SDGs. Hence, internal control contributes significantly to SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State, Nigeria.

Lastly, the fourth hypothesis states that there is significant relationship between corporate governance and peace & Justice among audit firms in Plateau State. As shown in the regression result above, (β=.0.036, P>0.05) there is no relationship between corporate governance and SDGs; therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between corporate governance and SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State is accepted. This means that variation in corporate governance does not bring about any significant variation in SDGs. Therefore, corporate governance does not contribute significantly to SDGs of audit firms in Plateau State, Nigeria.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The regression results of the study variables are identified as factors responsible for the growth of SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State, Nigeria. The predictor variable, transparency, has no significant relationship with Sustainable Development Goals among audit firms in Plateau State. This result indicates that audit firm's transparency in reporting duties does not necessarily lead to Sustainable Development Goals. The coefficient of transparency which is .052 shows that transparency leads to 5.2% of SDGs among audit firms in Plateau state, Nigeria but does not translate into a relationship.

Consequently, the regression result of the study variable auditing that have been identified as one of the factor responsible for SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State, Nigeria has no significant relationship with financial management (SDGs) of audit firms in Plateau State. The coefficient of auditing which is 0.234 confirms that auditing leads to 23.4% of SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State, Nigeria. This result specifies that auditing does not result significantly in SDGs.

Furthermore, the regression result of the predictor variable internal control evaluation that have been identified as factor responsible for SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State, Nigeria has a positive and significant influence on SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State. This result specifies that good internal control evaluation of audit firms will lead to SDGs. The coefficient of internal control which is 0.539 and 0.000 is a confirmation that auditing leads to 53.9% of SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State, Nigeria; thus there is a positive relationship.

Lastly, the predictor variable: corporate governance has no positive and significant influence on SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State. The coefficient of corporate governance which is .036 shows that corporate governance leads to 3.6% of Sustainable Development Goals achievement. This result specifies that a firm's corporate governance does not contribute significantly to Sustainable Development Goals among audit firms in Plateau State.

From the result of the four hypotheses tested using the regression and p-value, hypothesis one found that transparency which is one of the roles of the accounting profession has no significant relationship with Sustainable Development Goals among audit firms in Plateau State. IFAC (2011 & 2015) notes that professional accountancy ensures high quality reporting for stakeholders and also ensures transparent communication of the delivery of sustainable value to their stakeholders.

Hypothesis 2 findings show that auditing, which is also a major role of the accounting profession, has no significant relationship with SDGs among audit firms in Plateau state. This is in line with the work of Milne & Gray (2013) which notes that accounting firm's conceptualization of sustainability has been narrowed down towards corporate interest and not necessarily towards sustainable development goal.

Hypothesis three findings show that internal control evaluation is a strong factor responsible for strong institution among audit firms in Plateau State. Internal control among audit firms contributes to Sustainable Development Goals. This is evident in the work of Baker (2012) which shows that accountants are going to save the world; they create integrated audit, corporate transparency, reporting and auditing with new business model. Also, IFAC (2011 & 2015), professional accountants take leading role in design and implementation of strategies, policies, structures, and governance measure that set the course of delivering sustainable value creation. Bandyopadhyay (2016) also discovered that accountants and other finance professional are partners to nation building and they play a significant role in the economic development of the country. This internal control measures promote SDGs among audit firms in Plateau state and Nigeria at large.

Hypothesis four found that corporate governance as a role of accounting profession has no significant relationship with SDGs among audit firms in Plateau State. This is evident in the work of Bebbington & Larrinaga (2014) who outlined reasons for lack of progress in social and environmental accounting while achieving Sustainable Development Goals. They argued that SDGs is not a scientific concept but a contested term in an essentially political discourse about human activities and behavior. They undertake area of accounting investigation using full cost which is connected to sustainable development goals concerns (namely the description of externalities).

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

Sustainable Developments Goals acts as global guide line for obtaining sustainable development in Nigeria. Professional organizations such as the accounting profession provide different approaches to Sustainable Development Goals and a holistic vision to the accounting profession in the new economy. The major objective of this study is to evaluate the role of accounting profession in contributing to Sustainable Development Goals. The findings of the result show the major role of the accounting profession in contributing to Sustainable Development Goals using the audit firms in Plateau state. Transparency, as a role of the accounting profession, does not contribute significantly to Sustainable Development Goals among audit firms in Plateau state. Auditing as a role of the accounting profession has no significant relationship with Sustainable Development Goals among audit firms in Plateau state. Internal control evaluation as a role of the accounting profession contributes significantly to Sustainable Development Goals among audit firms in Plateau State, Nigeria. Corporate governance as a role of the accounting profession has no significant relationship with Sustainable Development Goals among audit firms in Plateau State, Nigeria.

This study identified the main role of the accounting profession in contributing to Sustainable Development Goals. Its objectives include the following: to evaluate the relationship between transparency and SDGs, to examine the relationship between auditing and SDGs, to examine the relationship between internal control evaluation and SDGs, and to determine the relationship between corporate governance and SDGs among audit firms operating in Plateau state, Nigeria. We can conclude from the result of findings that internal control as a role of accounting profession plays a major role in contributing to Sustainable Development Goals while transparency, auditing and corporate governance does not contribute significantly to Sustainable Development Goals among audit firms in Plateau State.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the accounting profession needs to consider formulating some formal reporting standard that can assess and support the implementation of SDG 16 which relates in part to transparent, efficient, and accountable institutions. This can also serve to articulate the expectations of corporations in this regard. Similarly, accounting firms should be role model of transparency and accountability in their own operations including auditing and reporting. Thus, mandatory legislation should be enacted concerning transparency and Sustainable Development Goals. Accountants and other finance practitioners are partners in nation building, so audit firms should undertake performance audit that examine the economy, internal control, efficiency, and effectiveness of key government programs that contribute to specific aspects of SDGs.

Furthermore, accounting professional bodies and standard setters should be included in the design and implementation of strategy, policies, and government measures so that they can set the course for corporate governance and achieve Sustainable Development Goals. Guidelines can also be prepared to influence the reporting by accounting firms which may also assist users in determining what information is reasonably expected. This may be based on the global reporting initiative.

6.3 Implications

The government should also be model of transparency and accountability in their own operations including auditing and reporting.

Second, government should introduce modified teaching and education programmes for professional accountants responsible for decisions relating to auditing and information disclosures on SDGs, both by professional bodies and higher education institutions. This should be preceded by surveys of the entities and the stakeholders alike. This would help to equip the accountants with the skills and expertise needed for Sustainable Development Goals reporting.

Furthermore, government should intensify promotion of internal control and corporate governance in audit firms. This should be given more attention as it can lead to peace and justice which is a component of Sustainable Development Goals.

6.4 Limitation of the study

The study employed a cross sectional survey, thereby posing limitations of changes in perception over time. Perhaps, a longitudinal study is desired. Data used in this research were collected only from audit firms in, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria in 2018.

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