

INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

Edited by
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and

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With a Preface by
NORMAN UPHOFF

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6 Community development associations and self-reliance: The case of Isalu Community Development Union, Iseyin, Nigeria

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Introduction

INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS ARE grassroots associations built on the principles of co-operation and organized group work. These purely traditional organizations, which include community development associations or unions, have existed for many centuries in different forms, especially among peasant societies, and have been responsible for much of the socio-economic and physical development of their respective communities.

Warren (1992: 5) observes that indigenous organizations and associations play very vital roles in community-level efforts to identify and prioritize their problems and seek solutions. In the past few years, considerable work has been done by various scholars around the world on the invaluable roles being played by these indigenous organizations (IOs) in the development process (Warren *et al.* 1989; Warren, 1991, 1992; Warren *et al.* 1995; Adejumbi, 1991). Many of the studies confirmed the important self-reliant development functions being carried out by the IOs in their various communities for many generations.

In most developing countries, citizens, especially those in the urban areas, look to their governments to provide for their needs. In the last two decades, however, governments, especially in Africa, have found it extremely difficult to meet people's socio-economic and welfare needs. The hallmarks of the crisis in Africa are its dwindling resources, growing external debts, declining economic performance reflecting very poor earnings, environmental degradation, insufficient food production and political instability. These and other factors have forced governments to explore the contributions community-based organizations can make towards self-reliant development.

Narrowing public-sector activities and commitments and the increased capacity of the private sector to engage in socio-economic activities have reinforced this dramatic shift to community-based organizations as providers for the needs of their communities. Development planners and policymakers have also realized that it is cost-effective to work with and through indigenous organizations on any development programme. The scope of development has also expanded to include what Brown and Korten (1989: 6) called a process by which members of a society develop themselves and their institutions in ways that enhance their ability to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life.

Every community in Nigeria has always had a variety of indigenous organizations and associations which play important roles. Fortunately, all three levels of government in Nigeria have recognized the need for concerted community self-help efforts in order to realize the needs and aspirations of all Nigerians. Governments now appeal to and encourage communities to organize themselves

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into Community Development Councils (CDCs) in order to achieve self-reliance and self-sustaining development. Community development was incorporated into development planning in Nigeria in the 1975–80 Third National Development Plan as a means of promoting meaningful physical developments in villages and towns.

There are 315 indigenous organizations in Iseyin, the activities of which reach into the social, political, occupational, cultural and religious spheres of life. Some of them are gender-specific associations. Unfortunately, the existence and activities of most of them are not known to people in larger communities. Isalu Community Development Union (ICDU) is one such community-based voluntary association in Iseyin which has successfully undertaken several developmental projects for the benefit of its members within the town and in the hinterland but whose activities are not known to some sections of the town and almost certainly not to outsiders. The task of this chapter is to expose the 'magic of success' of the ICDU by providing a documentary of its establishment and activities in all their ramifications. ICDU is an indigenous organization which evolved from the indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and is the underlying secret of its success.

Aim and objectives

This chapter examines the past and present activities, potential and capacity of the ICDU to undertake self-initiated and self-financed community projects towards achieving self-sufficiency and self-reliance. The objectives are:

- to disseminate information about the functions, characteristics and organizational structure of ICDU;
- to appraise the process of decision-making, project selection and execution;
- to examine sources of money and mode of spending;
- to highlight its achievements and constraints/weaknesses;
- to identify means of strengthening the capacity of ICDU for self-reliance and to enable it to contribute further to the socio-economic and physical development of Isalu, in particular, and Iseyin town, in general.

Methodology

The methodology used in this chapter is what Goode and Hatt (1952) termed the 'in situ participant' approach. The author has been an active member of ICDU since 1964 and has been involved in every activity. Minutes of meetings, correspondences, project files and other relevant documents were consulted. Discussions with past and current officers of the union especially Mr Onatunji and Chief Siji Oke (the current chairperson) enhanced the accuracy of the information contained in the chapter.

Conceptual framework

In discussing the concept of community development association it is considered necessary to look at the underlying concepts.

The term 'community' has been defined by different authors from varied perspectives (Akorede, 1986; Abiodun and Aguda, 1986; Nottridge, 1972; Omuta, 1986; Kolajo, 1960; Abram, 1971; Wey, 1988). While some see community as people who have a common interest (Webster's *Dictionary*) or

a specified geographical entity that can be identified in space, such as a town, others see it as houses and people located in a given area.

The concept of community has been further defined in terms of the more common trait of members having a sense of identity and developing common interests, experiences and roots, which help them to recognize and outline the attributes of their environments as resources, as well as a social wholeness in which each member has a stake and in which life is regulated by co-operation rather than by competition and conflict (Kolajo, 1960; Abram, 1971).

The concept of development is a complicated one having technical, socio-cultural and emotional connotations and one which can be defined from spatial and environmental points of view. Fisher (1984), De Blij (1993) and Friedmann (1981) have all written on the subject. Development is a term used to describe the process of overcoming poverty and diseases as well as the provision of infrastructural facilities such as bridges, hospitals, schools, electricity and water in areas where these are lacking (Olayiwola, 1990).

Development in relation to community development involves the stimulation of self-help and citizens' active participation in community affairs (Ekong, 1988). It implies improvement in the quality of life of a given people (Elaigwu, 1988).

Community development (CD) is the physical transformation of backward habitats in stages represented by the symbolic presence of such structures as modern buildings or town halls, schools, hospitals, roads and bridges, pipe-borne water and electricity (Takaya, 1988). The XIth International Conference of Social Work held in Rio de Janeiro gave a definition which fits appropriately to the objective of this chapter. It defined CD as 'a conscious and deliberate effort aimed at helping communities recognize their needs and to assume increasing responsibilities for solving their problems thereby increasing their capacities to participate fully in the life of the nation' (Ekong, 1988: 368).

Community Development Association (CDA)

Hicks and Gullett (1982) observed that an organization is formed by the coming together of individuals trying to achieve their personal objectives. In this way, the survival instinct of an individual, as Adedokun (1993) puts it, becomes a collective survival instinct. An association is simply a special-purpose group (Broom and Selznick, 1973: 206). Following from the above definition, a community development association can be defined as a voluntary association or interest group made up of people with mutual interests, common purposes, traits and peculiarities, coming together with the sole aim of collectively tackling a common problem or meeting a need (which is often socio-economic) while still retaining a degree of self-independence.

The main objective of most community-based organizations is the social and economic development of their various communities. Through their untiring efforts, such grassroot associations have undertaken communal construction of roads and bridges, police stations (e.g. Oje Owode via Saki), schools and banks (e.g. Ara Community Bank, Ara Community Day-care Centre and the community library), markets, health centres, post offices, town halls, mosques, churches, dams, and palaces (Warren, 1992; Agbola, 1988; Olowu *et al.*, 1991; CASSAD, 1992; Togunde, 1994). Other achievements are the granting of soft loans and other financial assistance to members as with the Weavers' Association in Iseyin

(Wolff and Wahab, 1995). Women's associations have been equally effective not only in the dissemination of information on family planning, immunization, and Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT), but also in the establishment of agro-based industries. The Ara Women's Co-operative Society established a palm-oil and food processing industry in Ara Town (Warren, 1992; Adedokun, 1993).

Self-reliance is the expression of human faith in people's own abilities (Nweze, 1988: 4). It is a conception of development in which peoples of a given society are mobilized to transform their physical, technological, political, administrative, economic and social environments for their own well-being (Nwosu and Nwankwo, 1988: 64).

The Isalu Community Development Union

Iseyin, the headquarters of the Iseyin Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria, is located 96 kilometres north of Ibadan and 43 kilometres north-west of Oyo town. Iseyin is widely reputed for the weaving of narrow-strip cloth. A great number of its citizens are employed in this craft. They produce very fine quality native cloth, *Aso Oke*, hence the popular saying, 'Iseyin—the home of *Aso Oke*'.

There are hundreds of indigenous associations in Iseyin, each with its own name, constitution and times of meeting, modes of operation, management styles and level of achievement. There is, however, one basic objective that is common to all of them which is to enhance the socio-economic status and living standards of individual members to enable them in turn to contribute positively to the physical and socio-economic growth and development of Iseyin.

Iseyin is made up of eight wards. Of all the wards, Isalu ward has an enviable record of social and physical development through collective self-help efforts. Since the 1940s members of the Isalu community have been living and working together as a team with the motto 'Strength in Unity'. Every indigenous member of the community belongs to the ICDU automatically.

In pursuance of the latest efforts of the Nigerian government to encourage the formation and proper functioning of Community Development Associations (CDAs), the Oyo State Government launched the Oyo State Chapter of the Community Development Council (CDC) in early 1989 at Ibadan. The Iseyin local government version of the CDC is the CDC Committee which is supposed to oversee the affairs of all CDAs within the local government area. At the time of writing there are 301 registered CDAs within the local government, eight of which are in Isalu. The ICDU is larger in scope and greater in membership, functions and activities than any of the present CDAs. An appraisal of the activities of the other CDAs is the subject of another chapter.

Founding of the ICDU

Isalu Community Development Union is a very dynamic, progressive and well organized indigenous association. It evolved over the years because of the realization of its members that development would not happen if they relied on government to provide the essential services needed in the community. Of the eight wards in Iseyin, it is in Isalu that the government developmental effort is least felt.

In the early 1940s the elders of Isalu community came together to establish a society called 'Majeobaje Society, Isalu'. Every adult in Isalu, irrespective of religious faith, political leaning and socio-economic status, was a member of the society. Although the majority of the members were illiterate, they were people

who knew much about every aspect of life in the community and the town as a whole. The chairperson of the society was the late Mustafa Dogo who ran the affairs of the society for almost 20 years. One reason for this was the fact that the society was a non-political organization set up mainly to promote the physical and economic development of Isalu. There was no cut-throat competition for a position in the society and, in any case, holding an office called for considerable dedication and sacrifice.

Members of the Majeobaje Society met regularly at the Catholic Mission in Bode Isalu and contributed a small amount each. At such meetings various issues were discussed, but the focus was always on the inadequate socio-physical infrastructure in the community.

The Majeobaje Society has the credit for initiating and opening up the 38km (24 miles) Isalu-Ikere road in the early 1940s. This is the road that leads from Bode Isalu to the site of the Ikere Gorge Dam (presently under construction). This road links together the villages where the people of Isalu have their farmlands: Elebiiri, Igboro, Alayin, Olobo, Agbede, Abugaga, Onitoto, Elekuku, Eleera, Onisaho, Ikodu, and Balelayo among others.

In 1954, the Majeobaje Society was granted permission by the Western Regional Development Board based in Ibadan to undertake the construction of a 4.4km road through the board's Upper Ogun Livestock Estate to Alayin village from where a link road was later constructed by the society to Ipapo town. Furthermore, in March 1955, the society commissioned the Owode market built in Ikere where buying and selling of farm products took place.

It is unfortunate that most of the developmental activities of the Majeobaje Society were not publicized. In 1961, the educated members of the Isalu community came together and launched the Isalu Literates' Union (ILU). The union's objectives were to bring into the limelight the laudable programmes and activities of the Majeobaje Society, to promote the educational advancement of members, to educate members of the community on the importance of self-help community projects, and to promote social interaction between members and other people in the town.

For many years the ILU functioned independently of the Majeobaje Society while complementing its activities. A point was reached, however, when the separate existence of the two associations was viewed as unhealthy. In order to remove this notion, and, more importantly, to ensure the participation of all citizens in community activities, the ILU was changed to the Isalu Progressive Union (IPU) in December, 1982. The nomenclature of the association was changed again in 1990 to the Isalu Community Development Union (ICDU) with the motto: 'Progress in Togetherness'. The new name was adopted to emphasize the community development orientation of the union.

Aims and objectives of ICDU

The ICDU is the only recognized body that brings together every citizen of Isalu and the one through which the common goal and aspirations of the ward could be achieved. The objectives of the ICDU as contained in its constitution are the same objectives stated earlier for the ILU. One difference is that the ICDU has an unlimited scope. Religion and politics are perhaps the only two areas that the union does not concern itself with, though it tackles such political problems as asking for representation in the local government administration.

Organizational structure

As stated earlier, membership of ICDU is free and open to every male and female citizens of Isalu. There are three branches of the Union—the Home Branch and the Ibadan and Lagos branches. The membership strength of each branch varies but the Home Branch has the highest number. There is one parent body to which every branch is responsible.

Each branch is organized in the same way. Officers include a chairperson, vice-chairperson, general secretary, assistant secretary, financial secretary, treasurer, internal auditor and a social secretary. The difference in the organizational structure of the branches and that of the parent body is that the parent body has a president and a vice-president as opposed to the chairperson and vice-chairperson for the branches.

Officers are elected in the same way, usually at the end-of-year general meeting. As for the parent body, the end-of-year general meeting comes up on every Boxing Day, 26 December. Any member from any of the branches is eligible for election into any office except the post of the general secretary which, by convention, is usually restricted to the home branch, for ease of co-ordination of activities.

Elections are peacefully and democratically conducted. Every nominated member reserves the right to accept or reject his/her nomination based on personal conviction.

Meeting schedule

Meetings are held in all branches once a month. The Ibadan Branch, for example, holds its meeting on the first Sunday of every month at three locations in Ibadan on rotation—Beere, Bodija and Ojoo. This is to encourage the attendance of members who are scattered all over the city. The parent body holds two quarterly meetings and one end-of-year general meeting, all in Iseyin.

The language of the meeting in all the branches is Yoruba. This is to encourage the full participation of all members, especially the elders, the majority of whom do not speak English.

Decisions are usually taken on matters after a thorough discussion where everyone who has an opinion is allowed to express it. Voting then takes place and the majority's wish is upheld. Projects for execution are selected by the same process.

Characteristic features

Some of the characteristics of the ICDU which have sustained it over a time are that: it is a grassroots (community-based) association; it is independent and autonomous; it is built on truth and a sense of purpose; though membership is (by birth) compulsory, there is no coercion; it pursues the needs of members to enjoy a meaningful existence; though guided by a constitution which every member tries to observe, it employs indigenous knowledge in its operations.

Funding

ICDU, like any other development-oriented organization, requires funds to operate. The union's usual sources of funding are annual subscriptions, occasional levies, launchings, donations, gate-takings and sales of almanacs/calendars.

Initially, each member contributed a five-naira subscription per year through the relevant branch. This has since been raised to 20 naira per year and is sent to the parent body to fund any project in hand. Each branch is run through small

additional contributions by members. For example, the Home Branch has what it calls a 'secret bag' in which members who attend its monthly meetings would drop into it any amount he/she could afford. Money from this source has never been adequate because, small as it is, some members still find it difficult to pay. For example, the Ibadan Branch raised only 1000 naira as annual subscriptions in 1993. Other sources of funding have therefore been introduced.

There are occasional levies on members, especially whenever there is an urgent problem to solve or a project to finance. A flat rate would be levied on members. Each branch would collect the levy from its members and remit it to the parent body. The collection of subscriptions and levies from members of the Home Branch is the most difficult. The branch officers usually enlist the support of compound heads to collect money from people in the respective compounds. Announcements on such matters are usually made in mosques and churches during congregational prayers.

In addition, funding is sought from well-to-do members of the union in the form of donations towards a particular project. Such affluent members have always responded enthusiastically. Until a few years ago, the ICDU also organized friendly football matches between it and other clubs within and outside Iseyin. Proceeds from the gate usually went to the purse of the union. In 1969, the ICDU produced its first almanac/calendar which was sold to members of the public. The proceeds were put into the union's account. This went on until 1990.

In 1989, the ICDU launched its 50 deep-wells project with a view to raising additional funds to complete the first phase of the project in addition to publicizing the activities of the union. This launching was the first of its kind for a community-based organization in Iseyin.

The ICDU is lucky to have members who belong to various professions: town planning, architecture, pharmacy, medicine, law, bricklaying, carpentry and auto mechanics. Apart from cash contributions, some members contribute in kind, especially their expertise towards group projects. For instance, the town planner in the union assisted in the location and distribution of the deep wells and the acquisition of a 0.8-hectare site for the proposed Isalu Community Centre. Member bricklayers and private contractors have supervised the construction of the deep wells free of charge.

As a way of reducing the cost of projects, the ICDU used the direct labour approach to a large extent, especially in its formative years and up until the early 1980s. All the roads opened up and culverts built were through direct communal labour. Compound heads would lead their members (which include males and females, children and adults) to construction sites armed with their hoes, cutlasses, axes and calabashes. Maintenance of the roads is carried out through the same process. At the time of writing, this age-old practice of road maintenance by members of the community still goes on, especially of the local access and farm roads. This practice is what Adedokun (1993) termed 'Volunteer Workers League' in his study of the Ara community in Osun State, Nigeria.

Achievements

The ICDU has achieved a lot within the short period of its existence and, given the resource constraints (especially financial) of its members, it is now considered one of the few educationally advanced wards in Iseyin with its members spread widely throughout the society, including politics. The table below shows some of its achievements.

Table 6.1: List of community development projects undertaken by the Isalu community, Iseyin

Project	Year	Cost
35km Bode Isalu-Ikere road	1940s	Direct labour
4.4km Olobo-Alayin road	1954	Direct labour
Owode market at Ikere	1954/55	Not available
1½km Ita Molosin-Isoko-Oluwole road	1967	Direct labour
1km Bode Isalu-Oke Igere-Oke Alafia road	1970	Direct labour
1½km Bode Isalu-Our Lady Hospital-Saki road	1972	Direct labour
1km Bode-Isalu-Olokooyo-Itan road including 3 culverts	Not available	Not available
10 deepwells (already commissioned)	1988/89	30000* naira
5 deepwells (almost completed)	1992/93	20000 naira
1.0 hectare land to build Isalu Community Centre at Elera, Isalu	1993	25000 naira
Purchase and perimeter survey of 1 128m ² of land at Ogunbado, Isalu	1993	5000 naira

* plus free service

The 10 deep wells first constructed are evenly distributed within Isalu ward. One each is located at Isoko, Oke Adeta, Irawote, Ojudo Ogunbado, Ojude Akala/Otugbede, Idi Iyalode, Ojude Awe, Ojude Afuku, Ojude Gbodo, and Ojude Aworan. The wells have improved the quality of life of members of the community, especially during the dry season when the various compound wells (usually very shallow) and most streams dry up.

The ICDU also succeeded in convincing the Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) of the need to build a road from Ikere to link Iseyin with Igbeti, a town in the Irepo Local Government Area. Work has already begun on the project.

Factors responsible for the ICDU success

It is useful here to highlight the factors that made it possible for members of the ICDU (from the time of the Majeobaje Society to date) to achieve its objectives. The ICDU adopts a combination of three approaches in its operation: the community, self-help, and special purpose or problem-solving approaches which are three of the six approaches in the development processes as identified by Long *et al.* (1973). Within ICDU, there is broad-based participation, adherence to democratic procedures, application of indigenous leadership and a holistic approach to community problems. The union usually lists things considered as problems facing the community and attempts to set one or two (e.g. road, water, farmland, school buildings, schoolteachers) as targets for immediate attention. The union takes advantage of its educated members who are highly placed in government or in the society in its approach to issues.

In over half a decade of its existence, the union has not experienced any factions or divisions among its members. Although people of similar ages exchange more pleasantries and relate more with one another, such rapport has been used positively to make union work more effective.

There is an absence of leadership fights as officers are democratically elected as provided for by the constitution of the ICDU. The traditional community

leaders in Isalu (Omkosa, Ogboye, Aaba, and Baale Ikere) usually give their full moral support to and permit all the activities of ICDU including the election of officers. There is no coercion of members.

The ICDU does not operate very rigid rules; rather there is flexibility in the way issues are handled and problems tackled. Accountability is taken seriously. To date, no officer of the union has ever been accused of corruption of any sort, including embezzlement of union funds. Statements of accounts are rendered punctually.

Politics are de-emphasized within the union. Although members of the Isalu community have always individually belonged to different political parties existing in the country, such feelings are usually put aside when it comes to matters affecting the community. Members act in unison.

Constraints

The Isalu Community Development Union is faced with some problems ranging from inadequate finances to low levels of commitment. As stated earlier, the sources of finance for the union activities are limited and a bit unreliable as many members do not pay either the subscription or the occasional levy. This affects the number and time of project completion.

The present subscription of 20 naira per member per year is grossly inadequate and should be raised in line with the current rate of inflation in the country. In addition, raffles, films, and other fund-raising events should be organized regularly. There is ignorance on the part of some members of the benefits of community development activities. Awareness talks should be organized from time to time for members. The level of commitment and personal ability varies greatly among members, especially among students and apprentices who do not contribute financially to any project.

The Home Branch is found not to be as effective as either the Lagos or Ibadan branches. This may be explained by the simple fact that most of the members of the Lagos and Ibadan branches are much more enlightened and accustomed to the self-help projects of communities in which they work or live.

There is a gender problem, as the ICDU is almost 90 per cent male. The reason is that very few women of Isalu community marry within the community. Women from outside the community who married members of the union do not belong to the ICDU. It is suspected that there would be greater participation and better funding if membership of the ICDU were to be based not only on the birthplace but also on marriage.

Conclusion

The ICDU has come a long way. With very limited resources at its disposal, it has been able to achieve most of the objectives for which it was established, especially the attainment of self-reliance through group action or community development.

The ICDU has, from its inception, engaged in a process of mobilizing and creating awareness among its members on the need for group action and/or collective efforts to develop themselves and their community. It is now seen by most observers as a movement towards the social, economic, cultural and political emancipation of members of the Isalu community. ICDU is a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community. It has successfully done this through the communal construction as well as maintenance of roads

and culverts, markets, and, recently, a block of four classrooms (donated to the Teachers' College in Iseyin) and provision of water. Construction work on the Isalu Community Centre, which will have a hall, library, postal agency, nursery school and recreational facilities, is to commence in January, 1995.

The union has constantly been used as a tool to redress imbalance in the distribution of amenities or services and even representations in the local government's affairs. It has, on a few occasions, initiated court actions against certain individuals who trespassed on its communal land, against cattle rearers who invaded farms with their cattle thereby destroying mature crops, and also against a larger community for pocketing the Isalu community's share of the royalties being paid on the land which belongs entirely to the Isalu community.

ICDU has become a method and, interestingly, a model being copied by the other communities in Iseyin, for achieving group goals and objectives, especially for addressing the basic needs in the community which government is unable to provide.

Members of Isalu community have not only developed a spirit of self-reliance, they have demonstrated it. The ICDU has great capacity and potential to attain an enviable level of self-reliance in all endeavours. It is endowed with a group of highly educated members who are arousing greater consciousness in the uninformed members and mobilizing the women for greater community development programmes. Unity, co-operation and mutual interest, which are basic to successful community development, are openly exhibited by members. Once their individual economic ventures and earnings improve and, if the union can get some assistance from any international donor agency, it would conveniently expand its community development activities and become more self-reliant.

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