

# CREDIBLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATIONS AS GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT AGENTS – WORTHY PARTNERS IN STATE DEVELOPMENT

19<sup>th</sup> August 2011

## Protocols

I must confess that when I received your letter inviting me to be the Guest Speaker at this 3<sup>rd</sup> ISTDAL Hall of Fame Awards I said **wow!! What a mouthful!!!**, When I saw the title for the lecture you have asked me to give; you will all agree that it is quite a mouthful, but it is topical, it is deep, it is important and it is relevant, indeed it is appropriate. Almost all the words in that title are key words, viz: CREDIBLE; COMMUNITY; DEVELOPMENT; GROWTH; AGENTS, and the phrase “WORTHY PARTNERS”.

The first question that arises from that heading is; are there Community Development Associations that are not credible? The answer is yes.

A Community Development Association (CDA) is not credible when its motive and practices do not engender virtues and promote the spiritual, physical; socio-economic and ethical well being and prosperity of the community.

You now ask what is the purpose or raison d’etre for a credible Community Development Association; I will enumerate some, viz:

1. Promoting Peace and Reconciliation
2. Arrowhead for Development Project
3. Ministry of Encouragement like in this 3<sup>rd</sup> ISTDAL HALL OF FAME AWARDS
4. Building Ethical Ethos
5. Cultural revival and sustenance
6. Social Security – Guaranteeship
7. Political Enlightenment
8. Defence
9. Encouraging Good Leadership
10. Education
11. Strategic Planning – Visioning
12. Partnering with State/National Government

This dozen is not exhaustive, but it more or less encapsulates the raison d’etre for a Community Development Association (CDA) that is credible and that will have the capacity and capability to propel growth and development in order to partner with government and other institutions.

As a vehicle for development how should a CDA function?

1. **PROMOTION OF PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT:** The existence of peace is fundamental if there will be development, without peace there cannot be genuine corporate development in any community, the role of a credible CDA must be anchored on promoting peace and reconciliation so as to create an atmosphere and environment for development and growth in that community.

This task of promoting peace and reconciliation is probably the most crucial and challenging for the CDA; because strife, quarrels, intrigues, conflicting ambitions, traditional issues and cultural matters invariably lead to disputes; the resolution process and the institutions for resolving these disputes are very important and must be credible to earn the respect, and acceptance of members. It therefore behoves every credible CDA to institutionalise structures and mechanism for dispute resolution and to ensure that the

membership of these structures is constituted of men and women of proven reputation and good report who enjoy uncontroversial respect in the community.

When the structures are in place the CDA should embark on reconciliation and crisis management before the disputes erupt into unmanageable conflagrations with accompanying damages. In every situation a deep and genuine honesty of purpose, sense of fairness, equity and good conscience must guide, as these will guarantee justice; thus even when someone loses in a dispute, he can go home feeling that justice has been done because he was given a fair hearing by a body or panel of reputable folks.

2. **Arrowhead for Development Projects:** Every CDA should have as one of its aims and objectives the promotion of Development Projects like schools, health centres, town halls; water projects, agricultural enhancement, electricity; scholarship, entrepreneurship etc.

The number of projects which a serious CDA can embark on are innumerable and ever expanding as in today's world. I must add ICT (Information Communications Technology) as one of the projects a forward looking CDA must develop.

The methodology or modus-operandi various communities employ for embarking on these projects is usually through "**Launching! Launching!! Launching!!!**" Whereby the members tax and levy themselves, invite friends and well wishers and generally celebrate while funds

are donated in a convivial atmosphere. In so many instances, stakeholders in the communities who have resources undertake to sponsor or build some of the projects either individually; through families or age grades or church groups or even gender groups, but everybody pitches in their lot to achieve a common goal.

A good leadership of the CDA ensures that whatever money is raised is strictly applied towards the project in a meticulously accountable manner. I must mention that sadly some errant persons have been known to embezzle or misapply such community funds to their eternal woes.

3. **Ministry of Encouragement:**

A very important role of a credible CDA is what I call "the ministry of encouragement" and this principle is based on the Igbo proverb that says "**eto dike na nke omere, o me kwa ozo**" meaning if you praise a strong man for his achievements he will achieve more.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> ISTDAL Hall of Fame Awards accords with the principles governing the ministry of encouragement. The ministry of encouragement rewards enterprise, recognises virtues, raises hope and ensures improvement in every society.

A credible CDA must be active indeed proactive in ensuring that awards, recognition including chieftaincy titles and mementoes including the naming of streets and places and even praise songs "ana enwe obodo enwe" are dedicated for sons and daughters who have given exemplary service to the community or who have brought honour and prestige to the community. This way such persons become role models and set standards for the ambition and horizon of the youths of the community.

The danger today is that so much emphasis is being placed on only high financial attainments for recognition and awards such virtues like sacrificial service to the community; honesty; Christian virtues; distinction in your calling as an artiste, teacher, sportsman, artisan, academic; professional or even your dedication in attending to communal affairs as a towncrier are not being given the deserving recognition.

In this ministry of encouragement a credible CDA must raise the bar and ensure that through proper acknowledgement of distinction and service, role models are supported in order to challenge the upcoming generation to improved performance.

4. **Building Ethical Ethos:** The New Websters Dictionary defines Ethos (noun) as “the spirit of a people; a civilization or a system, as expressed in its culture, institutions, ways of thought, philosophy and religion”

I submit that a credible CDA must dedicate itself to building ethical ethos. In the Holy Bible in Mathew 16:26 Our Saviour asked “What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?” Thus a community where ethical ethos is not being propagated and nurtured is doomed. It is therefore the duty and obligation of a credible CDA to propagate ethos that enobles, that dignify the human person and ensures the fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom. Dignifying the human person is very important, because of all creatures it is only a human being that has dignity, because anything that money cannot buy has dignity; we must make ourselves so dignified that our real worth will be more than money can buy; it is therefore the challenge before every CDA to grow their people in a manner that their ethos will make them more valuable than Silver and Gold or Naira, Dollar & Sterling

5. **Cultural Revival & Sustenance:** The American Philosopher William James who lived from 1842 – 1910 said of culture “Real Culture lives by sympathies and admirations not by dislikes and disdain ....” While Mathew Arnold a poet who also lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century said “**Culture is the passion for sweetness and light and (what is more) the passion for making them prevail**”.

Albert Camus the French novelist who died in 1960 said “without culture and the relative freedom it presumes, society even when perfect, is no more than a jungle”. The New Webster’s Dictionary page 235 defines culture as “the training and development of the mind, the refinement of taste and manners acquired by such training, the social and religious structures and intellectual and artistic manifestations etc. that characterize a society”.

The context in which we are using the world culture and its derivative cultural is as it relates to “the social and religious structures and intellectual artistic manifestations etc. that characterise a society” thus we may colloquially say the traditions and culture of our people.

The traditions and culture of a people makes them what they are but it is not static, some traditional/cultural practices are inimical, unethical and even inhuman and we praise God that over time we have abandoned such practices like killing twins; slave trade; widow inheritance; the Osu caste system; female genital mutilation; witch hunting/stigmatization, ritual murders and idol worshipping etc all these and more even including cannibalism were all part of our sordid past; they were part of our cultural practice and traditions; but thank God for Jesus Christ who has saved us and redeemed us from eternal perdition; we have seen the light and we know better.

We are also very happy to declare that not everything about our cultural past or history is sordid and ungodly; no, indeed there are so many aspects of our cultural heritage which are edifying and which must endure and which a credible CDA must project, revive and sustain. In the recent past, it saddened me greatly when one of our revered cultural heritages was under severe threat by the scourge of robbery and kidnapping (Aru), I am talking of “Igba nkwu/Ibu nmanya na ala Igbo”. This traditional “wine carrying” which is our own cultural wedding, traditionally, must be celebrated n’ala Igbo; but because of the threat and fear of kidnapping, we became exiles and started celebrating this all important

tradition in Lagos, Abuja, London etc; we hope that with the coming into government by a man like Owelle Rochas Okorochoa and the other governors in Igboland, kidnapping, banditry and armed robbery will be exterminated in Igboland.

It is the duty of a credible CDA to promote, Iri ji Festival which is an occasion to celebrate traditional harvest of God's agricultural bounty; credible CDA's must ensure that Igbo language does not die; most of us are very guilty of not helping our children to speak Igbo; we in Nigeria are more guilty than our brethren in diaspora, I was indeed very ashamed when I heard an Igbo boy born and bred in America speak Igbo fluently while my Children born and bred in Nigeria barely mutter smattering Igbo with a "foreign" accent. I blame all of us parents who are corporately guilty.

Another very important aspect of our culture that must not be diluted or anglicised is the traditional breaking of Kolanut "**Iwa Oji**" The Kolanut though very enlightened does not speak any other language except Igbo. No matter the diversity or character of the audience or gathering, all and every prayer or blessing concerning the Kolanut must, **MUST** be conducted in Igbo language. I could go on and on about aspects of our great heritage and culture which must be revived, promoted and sustained, but the point has been made, no need to belabour it, "Ala Igbo mara nma!!"

6. **Social Security - Guaranteeship:** The Nigerian Government does not have any social security system and social welfare devolves generally on your family, friends, community, employers or your church.

A credible CDA must evolve a social security system which ensures the minimum protection of members by providing assistance and support to those in need in times of crisis, emergency or helplessness. Thus those detained who are known to be otherwise of good character and in good standing are provided sureties and guarantors while hospital bills and other health related crisis are met or mitigated by contributions of the CDA members.

Igbos attach a lot of respect to ensuring a decent dignified burial of persons, a credible CDA ensures that members are given proper dignified burial and funeral obsequies either abroad or at home.

7. **Political Enlightenment:** A credible CDA must ensure that her members receive extensive political enlightenment within the political environment they find themselves and also ensure that those at home in the East receive proper information and political education in accordance with the Igbo proverb that "***Onye ije ka onye isi awo...***"

The proper political enlightenment should ensure that our people are relevant and respected in any political environment and constituency they find themselves.

I am not happy today because our people appear to have lost the impetus and political drive they used to have, even in the recent past. I recall vividly that in 1992/93 Chief Pat Chidolue (Patnasonic) won a seat to represent Amuwo-Odofin Federal Constituency at the Federal House of Representative while my brother Chimakpam Anyankpa won the seat within the same constituency to represent them in the Lagos State House of Assembly. Today almost twenty years after, the highest elective political office by our people in Lagos is Deputy Chairman of a Local Government. We can do better and we must do better.

I dare say that with proper political enlightenment and organisation we can safely secure and dominate elections in more than 50% of the elective positions in Lagos State 30% of

Kano State; 50% of FCT Abuja etc etc. indeed we can contest for governorship in some states and at least negotiate to be on the gubernatorial ticket of the party that would win the election as a minimum condition for our peoples support. We must work at it. **“Nkeiru ka”**.

8. **Defence:** Ndilgbo say that when you bunch broom sticks it is difficult to break, **“iji kota aziiza onu, o na ara ahu igbaji ya”**

That is why a credible CDA must be a powerful defence institution to protect members from unjust persecution and even laws that might be targeted at their socio-economic interests in the form of taxes, levies or regulations.

In states and areas where our people are prone to attacks either on their lives or businesses, vigilante groups and codes of communication must be designed to co-ordinate a response mechanism for protection and defence and safety. **“Igbo gaa adi”**

9. **Encouraging Good Leadership:** Good leadership is the most important factor that uplifts a people. A good CDA must have the large heart to encourage leaders with selfless qualities who are contributing to the development of their people.

Any CDA that does not encourage or support good leaders will risk losing the membership of such leaders as the person might choose to withdraw from attending meetings or even associating with the CDA. Igbo people say **“e’too Dike na nke o mere, omekwa ozo”**

Failure to support and motivate good leaders leads to lethargy and stultifies the development of our people, towns and institutions. Persons who served with distinction must be recognised or even celebrated; failure to give honour to whom it is due can undermine the capability of the CDA to achieve her aims and objectives.

I hope that the recipients of todays awards must realise that they are being honoured and celebrated in order to encourage them to do more, by honouring them ISTDAL is saying **“ji de kwa nke iji”** you must do more, but not like **“ikiri”**.

I would like to drop some posers for the CDA leaders here tonight;

- a. who are the leaders you are encouraging back home?
- b. What is the value content or credibility of the persons you are supporting?
- c. Are you a bread and butter type of persons? Don’t forget what happened to Esau.

10. **Education:** Lord Brougham said that “Education makes a people easy to lead, but difficult to drive, easy to govern, but impossible to enslave” while Hon. Samuel Whitbread (1758 – 1815) a radical politician in a speech in the British House of Commons on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1807 said “in a political point of view, nothing can possibly afford greater stability to a popular government than the Education of your people”.

The importance of good education to our people can never be over emphasised, that is why I support the free Education programme of the Rescue Mission in Imo State but we must do more. Education is the best armour you can give a person. Now, after you have armed a soldier you must deploy the soldier to a war front or an assignment or the arms will be turned against you. I therefore implore our leaders in government and industry to create employment to absorb these armed young men and women whom we have equipped with Education. It is the failure to provide employment that is leading to the increase in sophisticated crimes like kidnapping and cyber crimes.

11. **Strategic Planning – Visioning:** God declared **“... and your young men shall see visions..” Act 2: 17, Hoses 4: 6 “ My people are destroyed for lack of**

**knowledge”** A credible CDA must be the arrow head for strategic planning and visioning for the short medium and long term interest of the community. The type of strategic planning I speak about is both physical and fiscal, it is socio-economic and political; it has everything that impacts on the Human Development index of our people as relates to health and education; religion and cultural. It is about you and me. It is about your yesterday, today and tomorrow. The duty of a credible CDA is to prioritise on behalf of the community in partnering with governments for projects and counterpart funding. I will discuss this further in the next paragraph.

12. **Partnering with Government:** A credible CDA should be the vehicle to promote synergy and partnership with government at every level. It is the ability of the CDA to ensure such seamless stressless partnership that adds value to the community. A credible CDA will interface with government to ensure that governments objectives, policies and programmes are achieved in their locality, be it educational, health, like immunisation, and even tax collection; the CDA should also be a funnel through which the people receive the good things of life from the government even though it is the ward that is recognised as the closest government structure or constituency in our 3 tiered government; a credible CDA that is well organised will receive the respect of the councillors, local government chairman and even state and federal officers if they effectively organise in a manner that ensures they are capable of enforcing political decisions or taking positions.

**In Conclusion:** I affirm that a credible Community Development Association is a veritable vehicle for growth and a dynamic development agent with capacity to energise the people to being worthy partners in State Development. I further submit that any government that fails to listen to the voice of credible CDA will like Fela would say “miss road”. I pray that the Government of Imo State under Owelle Rochas Okorochoa will not miss road in Jesus Name. Amen

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