

**A NEW DIMENSION IN THE PARTICIPATORY ROLE OF
SELF-MANAGED CO-OPERATIVE UNIONS IN DEVELOPMENT
PROJECTS**

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INTRODUCTION

Until recently the belief among most Nigerian communities was that it was the sole responsibility of the government and its agencies to provide for the needs of those communities. People believe and some still do, that government could and should develop the community, provide all the necessary infrastructure and social and physical amenities. Government was seen as »the great provider« whose resources were unlimited. The scenario of what happened during the first decade of Nigerian independence especially during the political regime, provides a practical illustration of this belief.

In the recent past, we noticed how one community after the other petitioned the government for electricity, for road construction or improvements, for supply of well or piped water, for schools and colleges for health centres, dispensaries or hospitals, etc. Whenever a minister or the premier, or a leading political figure visited a community, the leading élite in that community presented to him an address which listed the evils and the needs of that community. In the address the dignitary was always called upon to use his influence in government to persuade the latter to meet all the community's needs. The political dignitary would, in turn, make promises raising the hopes of members of the community that the government would seriously look into the matter. After the election the community would wait, often in vain, for action.

The objective of this study was to examine the role of self-managed co-operative unions in community development projects in the southern part of Nigeria.

In order to achieve this objective, information was obtained from self-managed unions operating in the southern part of Nigeria. This information included data on the distribution of projects embarked upon by these unions, how the projects are financed, the objectives of these institutions and their achievements. The present paper is divided into five sections. Section II, outlines the major goals of self-

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managed co-operative unions. Section III discusses the traditional and the new approaches while section IV focuses on the empirical evidence of self-managed co-operative unions in development projects. The policy considerations that emerge from the study are given in section V.

II GOALS OF SELF-MANAGED UNIONS

Briefly the major goals of self-managed co-operative unions may be stated as follows:

(i) To induce social change for balanced human and material betterment. That is, to bring about such a change in society which not only leads to the betterment of the social and economic conditions of people in the form e. g. of the provision of amenities, but also enables people to develop their capacities to be able to overcome the forces of poverty, disease and ignorance. In other words, the provision of social and economic facilities such as good roads, piped water etc. has to be accompanied by human development through better education and vocational training which will enable man to solve his everyday economic and social problems.

(ii) To strengthen the institutional structure in such a way as to facilitate social change and the process of growth. This implies that to facilitate much-needed social change and progressive growth of communities it is necessary to strengthen the institutional structure at local level by the establishment of new institutions such as the village development committee, the farmers' association, the co-operative society or the re-organization of traditional institutions such as the elders' council and the council of women elders etc.

(iii) To ensure the fullest possible popular participation in the development process.

(iv) To promote social justice by permitting less privileged groups to give expression to their aspirations and to participate in development activities.

Traditional Approaches of Self-Managed Unions to Development

Methodologically, development has been approached from the diffusionists' points of view. This regards development as a programme or process of education to facilitate the diffusion or spread of certain cultural patterns and material benefits from the more developed areas (external and internal) to the less developed communities. With this orientation, the central problem in community development becomes that of finding an approach to ensure a rapid acceptance of modern techniques or adoption of innovations by local populations.

In the few past years most of the self-managed unions that embarked on community projects have revealed (a) a general tendency

to equate community development of rural areas with agricultural development and (b) a general operationalization of the term development mainly from the economic point of view. The apparent equation of community development with agricultural development is equally a reflection of the above economic orientation, with the underlying assumption that since the main occupation of Nigerian communities is farming, an increase in productivity in this sector will automatically enhance the living standards of rural populations.

Reasonable as these explanations and assumption might be, it is the opinion of the author first that the economic problems of a nation cannot be studied understood and resolved in isolation. A complex dialectical relationship exists between the economic, social, political and ideological aspects of human society, thereby ensuring that a solution found in one area can constitute some problems in another. Neither the problems of community nor national development can therefore be adequately resolved with emphasis slanted towards a particular aspect of this dialectic whole.

The New Approach

An integrated approach is the latest method that is gradually gaining ground in rural development in many developing countries. Self-managed co-operative unions have lately joined the bandwagon. This is the approach that Nigeria would like to see pursued more vigorously. It is based on the premise that the very nature of the process of community development and the size of the problem of promoting economic and social progress in rural and urban areas require that action be taken on several fronts simultaneously and not independently of each other. Furthermore, it is felt that the very concept of development demands the application of the knowledge and skills of all the relevant national or international services in an intergrated rather than in an isolated or fragmentary way.

In other words, development trends clearly require a multi-purpose approach rather than rural extension programmes which are predominantly single-purpose. This implies that programmes of agriculture, education and training, health and nutrition, co-operatives, water supply and road construction should not each be planned and implemented in isolation and without consideration of the implications that a development programme in one area might have for another.

This approach has as a primary objective the mobilization of human and material resources to cope with the situation. It also involves the stimulation of the active participation of the population for whom the programme is designed, and the development of institutions that will support and sustain the approach such as public services, co-operatives and credit facilities and administrative facilities that will facilitate effective communication at all levels.

In pursuing the integrated approach to development, one of the crucial factors which self-managed unions take into consideration is the type of training given to persons at all levels involved in policy-making and implementation and the public with whom they will

work. Therefore, when self-managed unions select development workers certain personal qualities are strictly required. These include maturity in age, sincere interest in people, dedication and devotion, willingness to live and work with rural communities and the ability to involve and organize people to mobilize their resources, both human and material, for the development of their communities. In addition, the unions always ensure that these workers possess a good knowledge of the traditions, customs and culture of the people among whom they work and are able to communicate freely with them. They must learn to teach people to be self-reliant and to accept full responsibility for controlling and managing their local affairs. They must be willing to participate actively in the development efforts of the people and not be mere passive onlookers. To this end, the unions feel that the personal qualities of the development worker are more important than the content of the training course he undergoes and the paper qualifications he possesses.

Empirical Evidence of Self-Managed Unions in Development Projects

Self-managed co-operative unions have played a significant role in the socio-economic development of various parts of Nigeria. The development efforts of such self-managed co-operatives have been stimulated largely by the residents of the various communities. The efforts of residents are harnessed by self-managed co-operatives and various associations aimed at promoting specific projects such as construction of access roads, bridges, road surfacing, building of schools, etc. Nigerians, within and outside the country, usually identify themselves with their home place. Some also join various pressure groups set up to promote the development of their home areas, the central aim being to provide local areas with facilities which governments either fail to provide or which are insufficient to meet the needs of the community.

The self-managed unions have two basic aims of development. The first is a programme of providing amenities such as town halls, dispensaries, markets, post offices, parks and community centres in rural areas, through communal efforts. The second basic aim is the establishment of Economic Development Committees which will promote small and medium simple consumer goods for local markets. This, it is hoped, will play an important role in local development and promote decentralized industrial growth in various parts of the region. By providing modern amenities such as those enjoyed in state capitals it is hoped that most communities can be made more attractive to live in. The development of small-scale industries is a major priority of the unions' plan to reduce the problem of youth unemployment in the villages. The projects advocated by the unions are to be modern labour-intensive medium- and small-scale industries designed to promote balanced development of the economy in both rural and urban centres, and to provide alternative employment for unemployed workers.

The various development projects embarked upon by the unions in the various areas visited in the southern region include both communally sponsored projects and others financed from various sources. The list indicates the types of services, facilities and amenities — economic and socio-cultural — identified in the survey areas. These include health facilities (dispensaries, maternity centres and piped water); educational institutions; construction (building, roads); employment-generating activities; control services (police); religious and cultural centres (churches, mosques, palaces); recreational facilities (hotels, community centres) and financial institutions (banks).

Table 1 shows the distribution of these projects in the local government areas visited; these include construction of roads and bridges, schools, postal agencies/post offices and electricity supply. Some villages build market stalls, others concentrate on rural water supply. A few local government areas have hotels, public toilets, agricultural projects and saw-mills supported by communal efforts. In essence, the efforts of the unions are focused on basic needs, particularly the amenities expected to be provided by local government authorities and/or state government: markets, public conveniences, recreation centres, basic health services, education, rural water supply and roads.

The projects identified in Table 1 are financed from several sources: the government (federal, state, local), community, individuals and religious organizations (Table 2). So far, the predominant source of finance is through unions: these provide funding for 56% of the projects identified. Other important sources include co-operatives, religious organizations and individuals. Table 2 shows that the percentages provided by federal, state and local governments are very small. Further investigation reveals local differences. In Irewole most projects are sponsored by unions. In Moro and Oyun individuals and religious organizations are active in community projects, while Aguata and Aniocha benefit more from state-sponsored projects. The primacy of communal efforts is consistent with the unions' strategy of development which emphasises active participation by the community, especially in areas where the government is unable to meet the needs of specific localities as quickly as necessary.

Apart from financial contributions to development projects, self-managed co-operative unions in the area also serve as agents of development through team work, mutual self-help, and development consciousness among its rank and file. There are various types of associations: professional associations, co-operative consumers' and producers' associations, and trade associations in the selected areas covered (Table 3). The co-operative union is by far the most popular association: farmers' associations are also very popular. The widespread participation in farmers' unions is generally in response to the government's recent encouragement to farmers to form associations in order to facilitate granting of loans from the Agricultural Banks, and acquisition of subsidised seeds, farm equipment, and fertilizers. It was also envisaged that co-operative farming could improve the scale of farming and enhance farm income. This programme was given a great boost during the »Green Revolution Programme«. It is, however, common knowledge that small farmers did not

benefit very much from the programme: both middlemen and large-scale farmers are believed to have extracted the large part of the benefits. The activities of these associations constitute full-time occupations for some, but part-time occupations for other residents. It is common practice to find a farmer who also owns a small shop where small merchandise are sold; he may also be a barber. A washerman may have a pepper milling shop, a teacher may turn into a part-time photographer after school hours. For some, such part-time occupations sometimes provide a substantial source of supplementary income.

The various associations have diverse objectives: collective bargaining, social development (broadly defined), mutual self-help, general welfare of the local areas, promotion of culture and tradition, maintenance of law and order, etc. Others are: to promote business, farming, reduce price costs of consumer items by making these readily available (and hence reduce the suffering of villagers), to assist members in securing financial aid, promote adult education, maintain healthy relations among members and reduce friction between migrants and natives, and resolve conflicts as they arise (Table 4). Perhaps the most frequently mentioned aims are the promotion of mutual self-help among members, and the granting of credit facilities to them. Collective bargaining and promoting of trade and business both for the association and its members are also important objectives, particularly for trade and professional associations. A few associations strive to enhance the literacy of their members through adult education programmes; others work towards general socio-economic and cultural progress in their areas.

The achievements of the associations can be judged in the light of their aims. These achievements are stated by the members to be as follows: success in making loans available to farmers to enable them to buy new seeds and plant tree crops; construction of storage facilities, union building or commercial houses for rent; furniture for rent, and purchase of vehicles to ease transport bottlenecks; setting up of commercial farms for growing both cash and food crops; establishing settlements for co-operative farmers, construction of roads, bridges and markets stalls, and the provision of recreational facilities in villages.

Policy Considerations

Some specific policy considerations emerge from this study: these relate to the identification of the needs of local communities by self-managed unions which have directed development efforts to the desired goal, ensuring an effective linkage between community development, rural and urban development strategies, and ensuring active participation and in the implementation of community — and the so-called rural — development programmes.

In most areas, most infrastructural facilities and amenities, especially health services, schools, market stalls feeder roads and water supply have been provided through the efforts of self-managed unions. In recent years, the federal government has launched what

could result in elaborate development programmes: housing; a green revolution in the agricultural sector; road construction; provision of schools and health services. If successfully implemented, such programmes could have the effect of reducing the financial burden on self-managed unions who for a long time have financed these amenities.

In order to minimize duplication of development activities the government has to play a leading role in stream-lining such efforts within a packaged programme of integrated urban and rural development. However, reliance on the projects of self-managed unions should not be stretched to the limit. In fact, the responsibilities of local, state and federal government should not be abrogated in favour of the initiative and drive of the various unions. Rather, the strategy should be to achieve «a more co-operative and mutually sustaining relationship» between them.

Self-managed unions have initiated projects in rural areas planned in most cases without adequate consultation with the local communities involved. Hence, such projects fail to capture and maintain the interest and commitment of locals. It is not sufficient to involve rural dwellers in the process of formulating development programmes aimed at improving conditions of living in rural areas; they also have to be involved in its implementation.

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TABLE 1 Self-Managed Co-operative Development Projects Identified in Selected Areas of Nigeria

	Aguata	Moro	Agbazilo	Ifesowapo	Njikoka	Yemoji	Oyun	Irewole	Orumba	Aniocha
Schools	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Health Centres	×	×	×	×	×	×	—	×	×	×
Public toilets	—	×	×	×	×	×	—	×	—	—
Post offices	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Water supply	×	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	×
Palaces	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	×	—	—
Community Centres	—	×	—	×	×	—	—	—	—	×
Churches/Mosque	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	—	—
Market stalls	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Electricity	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×

× Project identified

— not identified.

TABLE 2 Sources of Funds for Self-Managed Co-operative Development Projects in the Selected Areas

Sources	Percentages
Local Government	9.0
State Government	5.1
Federal Government	2.7
Unions	50.6
Individuals	9.8
Co-operative Societies	12.1
Religious Organizations	10.7
Total	100.0

TABLE 3 Distribution of Types of Self-Managed Unions Identified in Selected Areas

Types of Associations	Aguata	Moro	Agbazilo	Ifesowapo	Njikoka	Yemoji	Oyun	Irewole	Orumba	Aniocha
Co-operative Unions	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Carpenters' Union	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Farmers' Union	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Christian Association	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Progressive Union	—	×	—	×	×	—	—	×	×	—
Tailors' Union	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Blockmakers' Union	×	×	—	×	×	×	—	—	×	×
Drivers' Union	×	×	—	×	—	×	×	×	×	×
Medicine Sellers' Union	—	—	×	—	×	×	—	—	—	×
Bakers' Union	×	×	—	×	×	—	×	×	×	—

Key: × = Association identified
 — = not identified.

TABLE 4 Aims and Achievements of Self-Managed Unions Identified in Selected Areas

Aims	Aguata	Moro	Agbazilo	Ifesowapo	Njikoka	Yemoji	Oyun	Irewole	Orumba	Aniocha
Social development	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	—	×	×
Cultural development	—	—	×	—	—	—	×	×	×	×
Collective bargaining	×	—	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Mutual self-help	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Stimulate trade	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Promote farming	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Promote credit to farmers	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Adult literacy	—	×	×	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Achievements</i>										
Loan to members	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Construction of roads and bridges	—	×	—	×	—	—	×	×	—	×
Construction of market stalls	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Community development projects	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Enhanced trade	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Successful pressure group	—	—	×	—	×	×	—	—	×	—

Key: × = aims and achievements identified

— = aims and achievements not identified.