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Enhancing Business-Community Relations

Sir David Osunde Foundation Case Study

Sir David Osunde Foundation

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BCR Practices of Sir David Osunde Foundation (SDOF): “Promoting a Local Plan of Action for Disabilities”

Research Project Background

This case study is one of ten that were chosen as part of the ‘Enhancing Business-Community Relations’ project in Nigeria implemented in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These cases document examples of engagement between businesses and communities and can be used as learning tools for the promotion of responsible business practice and sustainable development.

The Enhancing Business-Community Relations project is a joint international initiative between United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the New Academy of Business. Implemented in seven developing countries, the purpose of the initiative was to collect and document information on business-community practices as perceived by all stakeholders, build partnerships with them and promote corporate social responsibility practices. It is also intended to enhance international understanding of business-community relations through information sharing and networking with other countries especially those participating in the project - Brazil, Ghana, India, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa and Lebanon.

The findings and recommendations reflected in the case study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of UNV, UNDP or the New Academy of Business. It is important to note that these cases were written as examples of business-community initiatives. They do not constitute a comprehensive assessment of the company’s social responsibility.

1. Introduction

The global assault on poverty remains one of the biggest challenges of our times. Hence, countries are being encouraged to develop committed approaches to its reduction through frameworks that would address the various dimensions that result in poverty. In response, they have come up with estimates for poverty status, plans for reduction as well as targets. However, critical issues that determine the extent to which countries can be rescued from this dilemma have challenged targets in developing countries. Some of these issues relate to:

- The ever increasing debt burden of the developing countries
- The failure of structural adjustment programmes
- The absence of focus on most intervention frameworks – poverty reduction strategies; in other words, programmes to accommodate specific groups in society within policy frameworks

The third issue is mostly responsible for the plight of vulnerable groups in developing countries. But this draws largely from three connate factors namely, lack of integration, which is a general weakness of poverty programmes; the artificial divide between economic and social issues in planning, and the habit of thinking sectorally, that is, organizing government departments and planning along sectoral lines at the detriment of vulnerable groups.²

The federal Government of Nigeria recently inaugurated the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), which represents a major pro poor programme aimed at emancipating citizens suffering from income poverty.³ However, it is not specific on any agenda for the redress of poverty amongst vulnerable groups and those living under extreme or core poverty.⁴

Volunteerism is a concept embedded in the local Nigerian culture and draws largely from primordial social ways of interaction in farming, self help in community causes, and other aspects of social life in the pristine community settings. Nowadays, there seems to be great difficulty in integrating volunteerism into the corporate culture resulting in the near absence of the concept in organized business activities. The most common form of volunteerism easily noticeable is philanthropy, which tends to occur on one-off basis and is usually not sustainable. But studies from advanced countries like Canada, the Netherlands, and Israel and even such developing countries like South Korea and Ghana demonstrate a huge contribution of volunteerism to national productivity hence the possibility of a wider application of volunteerism in poverty interventions. In South Korea for instance, a total of 3,898,564 persons volunteered 451.19million hours of time and skills to various causes amounting to a US\$2.182billion contribution to GDP in 1999.⁵

This – Sir David Osunde Foundation – case study explores the strong possibility of employing volunteerism as a framework for poverty intervention amongst oftentimes-neglected vulnerable groups in Nigerian and promises to form the bases of an otherwise absent Local Plan of Action for Disabilities in the country.

2. The Organization

Sir David Osunde Foundation was established in 1993 under the Company and Allied Matters decree of the Corporate Affairs Commission, a Federal Government agency responsible for the registration and incorporation of companies and organizations including non-profit. The Foundation was specifically set up to empower persons with disabilities through targeted programmes that emphasize advocacy for self help, their capacity building through education, skills development and employment opportunities and the resultant empowerment for sustainable livelihoods using volunteerism as a delivery mechanism.

2.1. Vision

Its vision is to

*strive for the time when society will look beyond the external accidents and discern those inner qualities that make all men human and, therefore, brothers; and press for change till the physically challenged are give a voice and equal opportunities.*⁶

Religion is a key factor responsible for the SDOF vision. The President of the Foundation is a strong Christian and knight of the Catholic Church whose vision of the Foundation is founded on faith. Three major volunteer units drive the vision of disabilities’ empowerment for the Foundation namely, the external volunteers unit; the special volunteers corps, and the international volunteers unit.

The external volunteers are that section of the community comprising of pupils, students, and the unemployed, who are encouraged to provide their good reserve of energy to worthy causes in the Foundation.

The special volunteers corps are distinguished persons from the “high-brow” and “middle class” sections of society, who could demonstrate exemplary leadership through volunteerism in three broad ways: public figures who handle specific disabilities cases recommended by the Foundation

for their assistance, financial contributors or donors of material gift worth in excess of ₦⁷1000 per month, and those who prefer to donate “solid” gifts – computers, equipment, logistics, et al – whose value is not less than ₦5000 per month.

The international volunteers unit provides the Foundation with technical personnel who develop programmes and articulates strategies for the delivery of its vision/mission.

2.2. Management

The following profiles represent four key personnel responsible for the daily management of the Foundation:

Sir David Osunde is the president of Sir David Osunde Foundation. He is happily married with children. Sir Osunde worked alongside the Jesuits assisting mentally retarded children for 14 years and funded a home for the children called Faith House before founding Sir David Osunde Foundation in 1991 as a dedication to God.

In addition to his involvement with the handicapped, Sir Osunde is also the president of Holy Family Society, a member of the board of governors of Loyola Jesuit College, and a patron of many societies and organizations in the Catholic Church. For his good works and devotion to God, Pope John Paul II named Sir Osunde Papal Knight of Saint Sylvester. Shortly after this, he was awarded the honour of Justice of the Peace by the Edo State Government, Nigeria for championing the cause of peace and promoting sustainable development in the country.

Aside from his volunteer work, Sir Osunde is the Deputy Managing Director / Chief Executive of KOCH Nigeria Limited, a subsidiary of Koch GmbH.

Lilian Ting is the Senior Development Officer / US Affairs Director of Sir David Osunde Foundation. At the Foundation, Ms Ting oversees public relations among expatriates, production/design/schedule/inventory, administration, marketing, fundraising, website development, database development, proposal writing, photography, and some publishing. She comes as a volunteer from the United States having graduated in Sociology from the Bryn Mawr College and worked in Guatemala and Taiwan. Aside from her work in the Foundation, she is also the secretary of International Women’s Club Abuja, Nigeria.

Dr. Ihenyen is a medical doctor at Liola Hospital and has been a trustee of the Foundation since inception. He directs the Foundation’s free medical clinic and acts as liaison between the Abuja and Benin offices of the Foundation.

Mr. Ojo is the director of the Foundation in Benin. His previous work experience include proofreader and later, librarian for the Niger Observer. He has been a board member of the Foundation since inception and has written a book titled ‘Give us a Chance’.

3. Business Community Relations Practices – The SDOF Disabilities Programme

Owing to the relatively poor visibility that vulnerable groups command in national planning and programmes, data is scarce and almost unavailable on the status of disabilities in the country. The level of disabilities can hardly be determined, statistically, and any estimate at such may be misleading. However, it is generally understood that a good percentage of the population fall within this bracket as evidenced from physical observation of the large number of the blind, lame, and generally handicapped beggars in streets throughout the country.

Several of the reasons that may be responsible for this situation relate to:

- A rising poverty and attendant malnutrition that exposes the population to diseases

- Poor literacy occasioned by inability to afford education; hence families prioritize children for educational sponsorship and handicapped individuals are the last to be considered
- Unavailability of public health programmes
- Social stigma and discrimination at all levels, even in employment

The burden of disability in Nigeria is enormous and can best be expressed by the disabled. But a close look at their daily struggles to meet with structural challenges in a system that is oblivious of their existence provides some insight into their predicament.

The most difficult challenge and threat to people living with disabilities are social stigma and discrimination, which both seem to pervade all sections of society. Some local ancient mythology has it that the disabled are social outcasts serving retribution for offences of their forefathers. But this is neither here nor there. More disturbing is the fact that the physically challenged are often seen as a disgrace to their families whether they are so from birth or as a result of accident. Hence, at home and elsewhere, they are usually confined to discrete places where people will not readily notice them. Also, they are usually hindered in marriage as their proposals are oftentimes rebuffed, neither are they given in marriage since suitors hardly come by. As a result of several social deprivations and other challenges coupled with their struggle for economic survival, “the physically challenged have a heavy psychological burden”.⁸ Yet more complex and alarming is the very absence of a framework for disabilities integration in the society. Most Government budgets are usually silent on disabilities and is understandably so due to the failure of planning to consider it an issue. As a result, the physically challenged in Nigeria are not provided any incentives in social infrastructures, employment, education, governance or any relevant aspect of social integration. Hence it is extremely difficult for Government to articulate policies directed at empowering the group. Even the pro poor policies aimed at empowering the very poor in the society have not mainstreamed disabilities in its agenda.

The SDOF in furtherance of its vision has inaugurated ten projects aimed at empowering the disabled in society employing volunteerism as a mode of delivery. These set of projects are continuously evolving and represent a framework for disabilities programme that the Government could adopt.

Two of these projects underscore the Foundation’s vision and impact on disabilities.

3.1. Lady Mary-Joan Home for the Physically Challenged

The Mary-Joan Home for the Physically Challenged operates from a building with living capacity of 30 persons and modern facilities including a bore hole for regular water supply, a 25KVA power generator to supplement inadequate and erratic supply from the national grid, and a medical clinic.⁹ All rooms in the home are en-suite to ensure the comfort of occupants.

Owing to the deep social stigma and discrimination suffered by the disabled – some are even abandoned by their families –, the Foundation developed the Home to empower and provide succour for people with disabilities through initiatives aimed at giving them a sense of belonging and building their sense of self worth, through education and skills development.

A major tool for the delivery of the Home’s objectives is discipline – stringent rules and regulations mandatorily observed by occupants. This is combined with an emphasis upon spiritual development.

The Home presently hosts 30 residents who learn different skills. For example, secondary school students who must undergo their basic skills training after regular school classes every day.

Residents have between 3 and 7 years to spend at the home depending on the skills being acquired and educational circumstances. About 100 other persons with disabilities who cannot be accommodated in the Home participate in its programmes. Food and upkeep are provided by the foundation. In addition, the Home provides free medical care to the 30 residents and the 100 other handicapped individuals who participate in its programmes.

3.2. Vocational Training Centre

The vocational training Centre was developed to build the capacity of disabled persons for skills they could utilize in employment, especially self-employment. This is to ensure that they overcome the discrimination they face in the labour industry and in addition inspire them towards a dignified means of survival, away from begging.

The Centre trains in shoe making, fashion design, hair dressing, carpentry, arts – graphics, sculpture and painting. This is attained with its numerous facilities including a shoe making factory fitted with industrial machines, a fashion home named after Mother Theresa where mainly physically challenged trainees undergo a minimum of three years training, and a modern workshop for the arts to mention but a few.

Some technical instructors in the Centre are handicapped. Duyeobong Edet is an instructor for the Foundation’s shoe making and Africanized western goods – pencil holders, children’s toys and handbags. In a deep sense, his position is significant for its ability to encourage other handicapped persons and demonstrate that they can really navigate through the challenges of life like every other person.

In addition to the initiatives mentioned above, the Sir David Osunde Foundation has informed the researcher about scholarships it extended to two blind students – Lawal Kazim and Fowowe Tokunbo – who recently graduated from the prestigious Loyola Jesuit College, Abuja. This is in addition to many other beneficiaries of the Foundation’s educational programmes including a law graduate and a masters degree graduate in International Relations.

A key factor responsible for the success of the Centre is the vision and networking ability of the founder, Sir David Osunde, which has enabled the Foundation to make a case for a disabilities plan in business, civil society and Government. He ensured the full participation of the Foundation in the UN Volunteers national workshop on business-community relations showcasing the immense capabilities of the disabled in the two-day workshop which attracted over 300 representatives from the private sector, NGOs, civil society, and a few government representatives. The outright commitment of Elf Petroleum Nigeria Limited, at the workshop, to cover the cost of artificial limb for Naomi, one of the foundation’s disabled persons constitute eloquent testimony of the great potentials of the foundation in advocating a disabilities action plan. A begging question here however is, Is this rather not another display of philanthropy as against a constructive approach to disabilities? The researcher imagines that this represents a philanthropic gesture, which may not support the development of a sustained local plan of action for disabilities. However, the ability of the Foundation to attract such corporate attention and patronage points to a greater possibility that it can muster greater stakeholder participation in a more constructive framework.

Ms Ting is perhaps the most passionate advocate of the disabilities cause. Considering her background, it is a wonder why she has to champion this cause in a foreign land. She has spent her time and meager volunteer allowance to support some of the Foundation’s handicapped. Her enthusiasm has attracted the support of International Women’s Club, Abuja for the Foundation. The International Women’s Club is a charity organization formed by the wives of diplomats working in Nigeria. The club has provided a grant of US\$1,500 to train more physically challenged persons in order to make them self-reliant. Ms. Ting was the secretary of the club at the time of this research.

4. Issues Addressed

Three salient issues are being addressed by the activities of the Foundation:

4.1. Advocacy

The Foundation is giving visibility to disabilities and contrary to popular perception, presenting disabled persons as real people, resourceful, hence, a useful subset of the society. Its activities may represent a local plan of action for disabilities in the country.

4.2. Capacity Building

The handicapped are acquiring skills for self-reliance. What is of more interest is that fellow handicapped persons are developing these skills. There could never be a better demonstration of self-reliance in the disabilities context.

4.3. Empowerment

As handicapped persons acquire various skills in the Foundation, they are encouraged to overcome societal prejudices and discrimination towards the handicap, to accept that they have contributions to make in society and through it, earn sustainable livelihoods.

In furtherance of the above issues, the SDOF has identified and proposed five ways its programmes/activities could be sustained in the years ahead. These relate to:

- Attracting volunteers from different spheres of life to support its activities
- Engaging sponsors to provide grants and funding for its activities and programmes
- Partnering with the private sector
- Securing jobs for the disabled
- Accommodating key aspects of its programmes in future UNDP/UNV programmes

For more information on the Foundations activities and plans you may wish to visit www.osundefoundation.org.

5. Community Perception

In an account, Ms. Ting had accompanied a delegation from Winrock International to a tour of the Foundation in Benin. The trip was an exploratory mission for possible collaboration in programmes between Winrock and the Foundation. Winrock had indicated interest in the Africanized western products made by the disabled persons, in the Foundation – shoes, art works et al. In the trip, Austin, the cab driver had engaged Ms. Ting in a discussion. His views tell us about one perspective that may represent the impact and community perception of the Foundation’s activities. As he remarks, “I didn’t believe people like this could make such a shoe, handbag, folder... When I think of the handicapped, I think they don’t have knowledge and ideas to do things like this. But when I see that [handicapped] people can make things like this, what is the purpose of them staying on the road? Here in Nigeria, we have a lot of handicapped... useless, useless. The foundation can do a lot and [to] help the country. Then we won’t have people standing on the road; useless people who have no skill and no one to help them. If they can do things like this, we don’t need to give them anything, only to raise them up and train them”.¹⁰ Austin’s view of the handicapped has changed from a group of “useless” people to persons that could be resourceful. But it is easy to see how his

description corroborates the local society’s disdain of the disabled with the use of the word “useless”, “useless”.

6. Key Outcomes and Lessons Learned.

The BCR practices of SDOF represents a local plan of action for disabilities programme in a country without a programme for its disabled, where capacities have been left untapped due to misconceptions and stigma towards the physically challenged. It provides a basis for easy integration into Government planning and budgeting.

Further, and as an external gain, the SDOF agenda also demonstrates how businesses can get involved and or support the disabilities development plan especially for those companies and organizations promoting ethical trading. The products of the Foundation are articles of fair trade, which are traded to address issues of exploitation and poverty amongst the disabled. While it addresses a minor percentage of the disabilities problem, its strength lies in the practice it demonstrates, which must be replicated at the community level for maximum impact.

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Endnotes

- ¹ The views expressed in this case study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the New Academy of Business, UNV or UNDP.
² For a detailed discussion of issues on the failure of poverty programmes in developing countries, see UNDP Poverty Report 2000 – “Overcoming Human Poverty”.
³ This term refers to a lack of baseline income receipts or expenditure.
⁴ Extreme or core poverty represents a more acute deprivation and refers to that section of the poor leaving without resources and opportunities that are fundamental to human survival. It is typified in conditions where people suffer deprivations in basic services – education, health, information –, human rights, eroded confidence, dignity and self-esteem, including the absence of baseline income.
⁵ See “Promoting Volunteerism in Nigeria”, a publication of Sir David Osunde, KSS, JP.
⁶ “Physically Challenged in Nigeria – The Hope”, a publication of Sir David Osunde Foundation.
⁷ This represents Naira, sign of the Nigerian currency. At the time of this case study and by United Nations Exchange rate, US\$1 is equivalent to ₦126.
⁸ “Physicall Challenged in Nigeria – The Hope”, a publication of Sir David Osunde Foundation.
⁹ Part of the contingency for decent living in Nigeria includes personal provisions for water supply, power generation, and medicare. Any expectation from Government to provide adequate cover for these social goods often leads to frustration and leaves the individual underserved.
¹⁰ Lilian Ting, “My View has really changed”; unpublished article narrating the details of a discussion with Austin, a driver, on peoples perception of the physically challenged.