#ShiftThePower

GIVING FROM MANY TO ONE: EXPLORING A HYBRID MODEL OF AFRICAN PHILANTHROPIC PRACTICES IN ANYIGBA, NIGERIA.

through the Story of We Can Clean up Our Town Foundation

By Abah Danladi

Photo by Abah Danladi

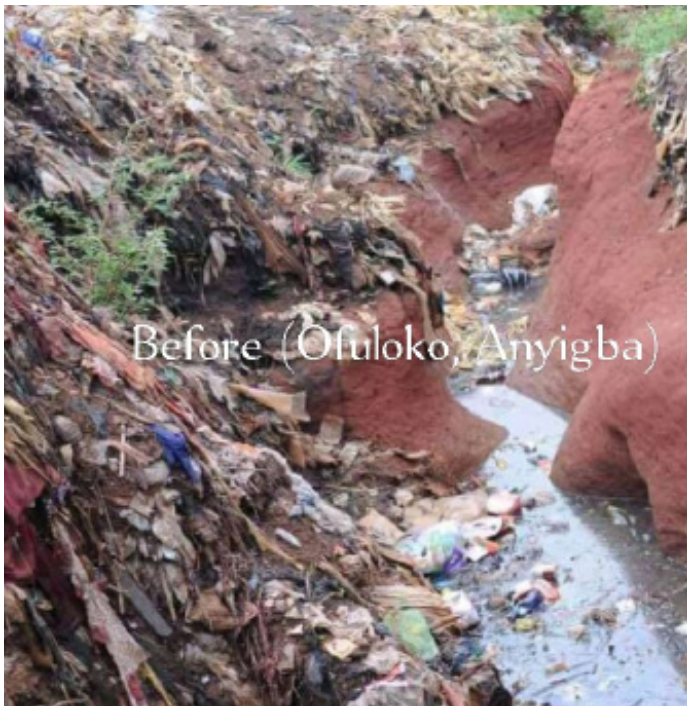
The We Can Clean up Our Town Foundation

INTODUCTION

"From the We Can Clean Up Our Town experience, it has been established that community philanthropists, when properly mobilised can contribute positively to addressing humanitarian or development crises."

The We Can Clean up Our Town Foundation is a community driven philanthropic initiative established to address the persistent challenges of flooding and environmental pollution occasioned by climate change and human-induced actions in Igala land especially in Anyigba community. With an estimated population of 2 million people, the Igalas occupy nine (9) Local Government Areas of Kogi State. The area covers about 13,665 square kilometres. The Igalas are predominantly peasant farmers. The distance from Abuja to Igalaland especially Anyigba, is about 316.9km (about 5 hours from Federal Capital Territory, Abuja).

As a result of the government's neglect and citizens' poor attitudes to sustainable environmental management, there were, before now, high cases of common preventable diseases such as polio, typhoid and malaria, caused largely by the outrageous dirtiness of Anyigba town. For the past



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five years, indiscriminate disposal of waste by residents had led to blockage of drainage canals and flooding of homes and markets. For instance, in 2012 and 2019, there were massive flood disasters in Idah, Ibaji and Anyigba communities. In 2020, Lokoja and Ibaji were flooded. Between 2012 and 2019, more than fifty thousand people were displaced by flood while about ten people lost their lives to flood related problems. Despite the huge environmental and humanitarian crises created in this community, government's presence and interventions remain negligible.

In order to mobilise domestic resources from community members in mitigating the negative effects of environmental/humanitarian disaster in Igala land especially in Anyigba community, the We Can Clean up Our Town Foundation was established in March 2020. The target was to raise N100 (One Hundred Naira) which is about $ 0.24 (Twenty-four Cents) from an estimated one million community members. Between March 2020 and March 2021, over eight hundred thousand people had donated various resources. This story is about how this initiative was conceived, factors that sustained it, amount raised, founders, challenges and lessons learned from this indigenous approach to addressing community challenges.

We Can Clean up Our Town Foundation was set up by Omale Theophilus Ocholi, an environmental activist, youth and governance advocate and a university lecturer. His goal was to mobilise and raise resources from community members to clean up the Igala towns. It was also set up to raise public awareness on the dangers of climate change and environmental pollution in the community. In order to set up this organisation, he donated his one-month salary, N160,000 (One Hundred and Sixty thousand Naira), to procure wheelbarrows, hand gloves and to buy weekly meals for community volunteers. He started with ten members; mainly youths, students and market women whom he convinced on the need to clean up Igala land, especially Anyigba, a bourgeoning, yet dirty university town. This was pursued through the clearing of bushes and drainages around public spaces such as markets, motor parks, timber shades, palaces and others. Currently, the Foundation has over 130 active (workforce-based) members who show up every Saturday to carry out community cleaning exercises in different parts of Igalaland, particularly in Anyigba. These 130 members represent a special category of active volunteers and labour force who can always be mobilised and moved to different sites for work. They receive food and transport fare at the close of work every Saturday.

Apart from this category of members, the organisation also has another class of members who mainly provide moral and financial support necessary for facilitating the activities of the organisation. This category of members is usually not physically available to participate in the weekly cleaning exercise, but they routinely identify and give their resources (money and tools) to support the activities of the organisation.

The organisation started formally in March 2020 by Omale Theophilus Ocholi and ten others. At the moment, its membership, apart from the 130 active volunteers (who meet weekly to clean), has grown to over one thousand people, including traditional rulers, university lecturers, students, traders, farmers and police officers who provide moral and financial supports. People get involved through weekly volunteering of their time, resources and labour to help clean the community and keep the environment habitable. Formal membership registration is for free and open to all categories of people irrespective of sex, class, religion or ethnicity. Donation of money, tippers for carrying wastes, diggers, hoes, cutlasses, shovel and others are welcomed from all and sundry. Because cleanliness should be a lifestyle, membership is accompanied with a

certificate which is for life.

According to the 2006 National Population Census, the population of Igala community was 2 million people. Based on this, the founder passionately believed that through community giving or self-help, the people could develop their community by addressing the root causes of environmental pollution, floods and dirtiness in the community. From a philanthropic lens, he reasoned, correctly too, that if only one million people from the community could be convinced to give just 100 Naira ($ 0.24), every year to clean up the town, it will be sufficient to raise 10 million Naira which will be enough to address the environmental challenges facing the town. Fundamentally, resources were raised through giving by community members who were persuaded to give a minimum of one hundred Naira (N100) to the We Can Clean Up Our Town United Bank of Africa Account (UBA: 1022894330, Account Name: We Can Clean Up Our Town).

Bearing in mind the challenge of financial inclusion in the community, the team usually moves to markets, community centres and palaces; cleaning, mobilising and soliciting for resources. Many market women, students and elders surprisingly gave more than the minimum amount. On several occasions that the team went to work at the Anyigba and Egume markets within the community, many market women gave not just their money and time but food, detergents and others. Between March 2020 and May 2021, over 10 million Naira cash had been raised and judiciously expended. This is in addition to several millions of Naira worth of freely donated labour. The major chunk of this fund was realised, strangely, during the disastrous months of the Coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria.

It is important to note that Kogi state was the only state that did not go under Covid-19 lockdown in Nigeria. Between May and July 2020, about 45% of the above fund was raised. Between August 2020 and January 2021, over 50% in cash donations were raised. Factors responsible for these variations in donations have been linked to Covid-19, social media, religious feasts such as Christmas, Easter, Eid al fitr and new year celebrations. As a tradition, many Igala sons and daughters residing outside their villages, usually travel home (to their villages) during these feasts where they often attempt to identify and support local development initiatives in their communities. We Can Clean up Our Town benefitted immensely from the kind gestures of people who came home during these festivals.

In an attempt to quantify the in-kind donation, the founder noted that:

In this area, one day of manual labour cost about two thousand Naira, and every week, more than one hundred boys, men and women are mobilised to different sites for public cleaning exercise. We have been doing this work for over a year…over 70 weeks…that is N14,000,000 worth of labour.

During work, the activities of the We Can Clean up Our Town are usually livestreamed on Facebook. The Facebook page of the organisation has almost twenty thousand followers. For instance, on 2 February 2021, it streamed live its activities in Anyigba market, and it received over twenty thousand views within three days. In less than forty-eight hours, there were over thirteen thousand direct cash transfers into the organisation's bank account from different people including people from Lagos and Abuja. This amounted to over 3 million Naira cash donation. The minimum amount received within this period was One Hundred Naira (N100) while the maximum amount received was Two Hundred Thousand Naira (N200,000). These donors were both locals and internationals, in terms of locations. There were donors/helpers from Lagos, Abuja, Germany and Rwanda, including villages within Igala community. Strangely, majority of the donors/helpers were community members, market women, students and youths. To promote transparency and accountability in managing the donated funds, the amount, name, item given, occupation and location of every giver is usually made public and uploaded online on the organisation's Facebook page. Similar posts were also made on the Facebook page of the founder.

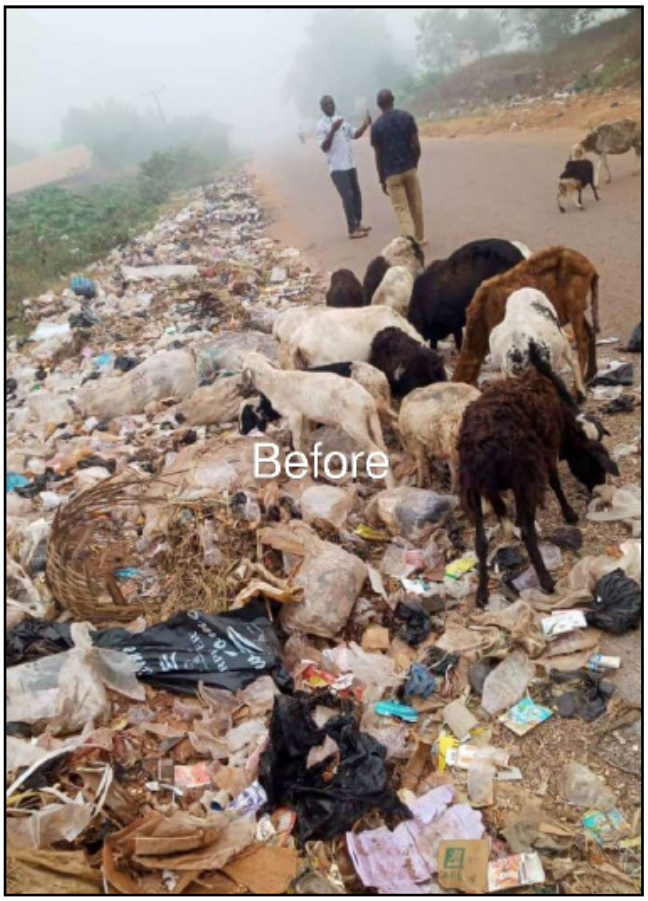
Also, through livestreaming of their activities especially during mobilisation campaigns and clearing of drainage canals, clearing and cleaning of markets and environmental awareness in schools, local givers and helpers built trust in the organisation which helped to boost social capital. Through this initiative, the people of Igalaland became co-owners and stakeholders in their own development process, especially in addressing environmental crisis.

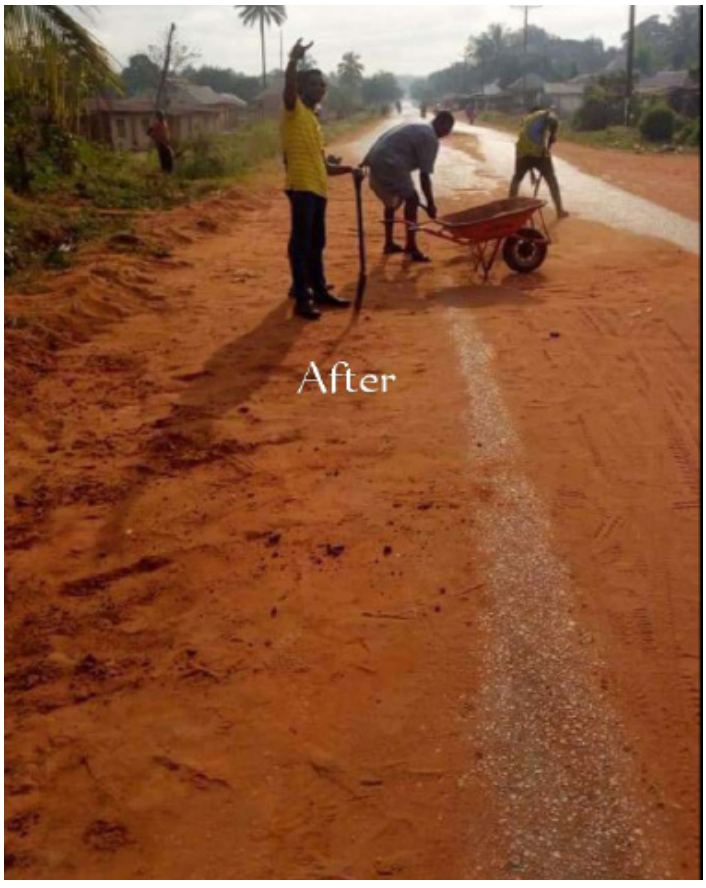
State of this Practice: This model is working effectively and efficiently. It is working because givers consider it to be the fastest means of addressing local community development challenges without waiting for the government and politicians. This practice is sustainable in delivering

impact. This practice is also working because the local community members and givers have trust in the managers and coordinators of this project. Because Omale Theophilus lives among them and the people know his background, integrity and capacity to deliver, they are comfortable entrusting him with their resources (money, tools, time, etc). Since the formation of the organisation, over five hundred thousand people have made different philanthropic gestures to the organisation.

Many traditional rulers and community associations have praised the founder and members of We Can Clean Up Our Town for their excellent contributions to rural development through the community clean-up programmes especially in terms of raising public environmental awareness and education, especially on the necessity for promoting public hygiene through sustainable waste and pollution management. For instance, the traditional ruler of Anyigba (Ogohi/Onuh Anyigba) and Aguma of Bassa, received the founder and his team in their palaces where they also made individual contributions and urged community members to give and support the We Can Clean Up our Town Foundation (See the picture attached).

From the We Can Clean Up Our Town experience, it has been established that community philanthropists, when properly mobilised can contribute positively to addressing humanitarian or development crises. Proper local resource mobilisation and active involvement of





Photos by Abah Danladi

locals in development projects is important for increasing financial sustainability and increased local ownership of projects. In other words, establishing and supporting local foundations largely focused on development projects and practices are imperative for addressing humanitarian crisis and boosting community ownership in responding to emergencies.

Furthermore, grant-making is an important part of the strategy deployed by this organisation to build trust in the community thereby demonstrating how small amounts of money, when pulled together, can directly help facilitate community-led initiatives on one's doorstep. In this way, 'development' is no longer an abstract construct but a visible reality especially to the community members. By insisting on the link between inputs (money), decision-making (at least transparent, at best, participatory) and outcomes (grant-funded, community-led activities), We Can Clean Up Our Town Foundation 'creates virtuous circles that see value being added, and trust and relationships being built at every step in the process of community development.'

The founder has received more than five different national and community awards from associations within and outside the Igala community since 2020. The awards are a testament of the high level of local buy-in of the initiative and a confirmation of the high level of appreciation and value accorded to his intervention by the community members since inception. One of the awards was accompanied with some financial remuneration of 50,000 Naira. He ploughed back 20,000 into the organisation. He used part of this money to buy head gears and shovels. What factors have accounted for success of this practice? Determination, selflessness, solidarity, trust and love for humanity. Ocholi noted that the love for his community through social change was his driving force… "that is, not looking at the immediate gain but the belief in contributing one's quota to addressing community challenges", he said.

Furthermore, the founder noted that a knack for accountability, solidarity and transparency in community leadership have remained driving factors in the success of this initiative since inception.

In addition, social media has remained the engine room of this African philanthropic model. Through its Facebook and Twitter pages, the activities of the organisation are made accessible to larger audiences across the globe. For instance, through Facebook, Igala sons and daughters in the diaspora continue to give to the organisation. Several pictures of the organisation's activities and works are archived on the page of the founder. WhatsApp has equally positively aided in mobilisation and dissemination of information among members. The group WhatsApp number is +234 9067148385 and information and resources generated from community members are equally shared on the WhatsApp page. This has helped to promote solidarity and trust in both group and community members.

Step-by-step process to realise this resource mobilisation milestone:

(i) Crafting a message: The founder identified a societal challenge and crafted a message which appealed directly to the heart of the community members. In order to realise its vision and mission, the organisation uses social media and local radio to disseminate well-crafted audio-visual messages on the implications of environmental pollution especially flooding. This helped to spur alliance and confidence-building in community members to demonstrate that certain community challenges can be tackled without government support.

(ii) Disseminating the message. Through strategic communication intended to raise resources, there was a conscious effort towards the dissemination of the organisation's activities on social media and around public spaces such as motor parks, schools, markets and to palaces of local chiefs. This approach helped immensely in resource mobilisation.

(iii) Getting community/multi-stakeholder buy-in. This was achieved through the registering of the We Can Clean Up Our Town Foundation with the Local Government social welfare department and the subsequent opening of a dedicated organisational bank account with the popular United Bank for Africa (UBA: 1022894330, Account Name: We Can Clean Up Our Town). In order to enhance further public buy-in, amounts donated were regularly made public especially on the organisation's Facebook page. This helped to build confidence in the minds of donors as the funds were not paid into a personal account. Furthermore, the involvement of traditional rulers and livestreaming of such royal engagements helped to promote public confidence and supports.

Key Challenges encountered and attenuation measures: From its early stage, the establishment of We Can Clean up Our Town Foundation and its activities did not sit well with certain politicians, especially some of them occupying elective and appointive political offices. Strangely, wrongly too, they saw the organisation's weekly activities as an affront on the government. The founder was summoned

twice by two different political leaders and told that his "pet programme" was an attempt to discredit those of them in government and seem to further expose the failure of their respective governments to the public. He was accused of being sponsored by members of the opposition parties to discredit the ruling party. To his amazement, the founder was persuaded to abandon/stop the initiative.

However, the founder remained undaunted and even convinced them to join him in the community cleaning initiative. He argued before them that environmental pollution and its associated challenges belonged to no political party, hence the need for collective efforts. In order to demonstrate the apolitical and areligious nature of the organisation and deflate the fears in the minds of local political leaders, he presented before them the organisation's statement of account showing various donations from the least to the maximum amount received from within and outside the country. Through strategic communication and advocacy, he won the support of many local politicians, particularly those holding different positions in the current government.

Furthermore, the absence of high-quality camera and handset for taking photos, recording and livestreaming activities constituted another key challenge. However, within few months, new phones and cameras were acquired.

Mobilisation of domestic resources (money, material and human) were major challenges which the organisation faced and is an ongoing strife but has managed to make some progress through public advocacy, deployment of information and communication technology to raise money both online and offline.

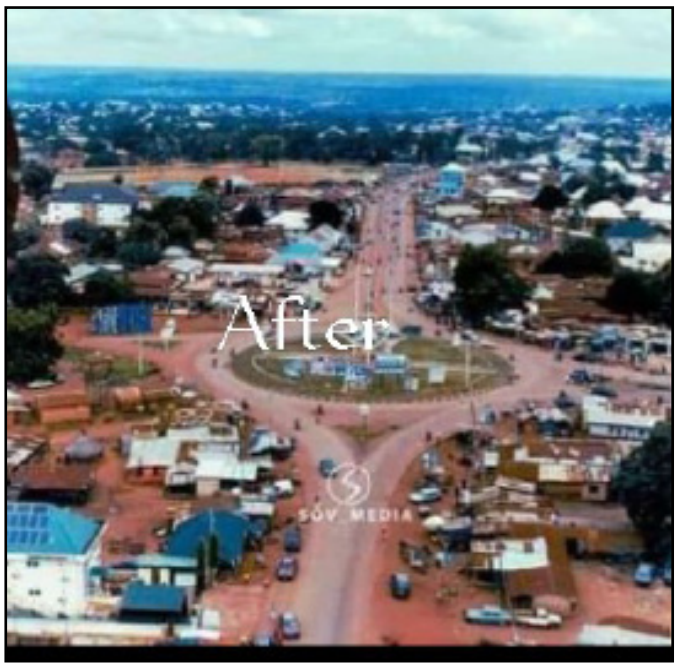


Photo by Abah Danladi

Lessons Learned: One major lesson learned from this local philanthropic model is that community members in Africa can successfully co-create, own and drive their own development initiatives through local giving without necessarily waiting for government or foreign donors. What is required within the community is the audacity of a focused and passionate changemaker to articulate, mobilise and drive the change.

The second lesson from this philanthropic model is the enormous, practical power of social media in community mobilisation and development. Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram are essential tools which government and community changemakers can leverage on to promote social transformation.

Impact of this Philanthropic Practice/Model: We Can Clean Up our Town initiative has made significant impact on the people and environment.

First, the organisation has greatly increased public awareness on the dangers of environmental pollution especially waste management and climate change. Through online and offline strategic public sensitisation programmes of community members especially market women, students and traditional rulers, the people have become better informed and aware of the dangers associated with having a dirty environment. The town, unlike before the inauguration of the organisation, is devoid of indiscriminate refuse dumpsites. (See inserted pictures of Before and After).

Second, this practice has helped to increase the consciousness of the locals towards giving for community development.

Third, socially, this practice has made massive impact through the promotion of social capital in the community. Through this, a high level of trust has been created and consolidated. (See inserted pictures of tricycles and other resources given).

In conclusion, this model is strongly recommended for use in a different context especially in North-eastern Nigeria where Boko Haram insurgency has led to humanitarian crises. With the failure of government, plus inability of international donors and development partners to provide all the required humanitarian needs (food, shelter, education, toiletries, etc), for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the Northeast region, relying on this kind of local philanthropic initiative can help raise resources and distribute same to children, women and elderly displaced by Boko Haram.

INGOs and donors, instead of outsourcing or subcontracting humanitarian aid to those displaced in Northeast Nigeria should engage directly with the local foundations that understand the people and community. This will help spur the buy-in and engagements of local community in any humanitarian aid programmes being implemented for the people. In fact, when members of the local communities lead, rich and poor community members will be more willing and comfortable to donate their resources.

CALL FOR ACTION:

Support Us to Clean Our Environment. No amount is too small or too big! Kindly donate to UBA: 1022894330, Account Name: We Can Clean Up Our Town, Nigeria.

Photo by Abah Danladi

Document your Local Philanthropy Practice: What's your Story?

The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) is inviting individuals, organisations, associations and groups from across Africa to submit stories or cases of existing community or local philanthropy models or practices they are engaged in.

The overall goal of this call is to identify, document and disseminate information on existing innovative, indigenous practices and or models of philanthropy or giving in Africa. It further seeks to explore, where possible, how these philanthropic approaches, practices and models interact with other existing practices within the African philanthropy ecosystem.
For more information, click here: https://bit.ly/3CfuMeZ

For enquiries, write to research@wacsi.org
NB: Submissions made will be done for the sole purpose of documenting indigenous praxis on local philanthropy and are therefore not subject to attracting any financial benefits.
Submissions are accepted all year round and will be reviewed and published on WACSI's website in close collaboration with authors.

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