

**THE IMPERATIVE OF INSTITUTION BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT: THE O. B. LULU-BRIGGS FOUNDATION STORY A.
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PREAMBLE:

In our world today and especially in Africa, women and other disadvantaged groups of people face diverse challenges such as lack of access to education, gender inequality, exclusion from nation building decisions, restricted access to funding for their businesses, child marriage, lack of access to quality health care and maternal mortality. Such vulnerabilities among others have set the stage for not for profit organizations to proffer solutions to improve the wellbeing of such groups and bring their challenges from obscurity to the limelight. It is interesting and instructive that frequently, the very people who have been victimized by these socio-cultural inequities are the same ones who have the passion to create organizations that will bring out change.

Not for profit organizations proliferate in Africa and quite a few of them are founded and headed by women. The key is not to set up an organization but to build the organization into a credible, sustainable institution that will become increasingly robust in scope and impact. It is imperative that the passions that usually fuel the start up of not for profit organizations be channeled into making them, well run, scalable and reliable organizations that can endure over the long haul.

When and how does an individual desire or passion translate into an activity? How does the activity become sustained till it requires an organization to focus it? What makes an organization become an institution and how can that institution endure and grow to achieve its goals? This paper will explore these factors and buttress the fact that it is in the building of strong institutions which stand the test of time that creative and lasting solutions can be proved to the socio/political/economic challenges which are Africa wise using the O. B. Lulu-Briggs Foundation as a paradigm.

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

Institution building is a broad organizational concept that encompasses a wide variety of activities that are at the core of ensuring sustainability and structure. These activities include establishing good corporate governance, creating and enforcing workable organizational processes and procedures; strengthening organizations to enable them engage meaningfully with government and regulatory authorities; ensuring that

organizations that are established with great passion and good intentions can survive the test and trials of time and circumstance to keep serving its defined publics. When institutions are weak or frail as is the case in most African States, then the ability of the state to function effectively is compromised. It is necessary to state at this point that institution building is an imperative for every nation that aspires to move from the category of under-developed to a developing or a developed Nation.

To illustrate my thesis, I will focus on four critical pillars that form the bedrock for building a strong institution namely:

- Vision
- Leadership
- Organizational Structure
- Kaizen Principle

2.0 VISION:

Not for profit organizations that have become institutions and withstood the test of time usually start with a burning passion to meet a need or set of needs in the life of mankind. An individual's passion transforms into a corporate vision which then sets the tone for the activities and solutions to be carried out by the organization.

The O. B. Lulu-Briggs Foundation was born out of empathy and compassion when I paid a visit to an aunt of my friend who was resident in Bakana, Rivers State. When we stepped into the home of this elderly lady, we found her unattended to. The roof of her house leaking and rain water was falling freely into her room and on top of her bed. This singular encounter of the brokenness and vulnerability of senior citizens, especially in the rural areas of Nigeria, touched my heart and the seed was sown that germinated into what is now the care For Life programme of the O. B. Lulu-Briggs Foundation.

The Foundation started as a benevolent act of charity precisely 12 years ago at a time which happened to be my birthday. My beloved husband had made plans to give me a lifetime treat, hosting my friends, relatives and associates. After a review of the budget it dawned on me that it was best to share my joy with the feeble, indigent and rejected rather than with those already comfortable with the niceties of life and so the Care For Life programme was born. We started out initially caring for two (2) persons which later extended to five (5) and gradually we increased the number of people we care for. Currently, over 200 elderly people are beneficiaries of this programme that spans across nine (9) communities in Rivers State. Beneficiaries receive a monthly food and beverage package valued at \$200(USD) each and can access quality medical services for routine checkups, every fortnight.

It was very clear to me from the start that what I had begun had to be sustained. For every one person we could reach and help, there were at least 20 more we could not reach. In order to carry out our activities in a structured manner and also increase our reach. From the onset, we ensured we had a duly registered legal entity, with a properly constituted Board of Trustees. This allowed us to engage to be accountable to an overriding group of people. Whose experience and feedback helped keep us on track. Because we are a properly set up organization, we are also able to interact freely with relevant arms of government within and outside Nigeria. It also conferred on us the legitimacy that any true institution requires, for it to be taken seriously.

Let me speak briefly about some of the structures we put in place to ensure the success of our work. Our objective in Care For Life is to ensure every senior enjoys a decent quality of life till such a time as God Almighty calls them home. To help us do this, we worked from the bottom up.

- We conducted a 'census' to identify the senior citizens. We got information like their age, where they resided, who they lived with and we personally visited each person to authenticate their existence and living condition. This provided us with a verifiable data base we could work with.
- We also developed a set of criteria with which we could meaningfully and fairly engage with the senior citizens. For instance, age wise, we consider people who are 65 and above. However, it is also important that these people have no other steady source of income or assistance (like from their children or wards) for them to qualify for our support.
- Availability of funds is also a consideration; so there is always a list of people we can assist pending extra funding for the programme.
- At the same time, we carried out a Needs Assessment exercise to quantify and priorities the most vital needs for this group of people. One thing we have learnt is that human beings always have a laundry list of things they want. It is all right to listen to them but do not give out things based on the funds at your disposal but rather on what you have independently evaluated their actual needs not wants, to be.

3.0 LEADERSHIP:

If institutions are to stand the test of time, the role of leadership is one to be critically examined. Majority of the African women live the myth that 'I cannot lead if I am not at the top'. This thinking may have limited into thinking they must occupy certain positions before they can take the lead in any situation. Realistically, leadership begins from where

you are and in whatever position you find yourself; big or small. As women who are institution builders, the solidity and sustenance of our institution is dependent on our ability to learn to lead from where we are by accepting responsibility for who we are and the people around us. The questions thus unanswered are these, since it is unlikely that many of us will have leadership roles thrust upon us, are we willing to get out of our comfort zones? Are we willing to think outside the box and start doing things differently? Are we willing to see beyond ourselves and begin to formalize what may be occasional acts of benevolence into structured activities that make a difference in the lives of people in our neighbourhood, communities and environs?

Many of us are wives, mothers, sisters.... we play several roles all at once. Some of these roles we play can be limiting especially since we live in a traditionally male dominated society. But the limitation comes only if we allow it. As leaders and potential leaders we must learn to build consensus among our primary constituency-our husbands, our children, our families. We must get their buy in to our organization plans and objectives and continue to garner their support and participation on a consistent basis.

This consensus building skill must be translated into the organizational structure. Why? Typically, not for profit organizations start with the passion and vision of one person. Through strategic leadership methods, this vision must be shared with staff and associates and the passion transferred to those who will carry out the operational activities, as the organization begins to scale up in operations and impact. At the O. B. Lulu-Briggs Foundation, we could not have successfully served over 400 people in nine locations-holistically, every month for 12 years-for just one programme without the ongoing sharing of the original vision and passion. This has helped us build a strong organization, in which my staff can carry out programme activities successfully, even in my absence.

Leadership can in no way be separated from supervision and accountability. As African women leaders, we must continually commit to uphold the values of honesty, integrity and respect for the laws of the land. We must desist from corruption in its entire ramification. In dealing with our constituencies, we must hold ourselves to higher standards of transparency and accountability. As leaders, it is necessary for us to have able aides we can delegate work to. However we must constantly have oversight responsibility for the activities we delegate, as ultimately, the growth, success or failure of the organization lies squarely on our shoulders.

4.0 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE:

Stepping out of mediocrity and organizational failure also entails putting the right structures in place and ensuring the structures work effectively. Structures in this context have a great deal to do with human capital and resources, because you will need to attract the right people with the right attitude to get the job done. In this case, we are talking

about an institution that functions to revolutionize a community, city, nation and continent by causing a multiplier effect. This is obtainable if the structure is characterized by the following:

- Clear definition of organizational goals: what do you want to do? Who do you want to serve? Where do you want to operate? How far do you want to expand your vision? Answering these questions helps focus the mind on expanding the organization's activities, while keeping the original passion, focus and effectiveness intact. Clear goals also bring about co-ordination among functions of different programme areas.
- There must be established standard operating procedures and routines-not ad hoc. Whimsical activities. For your staff and ultimately your organization to be effective, they must know what is expected of them on a daily basis. There should be clear job processes that all staff understand so they know how to act and when to act. Have easy to understand, comprehensive job definitions and reporting structures to determine which individual staff participate in specific activities and decision-making processes.
- You may not have all the staff you require to carry out all activities optimally, but engage sufficient human resources within the organization to accomplish the goals set forth in the organization's annual plan thus eliminating the challenge of missing critical deadlines.

I would like to expound further on the need for clear organizational goals, Recall that in my Foundation, we started off with one programme area which involved caring for the elderly and vulnerable people mainly in the rural areas. Over the years, we reviewed the multitude of their needs and today, the O. B Lulu-Briggs Foundation has been able to expand into six related focal programme fields namely:

- The care for Life Programme
- Free Medical Mission
- Access to Clean Water/Water Purification
- Micro Credit and Entrepreneurship Programme
- Education and Scholarship
- The O. B. Lulu-Briggs Campaign for Christ

There are staff/associates designated for the activities of each programme. There is also a Director of Programmes who ensures that all the Foundation's programmes proceed as optimally as possible. I'll now flesh out the scope of these six focal areas, to give you a better appreciation of how robust these activities have become over time.

4.1 CARE FOR LIFE :

This is the flagship programme of the O. B. Lulu-Briggs Foundation. It was envisioned to bring joy, purpose and meaning to the lives of the elderly people amongst us who are indigent, unattended to and adjudged social outcasts by reason of age and financial cum social standing in our communities.

This initiative also strives to improve the standard of living for the elderly, with services such as paid caregivers, free medication, monthly food distribution and regular social events designed to positively impact their bodies, minds and spirits.

MILESTONES:

- Monthly stipends to elderly beneficiaries.
- Monthly distribution of welfare packages currently valued approximately at \$200(USD).
- Build-A-Home Project: 7 homes have been erected for elderly beneficiaries.
- Build-A-Recreational Centre: A center where the elderly people can visit daily to socialise with their peers has been built and equipped in Abonnema. While 2 centers located in Andoni and Abua/Odual local government areas of Rivers State, are still on-going.
- Repair/renovation of 17 homes has so far been carried out in Abonnema, Ido, Obonnoma, Ilelema, Buguma and Okomoko-all in the rural areas of Rivers State, Nigeria
- Welfare packages; Kitchen utensils, storage cupboard and simple furnishings have been distributed to beneficiaries. Mattresses have been bought for 30 beneficiaries.
- Routine medical care and occupational therapy administration are provided to the elderly.
- Quarterly Free Eye care projects are conducted for them as well.

4.2 FREE MEDICAL MISSIONS:

This started off under the umbrella of the Care of Life Programme but has grown to be an independent programme of its own, distinct from the Care for Life Programme, but under the auspices of the Foundation.

- This programme targets the populace of the Niger Delta region in Nigeria that do not have ready access to quality medical care, especially in the rural communities.
- The Free Medical Mission actually started in my living room, long before the formal establishment of the O. B. Lulu-Briggs Foundation. Because of the enormity and intensity of the programme, it was outsourced to an organization known as “Pro

Health” which was exclusively financed by my husband, to carry out free medical outreaches in designated far flung rural communities.

- After a couple of medical outreaches using the O. B. Lulu-Briggs Foundation as a vehicle.

The Foundation engages the services of qualified volunteer medical personnel for this programme. We have in the past renovated and furnished medical centres and hospitals to meet our standards, in order to utilize these facilities for our programmes. We also have mobile operating theatres which we utilize in communities where there are no established healthcare facilities.

MILESTONES:

- Twenty (20) successful missions have taken place so far across Rivers State, Cross Rivers and Akwa Ibom State, all within the Niger Delta area of Nigeria.
- Our Statistics show that over 82,000 lives have been positively affected by this programme during the period.
- At each Free Medical Mission, we treat an average of 5,000 people over the 5 day period in each location.
- The Free Medical Mission is usually a 5 day programme during which free medical consultation, treatment (including surgery) and dispensing of medication are provided totally free of charge.
- We also carry out free in school de-worming exercises for school children.

4.3 MICRO CREDIT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP:

This programme was created to empower indigent women in rural communities and avail them of financial resources to start small scale trades and business after extensive training in the art of trading and conducting successful business.

It provides interest free revolving loans to organized groups cooperatives and also provides financial intelligence and training to build their business acumen, thus liberating them from perpetual penury.

MILESTONES:

- Sponsored entrepreneurship training programmes for women associations and youth groups;
- Trained and financially equipped individual participants that successfully completed the entrepreneurship training, to give them a head start in their businesses.
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4.4 ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER/WATER PURIFICATION PROGRAMME

The principal aim of this programme is to ensure that rural communities gain access to clean, safe and quality drinking water. It is a programme that targets communities deprived of safe drinking water and is designed as a strategy to combat water related diseases such as cholera, dysentery, intestinal and other worm infestation etc through the use of water treatment filters.

Also, it sensitizes our target communities on the importance of consuming safe water hence the need for proper storage system.

MILESTONES:

- The Foundation has successfully taught over 400 households in Luumene, Khana, Oporoama and Sama – all communities situated in Rivers State Nigeria – how to purify their drinking water.
- 14 Communities in Abua-Odual L.G.A. have learnt the easy and essential method of water purification using the Procter and Gamble purifier sachets (P&G).
- The Foundation procured and presented over four hundred thousand Procter and Gamble water purifier sachets free of charge to these communities.
- Three (3) industrial water pumps were provided for 3 boreholes sunk at strategic locations in Lumene to alleviate the chronic portable water problem in the area.
- The people of Abonnema, Akuku-Toru Local Government Area of Rivers State have also benefitted from a standard borehole with multiple dispensing points, provided by the Foundation.
- In 2013, the Foundation raised the bar higher and in partnership with International Energy Insurance Plc (IEI) provided 3 industrial mono-pumps with water filters for the people of Abalama in Asari Toru Local Government Area in Rivers State as a strategic means of combating water borne diseases.

4.5 EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIP:

This programme field is designed to increase participation in higher education for pupils and students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, particularly students from remote, rural areas.

MILESTONES:

- Scholarship awarded at secondary and tertiary levels
- Law School students - Scholarships have been awarded to over 200 Kalabari Law Students from 2009 – 2012 valued at \$287,558.62 (USD);

- Gave over 100 laptops to beneficiaries of the Kalabari Law Student Scholarship Scheme.
- Built and equipped Science Laboratories for two Secondary Schools in Abonnema, Akuku-Toru Local Government Area, Rivers State
- Built a secondary school in Sama Community in Degema Local Government Area in Rivers State.
- Built Hostel Accommodation for students of the Niger Delta University in Bayelsa State.

4.6 CAMPAIGN FOR CHRIST:

The O. B. Lulu-Briggs Campaign for Christ was launched in 2010. It is an evangelical unit in partnership with the Chapel of God with the divine mandate of winning souls to our Lord Jesus Christ. The Foundation has come to realize that we are only a vehicle to convey the Good News of God's abundant grace to as many people as we can reach

As such, the evangelical group of the Campaign For Christ accompanies all the Free Medical Missions to the selected communities. Preceding the start of the programme, the group organizes crusades in order to sanctify the area and the people for God's use. The idea is to offer healing for the souls even as the medical personnel treat physical ailments.

5.0 ADOPTING THE KAIZEN PRINCIPLE:

It is expedient to say that the Kaizen principle is another priceless pillar that has facilitated the building of strong institutions. One of the reasons why countries like Japan and China are taking over the world economy is because a whole lot of their operations are based on Kaizen. Kaizen means the need for continuous improvement.

It should be noted that the word improvement in this context is quite complex, and can be referred to in terms of cost reduction, re-branding, competitive advantage etc. As women who are also leaders, we should not just be contented with where we are in our various professions of the organizations we run; we should strive to be the best at what we do. We can learn from the Japanese and adopt this principle as a best practice. A typical example of the application of this principle is reflected in what the O. B. Lulu-Briggs Foundation is currently positioned to undertake. Presently, we have formulated various policies and reforms in our Modus Operandi. I am particularly glad to briefly share these reforms with you under the highlight (inculcating the Kaizen Principle) so that we can be more realistic.

5.1 INCUCATING THE KAIZEN PRINCIPLE:

In a bid to extend our frontiers to other regions in Nigeria and Africa particularly, the Foundation has earmarked the following strategic plans that are ongoing in the fulfillment of the Vision that sprouted her establishment.

- Firstly, the registration of O. B. Lulu-Briggs Foundation in the United States of America and the procurement of a Tax Exempt Status from the Internal Revenue Service to make it a 501(c)(3) Non Profit Charitable Organization that can source and receive donations and grants from donors outside of Nigeria.
- Secondly, we are processing registration with some Donor Agencies such as Map International to procure and ship medications and medical supplies from Donor Agencies in a safe and timely manner for the Care for Life Free Medical Mission Programmes.
- Thirdly, we will liaise with the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) to ensure that the medications we procure are up to regulatory standards, fit for consumption and with zero or minimal side effects on patients.
- Fourthly, we intend to implement the WATER IS LIFE STRAW as a short term intervention for communities that have not benefitted from the Foundations' Borehole Project. The Water is Life Straw is a small, portable filtration device that provides pure, clean drinking water whenever it is immersed into a water source. This straw, small as it is, saves lives on a daily basis by filtering out water borne disease. The internal components include membranes, iodized crystals and active carbon, all of which remove the iodine taste and micro-sized bacteria in water.
- Fifthly, we are seeking collaboration and partnership with international Non-profit Organizations that provide affordable housing projects in Africa such as Habitat for Humanity.

At this point, it is crucial to state that the strategies outlined are in no way exhaustive, because our modus operandi is kaizen, and as such is every evolving, constantly researching to develop new products and services that will assist the Foundation in some of its core areas of operations.

CONCLUSION:

Passion is important in starting up any organization, be it for or not for profit. Passion for a cause is what wakes you up every morning and keeps you going despite obstacles you may encounter. It is important that the passion must coalesce into a clear sighted vision, which forms the compass for your activities. The bible says 'My people perish for lack of knowledge'. I cannot overemphasize how vital it is to know and to frame clearly what you will or will not do. To do otherwise is to condemn yourself to a life of

endlessly running after a myriad of attractive looking causes and being effective in none. What drives our passion in the Foundation is the fact that the visioners are Christians and are driven by the ALL Knowing Most Powerful and ever Present Spirit of God, that ensures that we put the best foot forward and we place the better foot subsequently at all times. We are clear-sighted as we focus on our vision, while we broaden the activities we can carry out within our ambit.

For strong institutions to be built, scaled up and sustained, it is equally important to bring in critical stakeholders who share your vision and are willing to help achieve it. Start with the one activity and group of people you most passionate about. Over time, see how these activities can be expanded and build a structure and organization around your activities. As you build up the activities and structures, be careful to establish clear systems, processes and reporting lines that will ensure adequate supervision, communication and authentic feedback.

Learn to benchmark best practices and customize them to work in your environment. Best practices and means are found in the Holy Bible.

Legal formworks help create and sustain strong institutions. When your organization is duly registered, you are operating legally, your books can be audited and you can confidently establish meaningful partnerships with other not for profit agencies, government agencies and also attract the right caliber of volunteers for meaningful engagement.

Finally, be courageous enough to continually review your vision, your operations and your staff. Sustainable institutions that we frequently admire are not built by chance but through deliberate efforts to establish and where necessary, review goals, objectives, processes, operations, programme areas and staff.

Thank you for inviting me to this gathering of learned and eminent women. I sincerely hope these lessons drawn from over a decade of active involvement in the not for profit milieu, will provide useful thought starters and guideposts for you.

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O. B. Lulu-Briggs Foundation