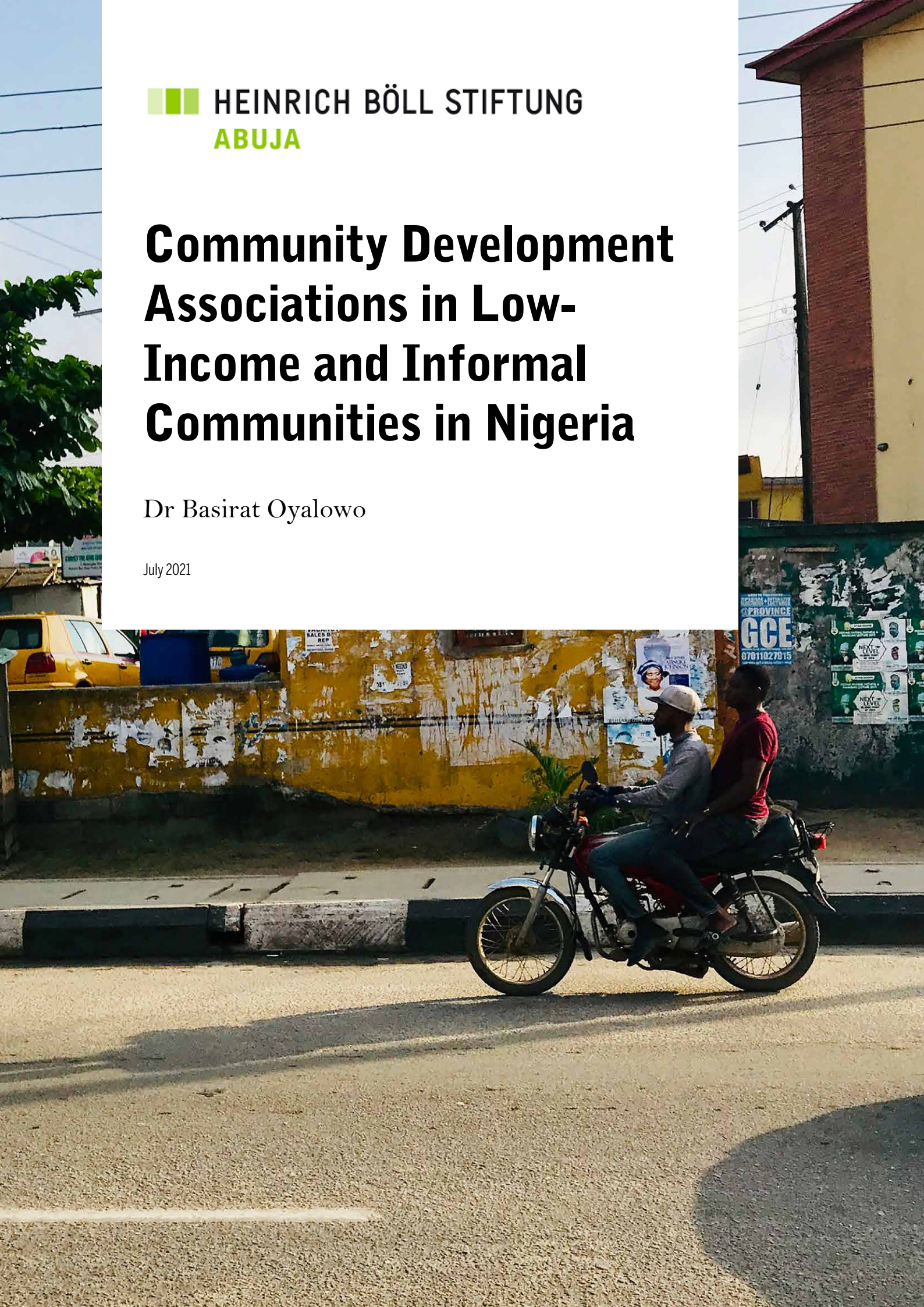


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Community Development Associations in Low-Income and Informal Communities in Nigeria

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Background

The history of Community Development Associations (CDAs) in Nigeria can be traced to pre-colonial times when people came together to address physical and social projects in the community (Muse & Narsiah, 2015; Uko, 2019; Akinsorotan & Olujide, 2006). These included housing construction, road construction, clearing farmlands, and building the Oba's palace, market stalls and even town halls. The involvement of CDAs in community life was also visible during the post-civil war reconstruction era when CDAs embarked on the reconstruction of damaged buildings (Uko, 2019).

CDAs were formally incorporated into development planning in Nigeria in the 1975–80 Third National Development Plan as a means to promote meaningful physical development in villages and towns, to serve as an institutional channel for robust citizen participation in democratic governance and to promote self-help and the development of social capital in each community (Wahab, 1996). The Federal Government mandated all communities to form CDAs, which were domiciled in the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural and Social Development (Muse & Narsiah, 2015).

CDAs have legislative backing at federal and state levels and are included in the local government (LG) framework. For example, the Lagos State government enacted the Community Development Associations Law on 18 February 2008 to provide guidelines for the registration of CDAs in every local government area in the state. The law's 16 sections set out the minimum number of members (not less than 20), the procedures and documentation required for registration, the duties of LGs regarding the CDAs in their jurisdictions, the duties of the anchoring ministry and other such provisions. While the law stipulates for democratically elected representatives into the CDA executives, and also provides guidelines for discontinuance of office by elected members, it does not categorically provide ratios for gender balance. Anecdotal reports reveal that any individual who owns a property (landlords) in the community could stand for elections.

Section 2 of the Lagos State law lists the functions and objectives of CDAs as follows:

- a. promote self-help efforts within the community;
- b. raise funds for the implementation of community projects and activities;
- c. initiate, execute and monitor community development projects;
- d. create awareness about and mobilize residents on their civic duties and community development generally;
- e. ensure peace and security within the community by collaborating with security agencies and government;
- f. monitor and maintain social infrastructure provided by government for the benefit of the community;
- g. promote and encourage compliance with government policies and programmes on community development generally;
- h. collaborate with public and private agencies and non-governmental organizations for the promotion of community development ideals and goals; and
- i. perform such other functions as may be recommended by the Ministry through the Local Government.

Section 3 states that a CDA executive council shall comprise a chairman and two vice-chairmen (*sic*), a secretary and assistant secretary, a treasurer, financial secretary and an auditor, a social secretary, a welfare officer, a public relations officer and three ex officio members.

The Role of CDAs within the Urban Governance System

In practice, however, CDAs have carried out functions such as basic infrastructure provision, maintenance and construction of schools. Uko (2019) cites more than five secondary schools that were built through community efforts and handed to the government in North-Eastern Nigeria. Aliero (2008) shows their relevance in the creation of community banks in Kebbi and Sokoto States, while Akinsorotan and Olujide (2006) acknowledge their role in road maintenance, street lighting, water provision and the construction of community halls in different parts of the country.

CDAs, therefore, draw their legitimacy from being legally recognized bodies with enabling legislation, association by-laws, elected executives and democratic governance, and also from their contribution to local service delivery. They are constitutionally recognized and must be registered by a supervising ministry (for example, the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy in Lagos). If they are registered with the appropriate ministry, they can be regarded as formal stakeholders. However, CDAs are consistently treated as informal stakeholders due to their origins in self-help and the spatial closeness and relational ties between members. This diminishes the perception of CDAs as serious contenders in decision-making processes in the state and relegates them to the lowest rung of involvement, without access to adequate resources to support their activities.

The figure below, which shows the position of CDAs in the governance structure of Lagos state clearly shows that they sit as the grassroots liaison between local government, the people and the traditional council. They provide the LG with inputs such as the community's priority needs, which should then be incorporated into infrastructure planning and budgeting. The LGs should be more proactive in streamlining the activities of CDAs in their jurisdictions and provide adequate supervision, coordination, motivation, monitoring and evaluation of their projects through appropriate government personnel (Akinsorotan & Olujide, 2006).

Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. The LGs, themselves suffering under the stranglehold control of the state government, have come to see the CDAs as competition (Muse & Narsiah, 2015), resulting in power tensions between the two. The impact of this on CDA effectiveness is confirmed by a CDA chairperson interviewed for this report: *"CDAs in Lagos are not working because they are under the local government chairman, and it is what the local government directs them to do that they will do"*.



CDAs in the Governance Structure of Lagos State

Source: Shittu & Musbaudeen (2015)

Internal Governance Structure

CDAs are the epitome of grassroots governance, as membership is associated with residency in a specific neighbourhood or group of streets and the ties between members are quite close. This situation is advantageous as it creates some pressure for executive accountability and transparency.

One of the dynamic features of CDAs is that they can develop their rules and regulations without any interference from external bodies. They plan and execute their programmes (Akinsorotan & Olujide, 2006) and raise funds from both internal and external sources, such as member contributions, donations or grants. This independence, if realized in practice, would give room for little manipulation by the government or its agencies. Because of their dependence on community resources, the CDAs need the full participation of all members in the decision-making process, which requires a democratic approach. In addition, CDAs are guided by by-laws and constitutions that clearly state the processes of accountability and democratic governance. Thus, CDAs tend to be more democratic than other players in the local governance system (Awosika, 2014).

Women's Representation in CDAs

Membership of each community association is expected to comprise all the sons and daughters of each community (Uko, 2019). Typically, CDAs do not discriminate among people, as they are inclusive and welcome all residents in the area (Ogu & Oreofeoluwa, 2014).

However, the representation of women in CDAs is open to question. The participation of women might be limited due to their not being property owners or rent payers. Unfortunately, without composite data on leadership demographics nationally, it is impossible to discern the gender balance. Nevertheless, data from CDA research can provide some indication.

In a study of flood management by the members of the Omologede CDA in Lagos, Ogu and Oreofeoluwa (2014) sampled 66% males and 34% females. In another study, by Akinsorotan and Olujide (2006), CDA members were predominantly male (74% to 26%), married and between 40 and 49 years old. Despite the greater number of men, the researchers observed that both men and women participated in community development activities. It is hard to ascertain whether the imbalance reported in both surveys reflects a lower female population in the CDA membership base or is a result of bias. On the other hand, women are generally preferred for posts such as financial secretary, treasurer, social secretary and vice president. In any case, their eligibility depends on being a 'landlady' (property owner) in the community. This would disenfranchise younger women and any other woman who do not fit this category. These are indications that greater female participation and representation is required in CDA activities.

Filling a Vacuum in the Local Governance Structure

CDAs are meant to support the LGs as mechanisms for mobilizing and integrating the grassroots into the fold of democratic governance in Nigeria in order to facilitate enhanced service delivery and higher quality of life (Awosika, 2014). Key lessons to be learned from the operations of CDAs include the following:



CDAs are meant to support the LGs as mechanisms for mobilizing and integrating the grassroots into the fold of democratic governance in Nigeria in order to facilitate enhanced service delivery and higher quality of life

- *Inclusiveness.* CDAs are open to all residents and welcome all who can volunteer their time and resources for the development of their community. This provides an advantage for inclusive service delivery by any supportive external agency.
- *Mobilization through service delivery.* As grassroots organizations, CDAs rely on the success of past and current projects to provide evidence of their commitment and also to pull other residents into volunteering. This holds lessons for both state and local governments that expect tax compliance from residents but make no provisions for routing resources back to the community in terms of service delivery. Accountability is key here and the practice of demonstrating accomplishment to encourage more commitment is vital for other tiers of government.
- *Project prioritizing and participatory approaches.* The projects embarked upon by CDAs are often decided at meetings and reflect the priorities of the community. Where civil society actors seek to provide intervention projects, they should follow the pathway of CDAs to establish the project's priority and then to ensure that the project delivery is participatory in order to bring about ownership of the project and its sustainability.

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Author's Bio

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