

Chapter 7
The Way Forward

1. Seeking Political Leverage

The Awe opticom is part of the Oyo South Local Government Area. Administratively, therefore, it has no independent existence of its own. Historically and socially, however, it has a cohesion and a will to act together which is not always evident within the artificially created local government unit. Moreover, in terms of rural development, its size and structure are such that make it eminently suitable for exploring the opportunities and problems inherent in the concept of integrated rural development through opticom units of organisation.

The strategy of opticom development is, however, part of the programme of the party in power in Oyo State, of which Awe is a part. Consequently, it is essential that as early as possible the Governor of the State should be informed formally of this effort and his blessings and support sought for its effective implementation. This is vital for many reasons not least of which is to minimise the frustrating interference or ditherings by bureaucrats on any matter for which government support or assistance is required.

Moreover, to give greater visibility and salience to the effort, it may be necessary to consider an appropriate occasion when a formal launching of the opticom could take place. However, in line with the emphasis on accomplishment, it will be advisable that the occasion chosen should be one in which there is some

concrete achievement to show. It may be when the first set of PPU block farms have been prepared and there are tractors and other equipments to show the visitors as well as the feeder roads and improved market. At any rate, the idea is to discount formal occasion of the purely speech-making type.

2. The Institutional Growth Process

Whatever the form in which the Awe opticom comes to be projected to the country at large, it is clear that its strength depends on the attempt to develop a series of institutions based on territorially or spatial defined units of organization, in this case the PPUs and the DAS. The significance of territoriality in this connection is to foster at the grass-roots a strong sense of operational cohesiveness and facilitate easy accountability. These are values which are regarded as critical for initiating development among groups who have had to live in close physical proximity for a long time but with a minimum of social collaboration.

Territoriality by itself, however, provides only an enabling structure. It does not determine or give any direction to the way people will behave. It is this that the various institutions exemplified in the PPU Committees, the Development Area Committees, the Awe Development Corporation and the Egbe Omo Ibile are meant to provide. It is within these institutions that the real strivings for development would be manifested and given concrete shape in the form of specific decisions to act jointly and severally. And it is in the interaction among these various

institutions that the strains and stresses of the development process will be played out, resolved, re-constituted and re-emerge.

What is important to stress, therefore, is the fact that the ideas expressed in the preceding pages, irrespective of their apparent realism and logical consistency, are no more than inert mental abstractions. When they do come alive in the attempt to implement them, they are bound to conflict with various forces in the society which can find no expression in this document. They will be confronted by forces of personal ambitions, individual idiosyncracies, nascent class interests, party political competitiveness and so on. These forces will seek to bend the various institutions one way or the other with consequences which are not easy to predict.

It would be unrealistic to assume that such a confrontation can be avoided. Indeed, even if this is possible, it could be unhealthy for the long-term goal of development. What should therefore be aimed at is how to contain these various forces, reduce their negative potency, identify and use to good effect any positive opportunities they present. This means that the leaders of the Egbe Omo Ibile must be people whose first loyalty is to the advancement of Awe and who are prepared to do everything possible to see that nothing impairs the endeavour of the community as a whole to move towards this goal. As leaders, therefore, their ability to intervene speedily, to forestall or anticipate issues with disruptive potential and to achieve and maintain a high degree

of consensus must always remain uncompromised.

Only in this way can the various institutions on which the development of the Awe opticom itself depends can be expected to grow and gain in robustness. Every crisis at whatever level which is successfully overcome is itself an achievement in development. Such crisis or its successful resolution should not be kept secret. When the heat and stresses generated have cooled down, it should be carefully reviewed, maybe at the level of the Egbe or the Awe Development Corporation, and the lessons to be learnt from it identified, digested and stored away to guide and inform future action and decisions.

The critical element in the process of institutional growth is what is being highlighted here. It should, however, not be allowed to obscure the routine or mundane element in that process. This is the generation and storage of information for improved decision making. Much has been said about this in various sections of this plan, but the vital importance of statistical data and other type of information about events at all levels of the opticom can never be overstated.

The Awe Development Corporation must devise a system of periodic reporting which would enable it to appreciate at a glance what is happening everywhere in the opticom. The responsibility for collecting such information and forwarding it

to the appropriate quarters must be squarely placed on the shoulders of specific individuals. Again, some firmness or sanction is required against any infraction of the routine of collecting and forwarding to prevent a slackness which may give the impression that such information activities are of peripheral importance.

Indeed, it is worth stressing how central such information are for decision-taking. Nigeria's development has been compromised and distorted by the increasing indifference to data collection manifested by various agencies of government. Maybe, the excessively easy access to financial resources that have characterised the country in the last two decades may blur the deleterious effect of this state of affairs at the level of a national government. Such indifference will be catastrophic for a small opticom and will certainly impair the effectiveness of most decisions or actions.

3. Dynamics of Spatial - Institutional Interaction

Once the various institutions begin to function and to achieve results, changes will begin to be noticed in the span of spatial interaction within the opticom. Improved feeder roads will make contacts faster, and more frequent; greater frequency and ease of contacts would reduce the need for many intermediate stopping points; and increased per capita income will start to influence the range of goods and services being demanded.

All of these changes would have impact on the continued viability of some of the PPU's and even of development areas and their agro-service centres. When this begins to happen, then it will be time to review the current territorial structure and adjust them for greater effectiveness. Such adjustment may involve a re-allocation of functions as between agro-service centres or even a merger of PPU's or of development areas. It could necessitate expansion of farmers and a re-alignment of feeder roads.

In short, the dynamics of opticom development entails the logic of continual or periodic change. There is no permanency about the present structure. It is only a means to incubate a development process within a given area. Just as strains and stresses emerge within institutions in the course of that process, so do they manifest themselves in the interaction between the spatial forms and the social functions these are meant to serve. Again, a timely strategy for resolving such conflicts become of the essence of successfully managing the opticom.

To conclude, the development of the Awe opticom is a new and challenging episode in the history of rural development in Nigeria. It is an act of faith and a hopeful commitment to the belief that a determined people can by their own effort change the depressing and demeaning circumstances of their lives.

It is in that hope that this brief outline of a development plan is being presented to the Egbe Omo Ibile Awe. The plan is imperfect in many respects. This in itself is deliberate. The expectation is that successive progress reports on its implementation will provide the data and information necessary to remove its many inadequacies and imperfections and make it a model for succeeding attempts by people in other parts of this country to chart out the path to their own social and economic development.

