

# **OD and Indigenous Church in Africa**

## **Change in the Organization of African Instituted Churches**

Rev Nicta Lubaale

OD can be easily misunderstood by churches in Africa. Some see OD as rooted in secular western management values that exclude the Christian faith. Others equate OD with redundancies. In contrast, many African Instituted Churches (AICs) take a very spiritual approach to organisational change, concentrating on prayer, reading of scriptures and repentance. This provides a rich resource. But it can also raise barriers to change when church leadership use the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures to block movement. Facilitating change processes in such environments requires a clear understanding of the resourcefulness and short-comings in the way people relate faith to organisational change.

This example of a major change process in OAIC shows how necessary it is to work on issues of leadership, governance and strategy. It also shows how important it is to take a political, emotional and spiritual approach to change. African Instituted Churches can benefit from African, Christian OD.

### **A vast network**

The OAIC (Organization of African Instituted Churches) is an association of indigenous, independent churches in Africa. These churches have been flourishing since the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with their emphasis on being distinctly African in both character and theology. There are now more than 60 million members throughout the continent. The OAIC was founded in 1978 to bring African Instituted Churches together in fellowship to share their concerns and hopes, working with them to enable them to minister more effectively in a rapidly changing environment. The OAIC has a huge network of over 1000 member churches.

### **Cracks appear**

But as OAIC grew over the years, its strategy, systems and structures had not adapted. By 2005 there were tensions in trying to be relevant in the contemporary environment. Programmes were growing as individual projects got funding, but there was no unifying framework. OAIC was scattered with different projects taking OAIC in different directions without a cohesive long term strategy.

This was exacerbated by leadership and governance issues. The Secretariat in Nairobi was making most of the decisions with little involvement of the governance structures. However, as the General Secretary who was in office was coming to the end of his second term in office in 2005, there was a window of opportunity for change and he was willing to give leadership to a process that resulted in the ongoing OD process. But how could this be done?

### **Looking at ourselves**

OAIC started by reviewing two of its major programmes to find out what they were doing, how it was going and what difference it was making. This process enabled us to recognise our successes as well as what our members were dissatisfied with. But we also realised that the issues were not just programmatic. They had to do with the whole organisation.

OAIC approached CORAT Africa, a Pan African Christian Leadership Development Organization, to help them through a process of 'Looking at the Future' (avoiding the misunderstood term OD). According to Rev Lubaale: "We had sent people to CORAT training in the past and had been satisfied. We persuaded two of our donors to fund it. After meetings to clarify expectations we agreed a simple Terms of Reference and workplan in October 2005".

CORAT reviewed all our documents; did semi-structured interviews with our directors; facilitated a meeting with all staff and senior management (one of the most uncomfortable moments in the whole process!). CORAT then sent out a questionnaire to stakeholders and scholars across Africa (who had related to the OAIC) to elicit the perceptions from our grassroots. They also facilitated four focus group discussions with our members at congregational level in Kenya and Uganda. CORAT then analysed everything and gave feedback to senior management of what they were hearing. This five-day workshop involved our Executive Committee, the OAIC management, as well as women and youth leaders from all over the continent.

We found that there were a number of successes we should celebrate, but also that there were areas of disappointment. We used these findings to look to the future and develop a five year strategy which we named: 'Visions for a Better World'. We used the plural 'visions' advisedly. We realised that OAIC churches had multiple visions - each member church has its own vision and it is these visions which motivate them to work in difficult circumstances at the margins of society. Our role as OAIC was to develop a strategic frame work which engages with the member churches' visions.

### **How did this help?**

This process helped OAIC in a number of ways:

- This framework gave us better direction, not just for the secretariat, but for the whole movement across the continent.
- It helped clarify our identity, what we bring to church and society.
- It enabled us to grapple with issues of leadership. Governance took back the role they had abdicated. They are now clearly in charge. We also set up a clear professional process to select the new General Secretary and management posts (not just rely on election).
- By looking comprehensively at the whole organisation, issues became less individualised.
- People started talking about 'we', not 'they'

### **On-going Accompaniment**

But this was just a start. As we looked to implement the strategic changes we planned, we realised we could do with CORAT's on-going support. After their initial contract ended, we realised we took our foot off the accelerator and let things slip back. We asked them to accompany us on our journey.

For two years their support was quite intense, particularly in restructuring in 2007 to align with our strategy. We realised that our structure had not changed in 30 years! This meant developing job-descriptions, retrenching staff and shifting to

one-year short-term contracts. But as we have gradually implemented the changes, CORAT has been able to step back and let us move on our own. Now they just regularly ask how things are going. This does not mean that we are not still grappling with major issues, but the nature of their OD support has changed.

### **Courage and Finance – big areas for improvement**

We learnt so much about ourselves through the process. Before we started we thought we were slightly unwell. We soon realised we were really quite sick. We should have addressed this much earlier.

We did not realise how pivotal the Finance Manager role was. We did not prioritise change in this area and this delay meant we continued to suffer from a poor financial management culture for many years.

We also delayed some agreed retirements. Performance was affected as people spent more time thinking about their future rather than the future of the organisation.

We did not realise how much this transition process would cost. With the staff changes involved our liabilities were heavy. We needed advice on budgeting for transition. There was a high emotional cost too. Transition brought grief and anger which we tried to deal with through communication, counselling and taking care of the most vulnerable. We found that leaders pay a heavy emotional price in taking such difficult decisions. They need pastoral support outside the organisation to cope with the burden of leadership during times of change.

The process of change also affects relationships with external partners of the organisation. Managing the internal and external processes can be a challenge and it sometimes results in disappointing the partners.

### **Taking a Political, Emotional and Spiritual Approach**

This change process was highly political. It required full support from the powers that be at the top. It was essential that CORAT had access to our governance. But as well as governance, middle-managers had to be convinced that change was inevitable and also essential. In the early stages, they almost derailed the process. They misinformed some employees causing the threat of court cases. Middle-managers were brought on board through a process of listening, opening up the General Secretary's office, senior management and also giving staff access to CORAT to discuss the proposed changes. This shows how change was also a profoundly emotional process. To deal with the trauma of change, CORAT recommended a counsellor who led a two-day counselling process which all but three staff attended.

But perhaps most importantly we realised that organisational change is a spiritual process. The visioning exercise was primarily an exercise in listening to the Holy Spirit. We asked ourselves: What is God doing in our churches? Where is the Spirit moving us to? Who is God calling to do what? What is God calling the AICs to do today? What is the new role of the OAIC in supporting the AICs to fulfil their calling?

It was also founded on prayer. Since the change process started, we revived our prayer meetings. For the last four years we have met every Friday – something which we believe has been a key part of the renewal of the organisation.

### **African, Christian OD**

We know we are still not there yet. We continue to struggle. But if we look back five years, we can see how far we have come. The OD process has made an incredible difference. We see that African Instituted Churches can benefit from an approach to OD that appreciates the cultural and theological differences. African churches need African, Christian OD.