

# **THE INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP IN FARMERS' ASSOCIATION FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN OJU**

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## **Abstract**

*This study was conducted in Oju II federal constituency, agricultural Zone to determine the influence of the leadership in farmers' association for enhanced agricultural activities in Oju local government area of Benue state. Good leadership is necessary to enhance Agricultural Associations for self-help groups through attendance to meetings, regularity in the payment of dues and participation in farmers' association activities. Farmers' associations are ubiquitous, yet the level of production among farmers is still inadequate. The paper also found some limiting factors that typically affect leadership to include the challenges of inspiring others or motivating others to ensure satisfaction of a goal, developing leadership style and finding true mentor and keeping people informed as a leadership. The study shows that farmers associations hold leadership a high potential as catalysts of farmers' activities to achieve their objectives. All the population of 120 registered farmers associations were used for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a twenty item questionnaire. Data collected were subjected to statistical analysis by using simple percentages. Leaderships were rated low in qualities of leaders and were found to be fairly effective.*

## **Introduction**

Leadership according to Deckor & Nnodim (2005) is the process whereby an individual directs, guides, influences or controls the thoughts of other members in a social system . The concept of leadership has been steadily increasing among scholars, public and private organizations, and managers since late 20th century

(Shriberg et al.2005). Agbarevo and Obinne (2010) described leaders in a group as those who command and guide. However, a leader is credited with both the successes and failures of a group. Armstrong (2006) also stated that "one or more group members, at various times can be identified as a leader according to some observable difference between the person(s) and other members, who are referred to as "followers" or "subordinates". Some authors defined leader according to the term "leadership". . Ofuoku, Uzokwe, and Ideh (2008) stated that, "A leader is anyone whose ideas are helping to give direction towards the common goals of the group”.

An individual is a leader in any social situation in which his ideas and actions influence the thoughts and behavior of others." Oplento (2012) viewed leader in term of "leadership" as distinct from "fellowship" as: "The person who has the most influence in the group and who carries out most of the leadership functions is designated the leader. Other members are followers, even though some may be leaders of subgroups, or may assist the primary leader in carrying out leadership functions. Understanding the other members of the group is one of the first steps in becoming an effective leader

House (1999) defined leadership as the “ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the organization and. Barry (2006) is of the view that leadership occurs only when people are influenced to do what is ethical and beneficial for the organization and themselves. It is all attempts to influence the attitudes and behavior of follower in and organizational context. It is the process whereby an individual directs, guides, influences or controls the thoughts of other members in a social system.

Iwala, Okwulola and Imoudu (2012 ) opined that the Influence of leadership in farmers association, and in the field of agricultural extension, has a critical strategic importance since it deals with developing groups of farmers in the community, according to their views ‘Leader serves as an administrator and coordinator for formulating, developing, implementing and evaluating agricultural programmes as well as developing farmers in managing resources in the rural areas’. Radhakrishna et al. (1994) emphasizes that the leadership role of farmers association has become an increasingly critical element in the successful performance of agricultural activities. Dubrin (2007) describes leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.

Havelock (1973) identified four leadership functions that enhanced farmers' activities, namely, as catalyst, solution giver, process helper and resource linker. This means that leaders of farmers association in rural areas should raise the awareness of farmers, form functional farmers Association and make decision for solution together with farmers

Farmer associations are widely recognized as a positive force for rural activities in Nigeria. Getting together with others allows men and women farmers to better cope with risk, Farmers' associations are a strong ground upon which farmers can articulate their views, access technologies and information, and make necessary recommendations. Active participation of farmers association in agriculture and commensurate access to productive resources and information has been cited as a key ingredient in increasing agricultural productivity. Leadership of such groups is a thus great step towards their empowerment and could be a key towards better outputs. Creating opportunities and eliminating barriers to enhance participation in leadership is thus inevitable.

Shriberg & Kumari (2005) stipulated that farmers' associations are instrumental social groups. These are groups that are formed to accomplish specified objectives. Farmers in general take membership of these kinds of groups because they can use such membership to accomplish goals that are related to their farming business. Terziovski & Dean (1998) emphasized that in farmers' associations; the leader elicits and encourages the members to harness their financial resources for use by members. Vroom (1995) observed that belonging to such group serves many functions to the individual members. Through farmers association, individuals satisfy their want, such as access to extension service, direct marketing of produce, price determination, access to inputs at cheap price, access to credit and exchange of ideas/experiences; though, access to credit constitutes the major reason.

Viswesvaran (2001) observed that farmers associations' have leaders who drive the leadership process. The leaders are required to have the ability to be empathic, emotionally stable, selfless, and loyal to group ideals and goals.

The influences required of rural leaders are a critically important matter. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) stated that knowledge, skills and abilities are the important human characteristics needed for carrying out task activities. Seevers et al. (1997) reported that in 1993, the Personnel and Organization Committee of the Extension identified 16 core competency areas that leaders should possess. The core

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competency areas include: applied research, change management, communication and human relations, computer operation and software, conflict resolution, cooperative extension system, educational programming (program development), evaluation and accountability, instructional development and learning, marketing and public relations, organizational development; personal organization and management; professional and career development; public policy education; human resource development and management; and strategic planning. These core competencies were found useful in leadership to shape the farmers association members' behaviour as a leader.

Cunningham (1996) described the leader's behaviour in the context of initiating structure and consideration appears to be most useful to extension workers. Initiating structure refers to getting the job done. It reflects behaviour which emphasizes the quality of work, clarifies everyone's responsibilities, offers new approaches to problem solving and encourages decision making through groups.

Moreover, consideration reflects concern for individuals in a group and their feelings. This refers to the need that extension workers should find time to listen to others, show interests in others as persons and compliment others for their work. Influence of Leadership assessment by the members can be measured by the extent to which the leaders achieve the group goals such as access to credit, extension service, cheap input, exchange of ideas and experiences as perceived by the members of the group ( Ofuoku, Enaikele, and Nnodim 2008 }

Leaders can implement policies and procedures that influence the team structure and capabilities such as skills and creating access to credit, organizing group for price determination and direct sale of produce to consumers.

Generally the performance of the members can be poor if they do not attend meetings regularly, if leadership performance is considered as being generally ineffective. The implication for leadership delivery service is that regular training should be organized for leadership of associations'. It is therefore necessary that such training should include democratic fixation of days and time for meetings as it is in the constitution of the association. Leaders should employ ways to access cheap inputs. Collective price determination needs to be done and the need to sell produce directly to consumers should be addressed. Motivation, cohesiveness, resources and the level of coordination and interdependency of tasks in relation to other units in the organization'' As Agbarevo and Obinne (2010).explained that the performance of the group is an

index of leadership effectiveness. This implies that if a group's performance is poor, then the leadership of such group is not effective.

There are indicators of association performance in farmers' groups. These include frequency of attendance to meetings, regularity of payment of dues, frequency of participation in group activities and amount of credit accessed. These criteria were used by [Radhakrishna et al. (1994)] and were recommended for use. Good leadership in any farmers' association may enhance skills and abilities of members to improve performance and successes. In Nigeria, influence of leadership on agricultural activities has been criticized for not being able to perform the necessary change in the rural community, especially the rural and resource poor. Extension was also criticized for inefficiency and in some cases for irrelevancy (Sallam and Akram, 2005). Realizing this situation therefore it is very critical to know the leadership competencies in farmers association and how do these competencies influence their performance. (Dinar and Keynan, 1998).

The importance of the leadership skills has become widely acknowledged as explanations of personnel and organizational performance in the various employment sectors. In the context of agricultural organization, skilled influential leaders are needed to coordinate human, capital and material resources required to accomplish the goals of agricultural activities. The influence required of rural leaders are a critically important matter. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) stated that knowledge, skills and abilities are the important human characteristics needed for carrying out task activities.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to identify the influence of leadership in farmers' association for enhanced rural agricultural activities in Oju local government area. Specifically the study aims to

- 1, Determine the influence of leadership in farmers association
- 2 Determine the extent of group performance in farmers' associations.
- 4 Determine the challenges which leadership of farmers association face
- 5t Proffer solutions to leadership challenges

### **Research questions**

Based on the purpose of study the following research questions were drawn

1. What are the influences of leadership in farmers association?

2. what are the extent of group performance in farmers association
3. What are the challenges of leadership in farmers association?
4. What are the solutions to leadership challenges?

## **Methodologies**

### **Area of the study**

The study was carried out in Okpokpo council ward Of Oju Local government area of Benue State, Nigeria. The area is comprised of six villages; Ebenta, Igwe, Igwoke, Igbegi, Ikori and Owori Obotu respectively,

The area is surrounded by mountain stressing from Andilla to Ohuma Uwokwu. It is blessed with fresh river water resources, forest resources and fertile soil for arable farming. The people are predominantly farmers who are into arable and tree crops farming, livestock farming and hunting.

### **Population**

The population of the study is all the 120 registered active cooperative farmers. Associations of the six villages in Okpokpo council ward of Oju Local Government area {BNARDA, 2013}

### **Sampling Techniques**

The entire population of 120 registered active cooperative farmers association was used for the study.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument used for the study was a twenty item questionnaire, developed and used to collect data.

### **Validation**

Instruments used for this study were subjected to validity test which cover face, content, criterion and construct validity. This was done by senior colleagues.

### **Reliability test**

Data collected from the trail testing was subjected to reliability test using cronbach alpha. The analyzed cronbach alpha coefficient is .723 (see appendix} which an indication that the instrument is reliable (Julie and Perderson, 2004).

### **Method of data analysis**

Data were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics. Precisely percentages (%) where;

$$NR \setminus NQ \times 100 / I$$

NR- Number of respondent

NQ - number of Questionnaires

## **RESULTS PRESENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Percentage performance; Influence of Leadership on farmers association**

**Research question one:** What are the influences of leadership in farmers association?

**Table 1: Influences of leadership on farmers' association**

S/No	Question	Yes	No	%Yes	%No	Frequency
1	Leadership of farmers associations is emphatic and emotionally stable.	90	30	75	25	120
2	A good leader promotes culture of cohesion and collaboration among farmers	90	30	75	25	120
3	A good leader will encourage, motivate and lead by example	80	40	66.66	33.33	120
4	True leader tend to be visionary, ability to look ahead	75	45	62..2	37..5	120
5	Good leaders make great mentor	85	35	70.83	29.16	120

**Research question 2:** What are the extents of group performances in farmers' association?

**Table 2: Extents of group performances in farmers associations'**

	Items	YES	NO	%YES	%NO	Frequency
6	Members were not effective in regular famers' associations meeting	90	30	75	25	120
7	Farmers' are willingness to participate in work and training session on a timely basis, e.g. no absence without good excuse and or reports for work late,	59	69	49.17	57.5	120
8	Members pay their dues and levy promptly	40	80	33.33	66.67	120
9	Farmers' groups are instrumental social groups. These are groups that are formed to accomplish specified objectives	78	42	65	45	120
10	Members do not complete assignment on time and with full commitment.	70	50	58.33	41.66	120

**Research question three:** What are the challenges of leadership in farmers association?

**Table three: Challenges of leadership in farmers association**

	Questions	Yes	No	%yes	%no	Frequency
11	Some members of farmers association in your group are difficult	88	32	73.33		120
12	There is challenge of inspiring others or motivating others to ensure satisfaction of a goal	76	44	63.33	36.66	120
13	The challenge of developing others , including mentoring and coaching is not a challenge	40	80	33.33	36.66	120
15	The challenge of managing, mobilizing, understanding and leading a change is common factor affecting leadership	95	25	79.166	20.83	120
15	The challenge of managing relationships, politics and image with senior managers or stakeholder is not helpful	25	95	79.166	20.83	120

**Research question four:** What are the solutions to leadership challenges?

**Table 4: Solution to Leadership challenges**

	Question	Yes	No	%yes	%no	Frequency
16	Developing leadership style, and finding a true mentor is not a leadership problem	20	100	16.66	83.33	120
17	Learning from experience is a best solution to leadership challenge	79	41	34.166		120
18	To have a compelling vision in a leadership is solution	88	32	73.33	26.66	120
19	Motivating yourself is not a solution	47	73	39.166	60.83	120
20	Keeping people informed is a leadership solution challenges	74	46	61.66	38.33	120



## **Discussion of Findings**

The findings from table 1 item one with 90% of yes and 30 % no indicates that the leadership of farmers' groups association should be empathic and emotionally stable, other influences includes promotion of culture of cohesion and collaboration among farmers . That a good leader encourages, motivates and leads by examples as indicated by (Dubrin (2007). Item 4 and 5 with 62.2% and 70% revealed that leaders should be visionary and great mentors as opined by Armstrong (2006)

Findings from Table 2 on the extents of group performances in farmers associations' indicates that members were not effective in regular famers' associations meeting as observed by Ashton (1996). Item 2 with 49% and 17% indicates that farmers are willing to participate in work and training session on a timely basis i.e. no absence without good excuse and or report for work late, due to influences of good leadership as s. Items 6 and 7 with 65% 53.33% indicates that members do not pay their regular dues and levy as at when due and that some members complete assignment on time with full commitment as supported by (Linder, 2001)

Finding from Table 3 on the challenges of leadership in farmers association with 73.33% and 63.33% indicates that some members of farmers associations are difficult and that there are challenges of inspiring members or motivating association members to ensure satisfaction of a goal. This was in support with Bindlish & Evenson, (1993). Item 13 with 80% also indicates that there were the challenges of developing P members including mentorship and coaching as asserted by Allen, (2003).

Findings on table 4 on the solutions to leadership challenges, with 83.33% indicates that developing leadership style, and finding a true mentor is a leadership problem. Item 17 and 18 indicates that learning from past experience and to have a compelling vision; self motivation and keeping members informed are leadership solutions as observed by Shriberg and Kumari (2005).

## **Conclusion**

The empirical evidence gathered so far about the influence of leadership on farmers' association activities shows that these farmers associations hold leadership a high potential as catalysts of farmers' activities to achieve their objectives. A good leader promotes culture of cohesion and collaboration among farmers, A good leader will encourage, motivate and lead by example.

However, this paper also found some limiting factors that typically affect leadership to include, the challenges that members were not effective in regular farmers' associations meeting. There is also the challenge of inspiring others or motivating others to ensure satisfaction of a goal. Developing leadership style, and finding a true mentor is a leadership problem and keeping people informed as a leadership solution.

### **Recommendations**

In this regard, the following recommendations can be taken for policy considerations.

- (1) Training sessions and a formation program on alternative leadership which incorporates good leadership qualities and traits should be implemented by Federal Governments with both women and men leaders as participants.
- (2) The leadership program should be a systematic re-programming of the culture and mind set of the person such groups grow to be more and more of a gender-sensitive leadership to transform structures and systems. Conduct capacity building and training programs that put farmers' association leaders at the center.
- (3) Farmers' association leaders need access to the latest technological information regarding agriculture, production and coping with climate change, as well as information technologies to access this information. They need to acquire entrepreneurial and marketing skills; confidence building; leadership skills; and the ability to negotiate and discuss with authorities.
- (4) They also need to understand the policy issues that affect them as farmers.

The study was limited by lack of information on farmers' associations' leaders' characteristics.

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