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## THE APPROPRIATENESS OF TRIBAL LEADER INVOLVEMENT IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

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*This study examines the appropriateness of the involvement of tribal leaders by investigating the influence of tribal leaders on agricultural development. Contrary to popular opinion and other findings on this often controversial subject, the findings indicate that tribal leaders, namely chiefs and tinduna, can potentially make a significant contribution to agricultural development. Supportive evidence is based on significant relationships between the level of agricultural development and tribal leaders' needs and perception, their credibility, and particularly their involvement. This influence, although less than that of the front-line extension workers, should be exploited once follow-up research has been conducted into the relevance of these findings in other parts of the country and under changing political and sociocultural circumstances.*

### 1. Introduction and background

Traditional African institutions have often been regarded as barriers to economic development and modernization (La-Anyane, 1984:33; Green, 1986:179).

Whether and to what extent this is the case, was the prime concern of this study, conducted in Swaziland where traditional law and custom appears to be stronger than in other southern African countries. Swaziland is one of three monarchies remaining in Africa. A feature of its political structure is its parallelism between modern westernized concepts of government and the traditional tribal system. The Kingdom of Swaziland is divided into 198 chiefdoms, for each of which a chief is in charge, assisted by deputies (induna/tinduna) and his councils. The chief has the power to control his subjects, to authorize land-use and to maintain law and order.

Although development can be regarded as a process involving a shift from traditional methods of production to new, science-based methods that include new technological components (Swanson, 1984), technology is but one facet of it. The socio-cultural environment that permits technologies to be created and innovated and the people who create or accept and apply these technologies to production are the central factors in development (Anthony, *et al.*, 1979). Efforts to induce change are often in conflict with existing ideas and customs. Moreover, change involves risks, particularly for the poor who have little margin to take chances.

Leadership and the leadership patterns are regarded to be important virtues when presenting new ideas to any local culture (Ahrensberg & Niehoff, 1974:136). Leaders have vested interests in their positions, but are capable of influencing opinions. The lack of cooperation by leaders can therefore be expected to be as harmful to a project's success as their open opposition. Howard (1984:42-43) supports this view in noting that community leaders give legitimization to programmes. Without their support it is very difficult, if not impossible, to mobilize the community effectively. Howard (1984) also suggests that people are more likely to accept and support programmes of change and to accept greater change when they have been given the opportunity to participate, and the earlier the participation, the less likely is there to be organized opposition to the programme. In addition, Howard & Baker (1984) point out that the African agronomy must be regarded as a communal or semi-communal effort

rather than an individual one, and that this ties in very closely with the pattern of authority in the community. The individual is merely a member of a group and his/her behaviour is largely determined by group norms on a prescriptive basis, rather than by personal drive or initiative.

### 2. Research method

In testing the hypothesis concerning the influence of tribal leaders' involvement on agricultural development, a stratified sample, based on the level of agricultural inputs and representing twelve percent of the 198 chiefdoms in Swaziland, was used. The 23 chiefs, 23 tinduna, and 23 front-line extension workers (FEWs) were interviewed, using a structured interview schedule.

Lacking generally accepted and readily available measures of agricultural development, an agricultural development index was calculated using various development indicators. These indicators, their national average as well as their value or weight allocated to them by a panel of experts are shown in Table 1.

Other indicators of agricultural development employed, but later discarded because of inconsequential and illogical correlations, were the percentage homesteads with savings, the number of cattle per homestead and a rating of the status of agricultural development by senior extension workers.

### 3. Findings and discussion

#### 3.1 The needs and perceptions of tribal leaders

Needs and perceptions can, as mediating variables, be expected to play an important role in leader involvement and consequently on development. Table 2 summarizes some of these influences. From the above it can be concluded that tribal leaders in the more developed areas tend to rate the priority of agricultural development higher, as well as the present and the envisaged future development level. They tend to be more outspoken concerning the necessity for more fencing, but are less concerned about arable land and grazing scarcity and are even more satisfied with the existing land tenure system. This could be an indication that leaders in the more developed chiefdoms are less inclined to find fault with and blame others, but rather to accept self-responsibility for the development.

**Table 1: The national average and weighting of various development indicators used in calculating a development index**

Development Indicators	National average <sup>1)</sup>	Weight <sup>2)</sup> (%)
1. % homesteads self-sufficient in maize production	35.04	20
2. % homesteads undertaking cash crop production	19.36	15
3. Ratio of homesteads per tractor	21.84	5
4. % homesteads using fertilizer	31.31	15
5. % homesteads using irrigation	8.83	15
6. % homesteads using extension service	20.82	10
7. % homesteads with car accessibility	75.29	10
8. Number of cattle per homestead	9.09	5
9. Number of pigs per homestead	0.36	5
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>100</b>

<sup>1)</sup> Extracted from Swaziland Agricultural Census, 1983-1984

<sup>2)</sup> The weighting of various development indicators was developed in consultation with the agricultural specialists in the Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives of Swaziland.

**Table 2: Correlations between agricultural development and tribal chiefs' and tindunas' needs and perceptions**

Needs and Perceptions	Chiefs (r)	Tinduna (r)
1. Priority of agriculture	0.25	0.38*
2. Present agricultural development situation	0.50**	0.48**
3. Future agricultural development situation	0.33	0.42**
4. Tractor necessity	-0.18	-0.12
5. Fencing necessity	0.52***	0.15
6. Irrigation scheme necessity	-0.02	0.17
7. Necessity for farm storage facilities	0.02	0.38*
8. Need for education	-0.26	0.08
9. Need for transport	-0.13	0.27
10. Arable land scarcity	0.03	-0.53**
11. Grazing land scarcity	-0.06	-0.54**
12. Satisfaction with land tenure	0.52**	0.16

\*  $p < 0.10$  \*\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

No evidence suggests that the influence of the more influential tribal leaders can be attributed to a more progressive view or attitude. Even as far as the parameters employed for land allocation is concerned, there is consensus regarding the order of priority, viz. (i) land availability, (ii) size of the family, (iii) equity among the homesteads, (iv) previous performance and (v) social status.

### 3.2 Credibility of tribal leaders

Various aspects or parameters of credibility were investigated and their influence on the agricultural development index analyzed (Table 3).

These results reveal how several parameters of tribal leaders' credibility accounted for 22.4 percent of the total variation of the agricultural development index. This is significant, but needs to be seen in perspective. In the case of front-line extension workers (FEWs) the credibility accounted for 48.83 percent of the total variation in the agricultural development index. It appears therefore that the credibility of tribal leaders, although important, is not as consequential as that of the FEWs as far as agricultural development is concerned.

On the other hand, these findings cannot be regarded as conclusive, as, due to resource limitations during the survey, it was not possible to include a representative sample of subjects (farmers) in the survey. It is, after

all, their perceptions that are decisive in assessing credibility.

### 3.3 The involvement of tribal leaders

A number of variables associated with tribal leaders' involvement and input are positively correlated with agricultural development, at least as far as the agricultural development index is concerned (Table 4).

These findings suggest that the tribal leaders in areas with a higher level of agricultural development tend to be more involved in rural development programmes, and spend more time on agricultural issues. This does not imply that they neglect their tribal duties. On the contrary, they also spend more time on tribal issues, but less time on pursuing their own profession. They are, therefore, not only committed to issues of a purely tribal nature. The larger number of projects approved could also be seen as an indication of the tribal leaders' involvement and interest. Tribal leaders' involvement in agricultural development does not appear to jeopardize their authority.

The opposite seems the case according to the opinions of all respondents, particularly those in the chiefdoms with a higher agricultural development index. In fact the rating of the present strength of the tribal authority by senior extension staff is positively related to the agricultural development index.

**Table 3: Stepwise regression of certain credibility parameters of tribal leaders and the agricultural development index**

Credibility Factors	R <sup>2</sup> (%)	Coeff.	t-value
1 Strength of tribal authority (SEO rating)	8.08	0.157	2.228**
2 Frequency of court charges against tribal authority	13.60	-0.312	-2.211**
3 Perception scores of chief's esteem by FEW <sup>1</sup> and SEO <sup>2</sup>	17.23	0.143	0.7000
4 Proportion of people having confidence in tinduna	21.08	-0.739	-2.497***
5 Proportion of people having confidence in chiefs	22.41	0.402	1.1440

<sup>1</sup> FEW = Front-line Extension worker; <sup>2</sup> SEO = Senior Extension Officer

**Table 4: Stepwise regression of tribal leaders' involvement and various indicators of agricultural development**

Independent Variables	R <sup>2</sup> (%)	Regr. Coeff.	t
1. % time devoted to agricultural issues	24.61	0.042	1.66
2. Involvement in rural development programmes	41.14	0.540	3.61***
3. Decision stability concerning community matters	44.98	-1.109	2.53***
4. Max. time needed for fulfilling tribal duties	48.08	0.054	2.19
5. Decision stability : serious traditional offenses	50.67	0.610	2.36**
6. Number of tinduna per chiefdom	52.37	-0.372	3.24**
7. Motivation of subordinates : project implementation	55.07	0.655	2.20**
8. No. of projects approved by tribal authority	59.26	-1.01	2.89**
9. Desired time input for tribal duties	61.85	-0.11	0.68

\* p < 0.10    \*\* p < 0.05    \*\*\* p < 0.01

A further reflection of the tribal authorities' strength in the chiefdoms with varying agricultural development indexes, is the perceived percentage of subordinates that would be necessary to enforce, by their opposition, a reversion of a decision by the tribal chief. The percentages are 51, 61 and 78 for the chiefdoms with low, medium and high agricultural development indexes, suggesting that the involvement in agricultural development does not seem to undermine the authority of a tribal leader.

#### 4. Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and supported by observations during the survey and several years of working experience in Swaziland, the following conclusions and recommendations are made:

- The general low agricultural development index established in this study suggests much scope for improvement and calls for concerted efforts of upliftment. In this context rural leaders have the potential of performing a key role.
- The potential positive role of tribal leaders needs to be realized and exploited. This study provides no evidence supporting the conclusions made by La-Anyane (1984 : 33) and Daniel & Stephen (1986 : 179) that the traditional African institutions are barriers and constraints to development. Instead, it seems that their involvement, inputs, credibility and perceptions - if favourable - can become facilitating forces in development.
- So as to promote the communication with and involvement of tribal leaders in agricultural development activities, formal liaison structures should be developed between tribal authorities and development agents or organizations. Better still, they should, like other important representatives of the community, be actively involved and participate in development activities. Whenever it is not possible to involve tribal leaders in a positive way, every attempt should be made to at least prevent

them from turning negative. Possibilities here are the granting of *ex officio* membership of development councils. Collaboration and regular consultations between extension workers and chiefs seem essential for this purpose.

- The extension service should be expanded and supported to reach a larger target audience in the farming communities effectively. The comparative evaluation leaves little doubt that, although the tribal leaders can play an important role, the extension service is significantly more important from an agricultural development point of view. The fact that these key role players, namely tribal leaders and extensionists, represent only few individuals in a local community, should take efforts aimed at motivating and training them very worthwhile.
- As a follow-up to this pilot study more research is necessary, especially as far as the subordinates' perceptions are concerned. The comparative perceptions of FEWs do provide a valuable insight, but they do not necessarily correspond with those of the broader community. It is the view or perception of the broader community regarding the leaders that is, after all, decisive concerning the potential impact of the involvement of tribal leaders in agricultural development. A bigger sample will also be needed to allow for generalizations applicable to the broader Swaziland.
- Follow-up research is also essential to find out whether the present and potential influence of tribal leaders apply similarly to other traditional areas, and to monitor the social, cultural and political changes likely to affect their influence or potential role.

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