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INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS ON ROLE PERFORMANCE OF LOCAL LEADERS IN RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of leadership characteristics on role performance of local leaders in Rural Community Development (RCD) in Southwestern Nigeria. It described the leadership characteristics of local leaders, determined role performance of local leaders in RCD and determined the influence of leadership characteristics on role performance. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select 352 local leaders drawn across the study area. Quantitative data were collected through structured interview schedule while in-depth interview guide was used to elicit qualitative information. Data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, means and multiple linear regression analysis. Results indicated that majority (81.4%) of the respondents had empathy, emotional stability (89.7%) and delegated leadership roles to their members (82.7%). Roles performed by local leaders were protecting members' welfare (mean = 2.42) and community mobilization (mean = 2.28). Findings revealed that empathy ($\beta=0.355$), emotional stability ($\beta = 0.183$), ability to delegate leadership roles ($\beta=0.143$), good communication skills ($\beta = 0.165$) and consistency in decision making ($\beta = 0.567$) significantly contributed to role performance of local leaders in RCD. The study concluded that emotional stability, good communication skills and consistency in decision making were leadership characteristics that determined local leaders' role performance. Significant leadership characteristics should be enhanced to ensure effective performance of local leaders in RCD.

Keywords: Leadership characteristics, Local leaders, Leadership selection, Role performance, Rural community development

INTRODUCTION

Community development has been one of the concerns of many governments, non-governmental organisations, agricultural and rural development agencies. The process of improving the general well-being of the community people through their active participation in community development activities is known as community development. It involves continual improvement by the people themselves which is usually driven by its power structure to bring about change in their lives (Rahim and Asnarulkhadi, 2010). The ultimate goal of community development is to develop members' capabilities and the potential to affect their well-being and quality of life through effective management of community development programmes as well as having highly committed and enthusiastic leadership. Emeka (2012) asserted that one of the approaches in creating sustainable rural development is by giving the main actors opportunities to think and plan their own future. This underpins the need for effective leadership at the local community levels in order to harness the efforts of the rural people towards their own development. When good leadership is provided, the people participate voluntarily in the accomplishment of stated objectives. The best approach to rural development is always through local leaders who not only act as legitimiser of projects but also help in influencing, encouraging and motivating their people to action (Emeka, 2012).

Local leaders are individuals saddled with the responsibilities of leadership in locality or a social system. These people direct or influence the

behaviour and action of other people towards achieving group or community goals. They are one of the major key players in Nigerian rural development programmes. In fact, the success of any development projects has been attributed to effective leadership at the local level who mobilise followers to actively participate in such projects/programmes (Hagberg, 2006). In the same vein, development can only be sustained over a long-term if these leaders are motivated and committed to keeping the momentum going. They are role models in the community as other rural dwellers look up to them for advice, consultation and others tend to imitate them (Mgbada and Agumagu, 2007). They are usually sociable, generally interested in solving community's problems when necessary. They are people with high integrity and repute within their community. These groups of people are usually expected to be sincere and trustworthy and trusted by their community members (Donye, 2017, Ekong, 2010 and Jibowo, 2000).

Many scholars such as Donye (2017), Echeta et al., (2017), Baba et al., (2014), Akwa and Kpalo, (2013), Mgbada and Agumagu, (2007) and Oladosu, (2000) have established important roles played by these leaders in rural community development such as pioneers of development projects; making decisions on different issues affecting the community; playing influential roles in sourcing for project funds; resource linkers among others. But these efforts cannot be achieved without possessing certain leadership attributes or qualities such as empathy, consideration, emotional stability, honesty, ability to delegate leadership

roles among others (Ekong 2010 and Jibowo 2000). Fisher (2005) and Schultz (2004) had earlier found that the personal and socioeconomic characteristics of local leaders had a significant effect on the community development effort. Oladosu (2000) and Okunade (2002) also reported that age, marital status, farming experience, origin of respondents, length of residence, level of education and participation in social organisation contributed significantly to the effectiveness and participation of contact farmers and community leaders in agricultural and rural development programmes. However, there is still dearth of information on the influence of leadership characteristics on role performance of local leaders in rural community development, hence the need for this study.

The main objective of this study was to determine the influence of leadership characteristics on role performance of local leaders in rural community development in Southwestern Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- i. describe the leadership characteristics of local leaders in the study;
- ii. determine role performance of local leaders in RCD; and
- iii. determine the influence of leadership characteristics of local leaders on role performance in RCD in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Southwestern Nigeria which comprises Osun, Oyo, Ogun, Lagos, Ekiti and Ondo States. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select the respondents (community leaders). At the first stage, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti States were purposively selected due to high prevalence of rural communities in these States compare to other States in the study area. At the second stage, one rural Local Government Area (LGA) was randomly selected from each of the three Senatorial Districts in each State, making a total of nine LGAs in all. At the third stage, 5 percent of all the communities in the selected LGAs were selected to make a total of 44 rural communities. At the final stage, a total of 352 local leaders were proportionately selected based on the numbers of local leaders in each of the selected rural communities. Duly pretested and validated interview schedule was used to collect the quantitative data from the respondents while qualitative data was elicited through Key Informant Interview sessions.

Role performance was measured by asking the community leaders to indicate the extent to which they perform their expected roles in rural development activities. Their responses were rated on a 4 point rating scale ranging from never performed (0 point), rarely performed (1 point), occasionally performed (2 points) and always performed (3 points). The total scores of each

respondent were calculated as role performance score. These scores were added to obtain a value of 6 which was divided by 4 to get a benchmark of 1.5. Any role with mean score ≥ 1.5 was regarded as major role performed by the respondents while any role with mean score < 1.5 was regarded as minor role performed. Leadership characteristics were measured using characteristics employed by Okunade (2002) and Siyanbola (1991) and later modified. These qualities include empathy, consideration, emotional stability, competence, communication skill, group membership, surgency and ability to delegate leadership roles. *Empathy* was measured by asking respondents to indicate areas where they had identified with their members before and each response was scored one point. *Emotional stability* was measured by asking respondents to indicate what would be their response if one of their members insults or infuriates them in the course of a meeting, and scored accordingly: get annoyed and insult him back (0 point), walk out of the meeting (1 point), and patient and continue the meeting (2 points). For *consideration*, respondents were asked to indicate who first benefited from poverty reduction programme they had participated in before and scored as follows: myself only (0 point), my family members only (1 point) and all community members (2 points). *Surgency*: Respondents were asked how often they discuss with any member or other organisations about how their communities can be developed in the last two years and their responses were scored as follows: often (2 points), rarely (1 point) and never (0 point). *Dispute/conflict management*: respondents were asked how often they had managed disputes among their members successfully and scored as often (2 points), rarely (1 point) and never (0 point). *Ability to delegate leadership role*: Respondents were asked to indicate roles they had delegated before to their members to perform to avoid delay of activities and each was scored one point. *Consistency*: Respondents were asked the extent of changing decisions made at meeting without consulting other members and scored: frequently (0 point), rarely (1 point) and never (2 points). *Group membership*: Respondents were asked to indicate their perception about themselves in relating with other members of the community/group they lead and scored as: I am the leader and above others (1 point) and I am not significantly different from other members (2 points). *Communication skill* was measured by asking the respondents to indicate how easy for them in conveying their ideas and thoughts to their members without any misunderstanding of the message using 3 points scale ranging from very easy (2 points), easy (1 point) and not easy (0 point). Frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviation were used to summarize the data collected. Multiple



linear regression analysis was used to determine the influence of leadership characteristics on role performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Leadership characteristics

Results in Table 1 show that respondents empathized with their members through visiting and caring for sick members (92.9%), giving financial assistance and participating in social functions of their members (90.5%), commiserating with bereaved members (75.9%), raising funds for poor members (73.6%) and among others. This implies that majority of the local leaders empathized with their members by identifying with their members' problems. It is when leaders empathize with their members that they can appreciate their problems; sensitive to their needs and ready to meet these needs. This finding is contrary to the position of Ofoku and Agbamu (2013) who reported that leaders of farmers' self-help groups in agricultural production did not show empathy but aligned with the submissions of Ekong (2010) and Jibowo (2000) who asserted that local leaders must have empathy. This implies that local leaders believed that welfare of their members is very paramount to them and ready to assist them to any level. As regards emotional stability, majority (89.7%) of the respondents preferred to be patient with members and conclude the meeting if one of their members behaves in an unruly manner to them in the course of the meeting and very few (4.3%) indicated that they would walk out of the meeting in case any member of their group insult them. The result implies that majority of the local leaders are the patient types who are also tolerant to elastic limit. They realized the need to be emotionally stable that is, they know how to respond to situation. Their understanding that community members are made up of different people from different homes and backgrounds would help them to realise that they would behave differently. This finding support the submissions of Jibowo (2000) and Sapkota (2010) who noted that leaders must be emotionally stable but disagree with the position of Ofoku and Agbamu (2013) who reported that leaders of farmers' self-help groups in their study area were not emotionally stable. Majority (79.3%) of the respondents indicated that they would make sure all members would first benefit from any assistance from government and few (13.6%) claimed only their family members or close relatives would benefit first from such assistance. This implies that majority of the respondents were selfless and considerate, that is, they understand the need to serve the purpose of their members before themselves. This would assist their members to trust them and enhance their credibility. This finding conforms to the submissions of Deckor and

Nnodim (2002) and Jibowo (2000) who stated that a good leader must be selfless and considerate.

Results on surgency shows that majority (81.5%) of the respondents claimed they often discussed how to develop their communities/groups with other people and government to assist them in the development of their communities. This implies possessing this leadership quality would assist the leaders to act as liaison between the government and NGO for assistance and also assist them to act as community spokesman. Majority (83.4%) of the local leaders indicated that they often settled different conflicts/disputes amicably among their members without resulting into violence. This implies respondents possess good ability in resolving conflicts. This would ensure cordial relationship and peaceful co-existence among the community members which would eventually bring development into their communities. This attests to what Pkalya *et al.*, (2004) observed that local leaders possessed local mediation ability. This is because local leaders are held in high esteem and accepted as men and women of wisdom with impeccable characters whose pre-occupation is to see to the peaceful co-existence among their members. As regards ability to delegate roles, majority of local leaders claimed they had one time or the other delegated the following roles to their members as occasions demand to avoid delay: supervise community projects (82.7%), mobilise other community members (82.1%), represent them in community engagement (75%) among others. This implies their absence in the communities would not mean stagnation of rural development efforts in their communities. Hence, ability to delegate leadership role would increase the effectiveness of a leader; prevent over tasking a particular leader and ensures continuity in role performance. Results in Table 1 reveal that almost two-third (63.4%) of the local leaders claimed that they never change a community decision without consulting with other community members. Some (33.8%) of the leaders claimed that they rarely a changed community decision reached at the meeting without proper consultation with members. The result shows that majority of the leaders were consistent to the community decision on issues affecting their communities by following agreed upon decision. The implication is that leaders would gain respect and credibility of their members and this would make them to be trusted and dependable without questioning their authority on any action taken by them. Also, majority (74.7%) of the respondents considered themselves as members of the group and not significantly different from other members of the community while 21 percent considered themselves as leaders who are above others. This result indicates that many of the leaders were humble and value group identity despite their leadership positions. Majority

(86.4%) of these leaders indicated that they easily convey their ideas and thoughts to their members on important group/community decisions without misinterpretation while few (13.6%) indicated that they had difficulty in conveying such information. This implies that many of the leaders possessed good communication skills. Good communication

skills are probably the most important factor in an effective group leader. Without it, problems go unresolved in the group and a leader with good communication skills is able to offer a viable or satisfactory solution if problems exist among group members there is any problem among the members of the group.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to selected leadership characteristics (n=352)

Leadership characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
*Empathy		
Visited sick members and gave financial assistance	327	92.9
Participated in social functions of their members	320	90.4
Commiserate with family of bereaved members of the community	267	75.9
Raised funds for poor members of the community	253	73.6
Source land for members who are in land for farming	255	72.4
Emotional stability(reaction to unruly behaviour)		
Get annoyed and insult him	21	6.0
Walk out of the meeting	15	4.3
Be patient and continue the meeting	316	89.7
Consideration		
Myself alone would benefit	25	7.1
My family members alone would benefit	48	13.6
All community members would benefit	279	79.3
Surgency		
Never discuss it with other and government	3	0.9
Rarely discuss with others and government	62	17.6
Always discuss with others and government	282	81.5
Dispute management		
Never	44	12.5
Rarely	14	4.1
Often	294	83.4
*Ability to delegate leadership roles		
Represent community members in community engagement	264	75.0
Supervise community projects	291	82.7
Mobilise community members to participate in project	289	82.1
Settle minor conflict	181	51.4
Consistency		
I often change decision reached at the meetings without consulting the community	10	2.8
I rarely change decision reached at meetings without consulting the community	119	33.8
I never change decision reached at meetings without consulting the community	223	63.4
Group membership		
I am the leader and am superior to other members	73	20.7
I am only bounded by some rules	16	4.5
I am not significantly different from other members	263	74.7
Communication skill/ability		
Not easy	48	13.6
Easy	279	79.3
Very easy	25	7.1

* Multiple responses

Source: Field survey, 2017

Roles performance of local leaders

Result in Table 2 reveals that ensuring cordial relationship among people (mean=2.45) was the foremost among the roles performed by local leaders in RCD; Protecting the welfare of the

members (mean=2.42), mobilizing community members for RCDPs (mean = 2.28), ensuring all assistance reach the targeted people (mean=2.25), participating in planning and execution of RCDPs (mean=2.22), contributing resources and organising

meeting for fund raising for RCDPs (mean=2.21), supervising and coordinating RCDPs (mean=2.16) and legitimising RCDPs (mean = 2.09) were major roles performed by the local leaders in RCD. On the other hand, awakening political consciousness among community members (mean = 1.42), ensuring conformity to community norms and values (mean = 1.41) and punishing unacceptable behaviour or ostracising erring members of the community (0.91) were minor roles performed by local leaders with mean scores below the benchmark of 1.5. This finding is line with that of Donye (2017), Echeta et al., (2017), Baba et al., (2014) and Akwa and Kpalo, (2013) who established that local leaders performed important roles in rural development in Nigeria.

Below KII excerpts conducted further strengthened the quantitative findings on roles performed by local leaders in rural community development:

As a leader, on many occasions I have liaised with people in authority to assist our community in providing social amenities and development projects; called meetings to sensitise members of new projects initiated by government and ensure the welfare of my community member.

(KII excerpt from a local leader from Bamikemo community in Ileoluji/Oke-Igbo LGA, Ondo State)

Whenever any new developmental programme gets into the community, I make announcement about it and give support to the programme; encourage others to participate fully in it and ensure people to live peacefully in the community without any rancor and bitterness through peaceful reconciliation of dispute that arises among community.

(KII excerpt from a local leader from Ikoro Ekiti in Ijero LGA, Ekiti State)

I have taken some decisions on behalf of the community to solve urgent problems like locating the site for borehole donated by UNDP and mobilise members for CDPs.

(KII excerpt from a local leader from Ode-Omu in Ayedaade LGA, Osun State)

Results from both qualitative and quantitative information show that majority of the local leaders demonstrated much enthusiasm and commitment to support the development of their various communities. This was exhibited through their efforts in ensuring peaceful and cordial relationship, protecting members' welfare, mobilizing their members to development programmes, giving support for projects and also diffusing useful information to their members.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by role performance in rural community development activities (n=352)

Roles played by local leaders	Ranked mean	Standard dev.
Ensuring cordial relationship among people	2.45	0.67
Protecting the welfare of the community members	2.42	0.90
Community mobilization	2.28	0.88
Ensuring all assistance reach the targeted people	2.25	1.00
Participating in planning and execution of RCDPs	2.22	1.02
Contribution of resources and organising meeting for fund raising to RCDPs	2.21	0.91
Diffusing information and educating rural people	2.20	0.89
Supervision and coordination of all RCDPs	2.16	0.94
Legitimising RCDPs	2.09	1.00
Liaising with government and NGOs for assistance	2.01	1.09
Dispute settlement	1.76	1.20
Conceiving and selling ideas on RCD	1.73	1.20
Awakening political consciousness	1.42	1.29
Ensuring conformity to community norms.	1.41	1.18
Ostracizing / punishing erring members	0.91	0.96

Source: Field survey, 2017

Influence of leadership characteristics

The results in Table 3 show that empathy ($t = 3.188$; $p \leq 0.01$), emotional stability ($t = 3.357$; $p \leq 0.01$), ability to delegate leadership roles ($t = 2.616$; $p \leq 0.05$), consistency in decision making ($t = 8.816$; $p \leq 0.01$) and good communication skills ($t = 3.439$; $p \leq 0.01$) were significant predictors of

role performance of local leaders in RCD. In terms of relative importance of each of the independent variables on role performance as measured by the Beta Coefficient, consistency in decision making ($\beta = 0.564$) is the most important leadership characteristics of influence in predicting the role performance of local leaders in RCD; hence, the

higher the consistency of local leaders in decision making, the higher the probability of performing their roles in RDAs. This was followed by empathy ($\beta=0.357$), emotional stability ($\beta=0.183$), good communication skill ($\beta=0.165$) and lastly ability to delegate leadership roles ($\beta=0.143$). The implication of this finding is that possession of these significant attributes (consistency, empathy, emotional stability, ability to delegate leadership roles and communication skill) by local leaders

would determine their performance in RCD. Furthermore, overall regression model summary show that R^2 value of 0.549 was obtained in the analysis. Also F value of 10.234 obtained was significant at $p \leq 0.01$. The R^2 of 0.549 indicates that significant variables in leadership characteristics could only explain about 54.9 percent of the variation in role performance of local leaders in RCD.

Results of regression analysis between leadership characteristics of respondents and role performance (n=352)

Leadership characteristics	Standardized coefficient (b)	regression T-value	P-value
Empathy	0.357	3.188**	0.002
Emotional stability	0.183	3.520**	0.000
Consideration	0.036	1.253	0.211
Surgency	-0.078	-0.688	0.492
Dispute/conflict management	-0.040	-0.778	0.110
Group membership	-0.135	0.799	0.250
Ability to delegate leadership roles	0.143	2.616*	0.039
Consistency in decision making	0.564	8.816**	0.000
Communication ability	0.165	3.439*	0.011

**Significant at $p \leq 0.01$; * Significant at $p \leq 0.05$ Model summary: F = 10.234; sig = 0.000; R^2 = 0.549, R = 0.741 Source: Field survey, 2017

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study reveals that majority of the respondents were consistent in decision making, empathized with their members, had emotional stability and delegated leadership roles to their members. Major roles performed by local leaders in RCD were ensuring cordial and peaceful co-existence among members, protecting members' welfare and community mobilization of members to participate in RCDPs. The study concluded that consistency in decision making; emotional stability, ability to delegate leadership roles, good communication skills and empathy were leadership characteristics that determined local leaders' role performance. Hence, the study recommended that significant leadership characteristics should be enhanced through organising training and workshops for local leaders to ensure effective role performance in RCD.

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