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Leadership Effectiveness among Farmers' Self-Help Groups in Central Agricultural Zone of Delta State, Nigeria and Its Implication for Improved Agricultural Extension Service

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author AUO designed the study, wrote the protocol, and the first draft of the manuscript. Author JUA managed the literature searches. Author AUO carried out the analysis of the study data and author JUA interpreted the data and author AUO discussed the findings. Author JUA proof read the written manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Research Article

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted in Delta Central Agricultural Zone to determine the effectiveness of the leadership of farmers' self-help groups through attendance to meetings, regularity in the payment of dues and participation in group activities. Farmers' groups are ubiquitous, yet the level of production among farmers is still inadequate. Seven of the registered farmers groups were randomly selected. Ten percent (10%) of the members of each selected group were also randomly selected to give 68 respondents that were used for the study. Primary data were collected from the respondents with the use of questionnaire and interview schedule while secondary data were collected from the records of the selected farmers' groups. Data collected were subjected to statistical analysis by using mean derived from 4-point Likert-type scale, frequency counts and percentages. The hypotheses were addressed with the use of Pearson correlation. Leaderships were rated low in qualities of leaders and were found to be fairly effective

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creating access to credit, organizing group for price determination and direct sale of produce to consumers. Generally the performance of the members was poor as they did not attend meetings regularly as their mean percentage attendance to meetings was 39.89% and the percentage difference in membership due payment between the year 2002 and the year 2011was -13.19%. Owing to this, leadership performance is considered as being generally ineffective. The implication for extension delivery service is that regular training should be organized for leadership of farmers' groups. It was therefore recommended that such training should include democratic fixation of days and time for meetings as it is in the constitution of the group, access to cheap inputs should be created, collective price determination needs to be done and the need to sell produce directly to consumers should be addressed.

Keywords: Farmers' groups; leadership effectiveness; group cohesion; multiple linkage theory; self-help.

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is seen as the process whereby an individual directs, guides, influences or controls the thoughts of other members in a social system [4,6]. [10] conceptualizes leadership as dominant personality traits of an individual over the receptive trait of other individuals in the performance of group function in an effort to achieve group goals. These concepts afore referred connote that there is someone who leads in the social system – leader. These concepts all point to the fact that leadership is a group phenomenon which occurs in an interactive situation between a group of people, the leader(s), the challenges or problems or tasks and possible solutions [11]. Farmers' groups 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.

In farmers' group, the leader elicits and encourages the members to harness their financial resources for use by members. [14] observed that belonging to such group serves many functions to the individual members. Through such group individuals satisfy their wants. These wants include 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 [13]. The wants or needs direct us to the goals of these groups.

These groups 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 [18]. In measuring leadership effectiveness, these qualities ought to be considered. More importantly, leadership effectiveness 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 [13], but if the perception of the members are used, it may not be reliable as perceptions are relative to the individuals. For this reason, the multiple linkage theory is considered useful. "This theory is important because multiple linkage models involve the leader effectively controlling variables that impact on team performance, taking a short-term and long-term approach to leadership. For example, leaders can implement policies and procedures that influence the team structure and capabilities such as skills and

motivation, cohesiveness, resources and the level of coordination and interdependency of tasks in relation to other units in the organization" [17]. This theory utilizes a model of group performance to explain leadership effectiveness. As [2] explain, 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 group 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 [16] and were recommended for use by [6]. [4] applied it in the case study they conducted in selected rural micro credit groups in Rivers State, Nigeria. The last one may be difficult to have access to as it is one of the confidential records of the groups.

Farmers' groups are ubiquitous, yet the level of production among farmers is still inadequate. [9] observes that up till now, Nigeria is yet to achieve 5% total caloric intake of non-starchy crops recommended by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Unless there are strong farmers' groups and leadership that create access to adequate amount of credit and relevant information for farmers, agricultural production targets will not be attained.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The major objective of the study was to assess the performance of farmers' groups' leadership in Central Agricultural Zones of Delta State, Nigeria. Specifically the objectives were to:

(i) ascertain farmers' assessment of the leadership of farmers' groups;
(ii) determine the level of meeting attendance;
(iii) ascertain group performance with respect to payment of dues;
(iv) identify the challenges which leaders of the farmers' groups face;
(v) discuss implication of those findings for agricultural extension service.

1.1.1 Hypotheses

Ho_1: Farmers' group members' assessment of their leadership does not significantly influence the performance of the farmers' groups.
Ho_2: Qualities of group leadership have no significant relationship with their effectiveness.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study area is Delta Central Agricultural Zone of Delta State, Nigeria. The area is located in the central part of Delta State, Nigeria. It is made up of Ethiope East, and West, Ughelli North and South, Okpe, Sapele, Uvwie, Udu and Isoko North and Isoko South local government areas. It is bounded on the north by Ukwuani, Ndokwa West and East Local Government Areas of Delta North Agricultural Zone. On the south by Warri South, Warri South – West, Warri North, Bomadi and Patani Local Government Areas of Delta South Agricultural Zone, on the east by Ndokwa East Local Government Area and River Niger and on the West by Orhiomwon Local Government Area of Edo State. The study area lies within latitude $5^{o}\ 00^{1}$ and $6^{o}\ 30^{1}$ N of the Equator and Longitude $5^{o}\ 00^{1}$ and $6^{o}\ 45^{1}$ East of the Greenwich Meridian [5].

The area is situated in the fresh water and rain forest vegetation belt. It is blessed with fresh water resources and forest resources. The people are predominantly farmers who are into arable and tree crops farming and livestock farming.

The study population includes the leadership of all the farmers' groups in Delta Central Agricultural Zone. Out of the 27 farmers' groups in the zone registered with Delta State Agricultural Development Programme (DTADP), for equitable representation, 10 percent (10%) of the members of each group were randomly selected to constitute the study sample as shown in Table 1; this gave rise to 68 respondents. Ten percent (10%) was used so that the sample population could be easily managed as experience has shown that many respondents cannot be easily convinced to fill questionnaires or grant structured interviews.

Table 1. Selection of farmers' groups and respondents

Farmers' group selected	Membership	10 percent
Cassava farmers' association, Eku	77	8
Fish farmers' association, Otor-Udu	79	8
Jesse farmers' union	221	22
Ughelli poultry farmers association	85	9
Isoko fish farmers' association	64	6
Total	677	68

Primary data were collected from the selected respondents, while secondary data were collected from the records of the selected farmers' groups. The primary data were collected with the use of interview schedule administered to non-formally educated respondents while questionnaire was used for those who were formally educated. Instruments used for this study were subjected to validity test which cover face, content, criterion and construct validity. This was done by senior colleagues.

The reliability was done using test- retest method. The retest was done 3 weeks after the retrieval of the instrument for the first administration of the instrument. The result of the correlation between the first responses and the second responses showed a high level of correlation for the structured interview schedule (r = 0.931) and the questionnaire (r =0.951).
Objective (i) was treated with means derived from 4 – point likert's type scale of strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2 and strongly disagree = 1. Objectives (ii), (iii) and (iv) were addressed with the application of percentages.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were addressed with the application of Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. The formula is stated as follows:

$$r = \frac{\frac{xy - (x)(y)}{n}}{\sqrt{\left[\frac{x^2}{n} - (x)^2\right]\left[\frac{y^2}{n} - (y)^2\right]}}$$

Where:

n = Total number of respondents.
Y = Performance of farmers' group/ effectiveness of leadership.
X = Farmers' assessment of leadership/ qualities of leadership.

Code numbers, FG_1 – FG_7 were used to represent the farmers' groups to maintain the anonymity required by the secretaries of the groups who gave the authors access to the required records in strict confidence. The limitation encountered was that none of the groups allowed the authors to have access to most of their financial records.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Respondents' Assessment of their Leadership

Table 2 indicates that the leadership of farmers' groups was generally not empathic, not emotionally stable, was not selfless and did not exhibit loyalty to group ideals and goals. According to [18], these qualities make good leadership in farmers' groups. They generally also did not exhibit integrity.

People are said to be empathic when they put themselves in the shoes of others, that is, they imagine that they are the ones in the position in which people find themselves. It is when leaders are empathic that they can very well appreciate the problems of their followers.

Emotional stability here has to do with how one responds to situations. One is emotionally stable if he/ she is not easily angered. The angry man easily makes mistakes, especially when dealing with fellow human beings and such mistake can be costly. Leaders that have stable emotion are the patient types who are also tolerant to elastic limit.

Selflessness here connotes serving the purpose of others before serving themselves. Members of group always want their needs met first before the leaders meet up with their (leaderships') needs. Good leaders are known to be selfless [4].

Leadership is loyal to group goals and ideals if he respects the group goals and ideals. Respect for group goals and ideals breeds integrity among leaderships. A leader who respects the goals and ideals of the group will always act in ways that lead to achievement of group goals.

Integrity has to do with honesty. How honest the various leaderships are. Honest leadership will be transparent in all his deals and transactions, especially as it concerns money issues. Many leaders feel that their position is an opportunity to enrich themselves. This notion is very common with leaderships in rural areas of developing countries [6].

They were not also effective in organizing regular extension / famers' meetings and did not organize group meetings regularly. Extension/ famers' meeting are expected to be held 24 times annually, and 70% of the 24 times annually is regarded as regular while group meetings are to be held 12 times in a year and it is regarded as being regular if meetings are organized for 60% of the annual 12 times [5].

In the area of effectiveness, the leaderships were only effective in providing access to credit, organizing for price determination, and direct marketing of farm produce. Farmers subscribe to groups because of their aforementioned needs which form the reason for subscription to farmers' group by them [13]; [15]. This implies that the leadership of farmers' groups was generally not effective. This can create a negative feeling in the members and can lead to withdrawal of members from the groups. Farmers would like to remain in their various

groups if their needs are satisfied [13], [14]. Once the individual farmers' needs are satisfied, the group remains cohesive [15]. Generally, the respondents rate their leaderships poorly.

Table 2. Respondents' assessment of their leadership

Leadership Quality	Strongly agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Score	Mean
1. Empathic	16 (64)	13 (39)	23 (46)	16 (16)	165	2.42
2. Emotionally stable	18 (72)	13 (39)	20 (40)	17 (17)	168	2.47
3. Selfless	12 (48)	12 (36)	33 (66)	11 (11)	161	2.36
4. Loyal to group ideals and goals	16 (64)	14 (42)	25 (50)	13 (13)	169	2.48
5. Exhibit integrity	11 (44)	17 (51)	19 (38)	21 (21)	154	2.26
6. Provides access to credit	19 (76)	19 (57)	19 (38)	11 (11)	182	2.68*
7. Organize regular extension/farmers meetings	14 (56)	16 (48)	21 (42)	17 (17)	163	2.39
8. Organize group meetings regularly	16 (64)	12 (36)	25 (50)	15 (15)	166	2.42
9. Creates opportunities to access cheap inputs	8 (32)	12 (36)	32 (64)	16 (16)	116	1.70
10. Organizes for price determination	18 (72)	20 (60)	14 (28)	16 (16)	176	2.59*
11. Organizes for direct marketing of farm produce	20 (80)	17 (51)	16 (32)	15 (15)	178	2.62*

Cut-off Score = 2.5 (≥ 2.5 = Good Leadership quality/effectiveness; < 2.5 = Poor leadership quality/effectiveness).

3.2 Members' Performance with Respect to Meeting Attendance (Participation in Group Activities)

Table 3 indicates that apart from FG_1, FG_2 and FG_7 that had average performances, with respect to meeting attendance, the other groups performed poorly. Meetings are supposed to be attended 12 times in a year by every member and a member that has 60% in attendance to meetings is considered as being regular in meeting attendance. [4] opined that 62.3% of socio- economic groups in Rivers State, Nigeria had poor meeting attendance as their major bane. Most of the members were not attending meetings regularly. [13] suggest that poor meeting attendance is related to leadership performance of their obligations to the members. Though this may be attributed to interference by domestic and other responsibilities, the major reason was that most of the members were dissatisfied with their leaderships. [15] observed that many farmers' groups lost their members due to dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction inhibits cohesion in groups. As long as most members are not satisfied, they will handle the issue of meeting attendance with levity. [16] opined that democratic leadership which facilitates group's performance enhances group cohesion. If members of groups are satisfied, they will always make provision for the meetings in terms of time. Attendance is very important in self- help groups because it is in such groups that famers are able to do what they cannot do individually. For example, because of the dearth of extension workers, farmers can only have access to such extension service as members

of groups [1]. The members subscribe to groups in order have access to credit, exchange of ideas and information with other members.

3.3 Performance with respect to Payment of Dues

It was observed that all the farmers' groups had no fixed rate of financial subscription, but the rate paid depended on the perceived capability of the individual subscriber. Each subscriber fixed his/her own subscription (Table 4). There were increased performance between 2002 and 2006 generally, but the groups, experienced dwindling performance between 2007 and 2011. This is attributed to dissatisfaction of the members of the groups. Most of the members expressed their grievances by reducing their financial subscriptions to their respective groups. The dissatisfaction was due to delay in receiving loans applied for and sometimes when received, the desired amount is not released at once. Some of the leaders also did not carry most of their members along in accessing cheap inputs through group purchase and extension services. [12] discovered that fish farmers subscribed to self-help groups in order to have access to cheap inputs, credit facility and extension service. Farmers reduced their subscriptions with their various groups as result of the fact that they do not have access to loans when needed as the leadership is a self- serving one. This situation is bound to anger affected members [15].

The credit enables them to expand and improve on their farm holdings. Ofuoku et al (2006) discovered significant difference between scale of production of fish farmers who subscribed to cooperative societies and non-subscribers to cooperative societies. The difference was as a result of the access the subscribers had to cheap inputs and credit facilities. In situations where members of groups do not have access to such credit facilities and cheap inputs, they are bound to express their dissatisfaction by either withdrawing their membership or reducing their subscriptions [15]. The reduction in subscription rate is attributed to lack of satisfaction. The implication is that they do not have access to credit facilities when needed; meetings are not well publicized among members.

Table 3. Members' performance with respect to aggregate meeting attendance

Level of meeting attendance																						
Farmers' Group	**2002**		**2003**		**2004**		**2005**		**2006**		**2007**		**2008**		**2009**		**2010**		**2011**		**Total**	**Percen-tage (%) atten-dance**
	E	**A**	**E**	**A**	**E**	**A**	**E**	**A**	**E**	**A**	**E**	**A**	**E**	**A**	**E**	**A**	**E**	**A**	**E**	**A**		
FG_1	972	504	972	612	852	360	876	528	828	516	756	456	888	612	900	696	912	552	924	385	5221	58.80
FG_2	960	600	936	480	720	240	720	276	720	228	792	300	804	312	912	372	876	324	840	492	3624	43.77
FG_3	756	264	804	348	864	348	948	372	1020	432	1020	384	1044	420	996	396	972	252	972	252	3468	36.91
FG_4	984	384	100	372	103	408	102	300	1020	456	984	432	966	384	966	408	948	372	948	420	3936	39.85
FG_5	2772	636	277	612	276	492	276	552	2712	408	2760	420	2760	516	2652	492	2652	480	265	504	5112	18.16
FG_6	1152	492	115	456	115	480	104	432	1032	420	1032	432	1032	360	1020	384	1056	432	102	372	4260	39.80
FG7	840	396	840	372	804	360	792	312	780	336	780	312	816	324	768	336	768	288	768	300	3336	41.93

Source: *Various Farmers' Groups*

E= expected total attendance; A= actual total attendance.

Table 4. Members' performance with respect to subscription (million Naira)

Farmers' group	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	% diff. between 2002 & 2011
FG_1	1.10	1.24	1.39	2.01	1.71	1.33	1.31	1.18	1.16	1.16	5.45
FG_2	1.23	1.20	1.31	1.39	1.38	1.41	1.42	1.30	1.21	1.20	-2.44
FG3	1.81	1.81	1.81	1.91	2.03	1.80	1.48	1.43	1.42	1.33	-26.52
FG_4	1.45	1.53	1.57	1.61	2.11	1.99	1.96	1.63	1.40	1.40	-3.45
FG_5	2.31	2.28	2.11	2.11	2.31	2.34	2.20	2.20	2.00	2.00	-13.42
FG_6	2.27	2.30	2.36	2.13	2.26	2.00	1.89	1.92	1.91	1.42	-37.44
FG_7	1.31	1.31	1.35	1.33	1.41	1.45	1.32	1.36	1.31	1.12	-14.50

Source: *Various Farmers' Groups*

3.4 Membership Challenges with Groups' Leaderships

The important challenges members had with group leadership (Table 5), include inadequate access to cheap farm inputs, irregular information on extension/farmers' meetings and time of group meetings. The leaders often failed to make adequate arrangements for bulk purchase of inputs for group members. The bulk purchase, when made even without the aid of extension agents is cheaper. This is congruent with the findings of [15] that discovered that inadequate access to input was one of the constraints of farmers' groups in Delta State, Nigeria.

Meetings were more often than not fixed at times that were not conducive for majority of the members, especially extension/farmers' meetings. It is through such meetings that farmers access extension service/interaction. Access to extension service is one of the important reasons farmers subscribe to farmers' groups. This confirms the finding of [13] who discovered that fish farmers in Southern Nigeria pointed time of extension/farmers' meetings as one of the constraints facing them.

Irregular information on such meetings was also pointed out by the members as one of the challenges they had. Leaders failed on their part to disseminate information on such meetings regularly to members of the groups. This is an indication of incompetence on the part of the group leadership. Communication is very important in the affairs of groups. The pattern of communication largely affects group performance [2]. Patterns of communication are direction of flow between those involved. If the direction of flow is limited to a few of the members, there will be communication breakdown. This often deprives receivers (members of the group in this case), of the necessary information.

Table 5. Members' challenges unit groups' leaderships

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Inadequate access to credit	30	44.12
Inadequate access to cheap inputs	48	70.59
Time of group meetings	40	58.82
Irregular information on extension/farmers' group meetings	38	55.88
Failure to organize for produce price discrimination	30	44.12
Failure to achieve direct marketing of produce	31	45.59

3.5 Relationship between Members' Assessment of Leadership and Members' Performance

Table 6 indicates that farmers' groups members' assessment of farmers' groups' leadership has positive relationship with members' performance. Leadership effectiveness has positive and significant relationships with meeting attendance ($r = 0.630$) and monthly payment of subscription ($r = 0.790$). This implies that the higher the members' opinions are about the leadership, the higher the members' performance. This invariably means that members will perform better if they find their leadership as performing up to expectation. This has implications for farmers' group cohesion. Democratic leadership which facilitates groups' performance and attainment of group and individual goals enhance group cohesiveness [16]. According to [15], in situation where members do not have easy accesses to credit and inputs, the members are bound to express their dissatisfaction in various ways. Leadership

research has consistently found a strong positive relationship between charismatic leadership behaviors and followers' performance (House 1988; Bass 1990). This is congruent with the explanation given by [2] of the Multiple Linkage Theory, which portends that group members' performance is an index of group leadership effectiveness.

Table 6. Pearson correlation of members' assessment of leadership and their performance

Variables	Leadership effectiveness	Meeting attendance	Payment of dues
Leadership effectiveness	1.000	0.630*	0.790*
Meeting attendance	0.630*	1.000	0.501*
Payment of dues	0.790*	0.501*	1.000

3.6 Relationship between Quality and Effectiveness Assessment of Leadership

There is positive and significant relationship between the quality and effectiveness assessment of the farmers' groups leaderships (r =0.603) (Table 7). The implication is that their assessment of the leaderships is valid and reliable.

Table 7. Pearson correlation of quality and effectiveness of leadership assessment

Variables	Quality	Effectiveness
Quality	1.000	0.603*
Effectiveness	0.603*	1.000

4. CONCLUSION

The leaderships of the farmers' groups were only found to have performed generally on the average in the aspects of provision of access to credit, organizing for price determination and direct marketing of farm produce. From the members' performance which is poor, judging from meeting attendance and payment of dues, the leaderships of the various groups are adjudged as not effective. This is so as they could not achieve most of the goals for which the farmers' groups were formed. This is in consonance with multiple linkage theory which portends that the performance of group members is an index of leadership effectiveness.

IMPLICATION FOR AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

One major problem of agricultural extension delivery in developing countries is the dearth of manpower to cope with large number of farmers that constitute 75 – 85% of the workforce [2]. [1] puts extension worker: farmer ratio at 1:1189, while [7] suggests the ratio of 1:250. This implies that the number of farmers is too large for field extension agents to manage. In order to cope with this trend, agricultural extension activities are now being carried out in groups. The farmers are encouraged to form specialized groups to ease their interaction with field extension agents.

Farmers also have needs they would want to satisfy which they cannot solely satisfy unless they subscribe to such farmers' groups. These needs include, very importantly, access to extension service, market information, and access to credit facilities; etc [13].

If the leadership of farmers' groups is ineffective, agricultural activities of the farmers are adversely affected. As this happens, food security is being inhibited. Therefore agricultural extension services need to organize leadership training for farmers' groups at intervals. This training should be designed in a way that it will take care of the importance of adequate and early dissemination of information on meetings to members; importance of democratic fixation of meeting days and times; and the need to use various media to disseminate reminders of meeting to members. Group leaders should be trained to adopt democratic leadership style and jettison the autocratic leadership style that exists in most rural areas of developing countries. The group is an avenue where members can speak with one voice as touching issues that border on their economic well being [13].

The Ministries of Commerce and Industry, and Agriculture that regulate the groups should organize training for the leaders on proper awareness of the their functions, how to motivate their group members, how to increase satisfaction of group members so that group interests and meeting attendance can be sustained; and the possible desirable results of such training.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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