

## Effect of Leaders' Length of Involvement on Perceived Effectiveness of Community Development Agent Training Programme

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**ABSTRACT** This study was designed to investigate the effect of community leaders' length of involvement in community development agent training programme. Two hundred and eighty eight community leaders were randomly selected to participate in the study, data was collected using a structured questionnaire comprising of the community leaders involvement scale and perceived effectiveness scale. One way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze the data. The result indicated that there was no significant effect of community leaders' involvement on the perceived effectiveness of community development agent training programme. It was suggested that subsequent studies should identify and investigate specific community development challenges and particular leadership style to drive the process.

### INTRODUCTION

The changing context of community development even among developing nations has meant that more and more training of community development agents would be needed that would take into cognizance the said change and then mirror whatever inputs community leaders themselves would make in the curriculum and methodologies that are being used. We know that community development has since shifted away from its normal conceptualizations as a process, movement, programme and products in which emphasizes had been laid on viable physical achievements. Purcell (2012) and many other scholars now propose that community development and its training programmes must now be viewed as depoliticized endeavours that span activities, programmes and processes that are designed to address imbalances in power and bring into effect change that is founded on social justice, equality and inclusion (LLUK 2010; Purcell 2012; Beck and Purcell 2010; Christens 2012a, 2012b; Christens et al. 2011; Christens et al. 2011; Ginwright 2010; Peterson et al. 2011; Schubotz and O'Hara 2011 and Seidman 2012). What this means is that we now have concentrated focus on issues that have to do more and more with empowerment, transformation, balance of power in whether political or social or cultural or economic, real wealth (UNDP 2010).

Provision of social services is a development strategy, while community participation is one of the methods of achieving this objective, thus the two concepts can be conceived together as

community development (Omofonmwan and Odia 2009). Community development (CD) has been defined by the United Nations as the process by which the efforts of the indigenous people are combined with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities; integrate these communities into national life and to enable them contribute fully to national progress" (United Nation 1956; Christens and Peterson 2012). This complex process as seen in the UN definition consists of two main elements which are (a) The participation by the people themselves in efforts to improve their level of living with as much reliance as possible on their own initiative and (b) The provision of technical and social services in ways which encourage initiative, self-help and mutual understanding.

CD is one of the three strategies which have been adopted for rural development by many developing countries alongside agricultural extension and integrated rural development, (Williams 1978). As such, CD is aimed at utilizing the rural people to develop themselves through self-initiative and motivation, with minimum assistance from government. It is aimed at social development through self-help projects, health and nutritional improvement projects, as well as other similar projects. It involves community members in planning and implementation of programmes for their own development. It stimulates government and other development agencies to provide technical advice and materials in planning and implementing the projects (Gboyega 1992; Gamble and Weil 2010).

Generally, the key elements of successful community-driven development projects have been identified to be participation, sustainability, social inclusion and enabling policy environment (Dahl-Ostergaard et al. 2003) and this cannot be achieved without the people and a vibrant leadership to coordinate the community members to achieve the set goals. Community power structure is a complex network of relationships between the recognized power holders and the interplay of their roles in a community. These power holders, otherwise known as leaders, direct the affairs of the society towards the achievement of objectives. Jibowo (1992) describes power structure as “patterned distribution of authority and influence among various actors in a group or community”.

The concept of leadership is very crucial to the survival of any society. Even where there are established norms, leaders are still needed to ensure compliance with such norms for societal orderliness and healthy being. Van den Ban and Hawkins (1996) define leadership as the “directing, influencing and controlling of others in pursuit of a group goal”. This implies that the function of making decisions lies on the leaders. Ekong (2003) even sees leadership as being synonymous with decision-making and therefore regards decision-makers as community leaders. If this is true, then the leaders have a significant role to play in the development of their communities and their report on community development agents that are working in their communities should be reckoned with for a proper evaluation and assessment of what the community development agents must have been doing in their respective communities of operation. As good as community development initiative is in driving development to complement government efforts, there is a need for effective leadership to drive the process and ensure that the CD agents respect not just the rules of engagement but that they be mindful of the cultural values and societal norms in their areas of operation. This is an indication that a properly conceived CD initiative can be compromised by the absence of effective leadership to drive the process and act as a bridge between the communities and CD agents.

Scholars and researchers over the years have stressed the importance of effective leadership in driving performance and developmental process. This they have done through definition of

the concepts, identifying leadership roles and conducting empirical studies. Bass (1985, 1990) states that effective leadership provides a vision and a sense of mission, and raising followers’ self-expectations to attain higher level of functioning which will most likely contribute to the success in a group. Empirical research has indicated that there exist significant positive correlations between leadership and organizational functioning (Hater and Bass 1988; Koh et al. 1995). In a similar submission, Bycio et al. (1995), and Howell and Avolio (1993) reported findings from separate empirical research that leadership is positively associated with subordinates’ commitment and performance. The aforementioned literature indicates that leaders’ involvement will likely be critical ingredient in the success of community development agent training programme.

A number of approaches have evolved over the years that are geared towards the actualization of community development. One of the most popular approaches is the provision of basic social amenities to communities by government. Others include: Community Development Associations (CDA): that does initiate, mobilize resources and execute community project. Cooperative Societies: they mobilize credit facilities for members and build small scale industries in the community. Community Elites: These are individual community members or groups, who support the community in areas of felt needs as well as influence the government and other development agencies in sitting of projects in their communities. And the most recent in the course of institutionalizing stakeholder participation in community development is the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO).

In spite of the benefits of the above stated approaches, there is a major challenge of effectively organizing the people for their own development, and this has led to a growing need to organize an efficient training scheme aimed at exposing the would-be community development agents to a broad range of knowledge and skills in technical and human relations matters and also ensure the involvement of community leaders in the training process. Anxious not to leave things to chance and to ensure that trained personnel did not become a threat to government’s determination to help communities help themselves by embarking on self-help projects, the government has had to emphasize and organized

the training of community development agents. To this effect, the government had established four community development agents training institutions with different goals but with a common objective of giving the trainees, i.e. the CD agents, such trainings that will equip them for helping various communities to initiate and complete self-help projects. Despite the establishment of these training institutions, experience has shown that as much as development personnel training programmes in the state has been mounting with time, little has been done to evaluate the effectiveness of community leaders' involvement in the schemes. The little done has failed to provide empirical evidence to demonstrate the relationship between the said growth rate and the involvement of community leaders. So far, attempts made at drawing the relationship have been verbal and in most cases uncertain with apologetic and defensive political rhetoric.

Indeed, some critics of the training programmes for CD agents in the state have argued that community development efforts may not even have anything to do with change agents. This school of thought believes that communities initiate and execute self-help projects, with or without the support of CD agents. The question arising from this is: could this be true? If the answer is in the affirmative, what is then the need for continued investment of scarce resources in the training of CD agents? If otherwise, would it be possible to contribute further knowledge to the training of CD agents in order to enhance their performance in training programmes?

### **Objectives of the Study**

It is in line with the above that this present study set to evaluate the effect of community leaders' length of involvement in community development on perceived effectiveness of community development agent training programme, with the view of providing an empirical data regarding the effectiveness of the training programme as well as to know how the duration of community leaders' involvement in community development will affect the perception of whether the training programme is effective or not.

The study portends to be of great value in many ways. The valid understanding of community leaders' perception of the effectiveness

of CD agents training programmes could inform reforms in curricula and methodology in such a way that returns on investments in the field can be quantified.

Perception itself is a relevant subject in psychology. Everywhere, psychologists have taken perception to refer to the cognitive activity involving the process of interpreting the vast quantities of stimuli to which an individual is exposed. Thus, perception often involves the use of cognition to be able to view an object about which we can form concepts or ideas. In most cases, such formed ideas or concepts have been known to be valid. But this study is not about perception as such. It has been used here to measure how community leaders view the effectiveness of CD agents training so that we are in a better position to know exactly whether or not the investments made have been worth the while.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

The present study adopted a cross-sectional ex-post facto research design. This was deemed appropriate because the researcher did not consciously manipulate any of the variables, they were rather observed as they had already occurred.

### **Population and Sample**

The population of study is made up of male and female community leaders in the study areas. A sample of 288 was drawn from the population. The participants were randomly selected from the population of study.

### **Instrument**

Data was collected using the community leaders' involvement questionnaire developed for use in this study. This is a 24-item scale meant to elicit information on the level of involvement and perceived effectiveness of involvement in CD Agents training, it is structured in the Likert format with 5 response options ranging from 5, strongly agree to 1, strongly disagree. The higher the score the more effective the involvement. The author reported a test-retest coefficient correlation of .95 (N = 30).

### Procedure for Data Collection

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire; administration was done through research assistants who approached the leaders in their respective homes drop the instruments for them and picked up at later dates. Participants were urged to be as honest as possible in their responses and that there were no right or wrong answers, the exercise was purely for research purpose. They were also told that they were not under compulsion to participate in the study and reserve the right to withdraw at any point they felt inclined to. Only those who accepted to participate were included in the study. Data administration was done over a period of four weeks.

### Analysis

A one way analysis of variance was conducted on the data collected and the result presented in the result section.

## RESULTS

The present study was concerned with the extent to which community leaders' length of involvement in community development activities would affect their perceived effectiveness of the training programme. The result is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: ANOVA summary table showing the effect of community leaders' length of involvement in CD work on perceived effectiveness of training programme**

<i>Source of variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>P value</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Main effects	79.39	2	39.70	.59	n.s
Explained variance	79.39	2	39.70	.59	n.s
Residual	19160.58	285	67.23		
Total	19239.98	287	67.04		

n.s = not significant

The result as shown in Table 1 revealed that there is no significant effect of community leaders' length of involvement in community development work and perceived effectiveness of training programme. In other words, whether a community leader has been involved in community development work for a long time or for a

short time does not have any significant effect on how they perceived the effectiveness of training programme. Most probably, change that comes with the participation of everyone in the community in community development projects are so visible that it would not require any lengthy period of observation for anyone to come to the realization as to whether or not anything has taken place at all. This is not to say that experience can be discarded when it comes to come CD. In fact, the more the involvement of anyone in a given activity probably the better it is for the review of what is being done.

## DISCUSSION

This study set out to investigate the effect of community leaders' length of involvement in community development on perceived effectiveness of community development agent training programme. The result however shows that leaders' length of involvement does not have any significant influence on community development agent training programme, this finding is contrary to our assumptions and expectation and runs contrary to popular literature on leaders involvement in enhancing performance. For example, Matli (1989) found that leaders' involvement in training and planning was closely related to performance and that involvement also encourages participation among the populace which led to increased performance. In an experimental study, Howell and Frost (1989) and that conducted by the Health and Social Care Board (2012) have found that participants whose leaders are involved in the task demonstrated higher performance than those whose leaders were not involved. These two examples suggest the importance of leaders' involvement in the attainment of set goals and that leaders' involvement can enhance performance of participants. These however, were not supported by the findings of this study, this probably may be due to socio-cultural differences in the values of people involved, the studies cited were carried out in the West while the current study was done in Sub Sahara Africa. It is obvious that there exist fundamental differences in the values held and needs of the people. Another probable cause of departure in findings is the generic nature of the conceptualization of leader in the present study rather than approaching the concept in specific mode of contemporary approach.

Similarly, Alam (2012) based on review of leadership in community development affirmed that there is a general expectation for leaders to play important roles in enhancing the process of community development and engendering mass participation. In line with the above mentioned submissions, SIL International (2012) also lend credence to the fact that involvement of community leaders in community development initiatives is imperative the success of the programme and consensus building among the people. In an earlier experimental study, Dinham and Shaw (2012) seemingly found that participants whose leaders are involved in the task demonstrated higher performance than those whose leaders were not involved. The finding has been corroborated by those coming from those conducted by Wang, Chen and Chen (2011) and then that by Settle (2010, 2012). These examples suggest the importance of leaders' involvement in the attainment of set goals and that leaders' involvement can enhance performance of participants (Tremblay and Gutberlet 2012) These however, were not supported by the findings of this study, this probably may be due to socio-cultural differences in the values of people involved, and the studies cited were carried out in the west while the current study was done in Sub Sahara Africa. It is obvious that there exist fundamental differences in the values held and needs of the people. Another probable cause of departure in findings is the generic nature of the conceptualization of leader in the present study rather than approaching the concept in specific mode of contemporary approach (Kuponiyi 2008; Olujide 2008).

### CONCLUSION

In the context of this study community leaders' length of involvement did not influence perceived effectiveness of community development agent training programme. This should however, not be seen as conclusive evidence that leaders' involvement is not important in training programme; rather, subsequent studies should emphasize specific community problems and specific leadership approaches in enhancing task performance and effective involvement. Doing this should really enhance the quality of training programmes aimed at capacitating community development agents such that their inputs would be much more valuable. For community

leaders have been known to make significant inputs to the development of community development agents training curriculum. Their involvement in both curriculum and actual training activities have been known to raise training standards.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Subsequent studies should emphasize on specific community problems and specific leadership approaches in enhancing task performance and effective involvement. Also, the scope of future studies should be expanded to enhance external validity while attempt at experimental manipulations should be considered. In sum, communities in the developing world could gain more from articulated studies that could bring out the strengths and weaknesses of training programmes designed for development agents. If they do, developing communities could well be on their way to developing at a much faster and beneficial rates.

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