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Influence of Leader Interpersonal Attributes on Cohesiveness of the Dairy Goat Farmers' Groups in Central and Eastern Provinces of Kenya

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Abstract:

The Dairy goat Project introduced in the Central and Eastern Kenya highlands in 1992 by GTZ in collaboration with the Kenya government is a success story of a poverty reduction project. The Dairy Goat Farmers' Association in Central and Eastern Provinces of Kenya has been very successful in sustaining the project outputs, capacity growth and stability of the member groups. These dimensions of organisational growth have been attributed partly to effectiveness of group leadership. Although factors that contribute to effectiveness of leadership as an interaction process and outcome are generally known, not all factors may be generalised to specific circumstances due to the situational nature of leadership. This study examined influence of leader interpersonal attributes on group cohesiveness in member groups of the Dairy Goat Association of Kenya. Out of 106 farmers' groups and 2199 members, 47 group leaders and 251 followers selected through stratified random sampling, were interviewed. All the Leader interpersonal attributes (problem solving, team work, decision making and conflict resolution) were significantly related to group cohesiveness at $p \leq 0.05$. The study concluded that leaders' interpersonal factors were important determinants of leadership effectiveness. There is therefore, need to design leadership training programs that equip group leaders with interpersonal skills for enhancement and sustainability of the dairy goat project.

Keywords: leadership effectiveness, farmers groups, sustainable goat project

1. Introduction

1.1. Background Introduction

The German Agency for Technical Co-operation (GTZ) in collaboration with the Government of Kenya introduced the Dairy Goat project among farmers' groups in the highlands of Central and Eastern Kenya in 1992. The project was based on the premise that these areas have a generally high population density (450 people / Km²) with up to 700 people in some Counties like Kiambu, upper parts Embu and Meru (Kariuki & Place, 2005). The increasing population density has forced the expansion of arable cropping into lower arid areas and higher altitudes, suitable for livestock, tea, pyrethrum and/or forestry. Key modifications within the agricultural systems in the highlands include shorter or no fallow periods, cropping on steep slopes and in the swamps during the dry seasons. Such an intensive agricultural system has progressively resulted into shrinking of grazing areas, to the extent of not being able to sustain one dairy cow. Therefore, promotion of crossbred goats and particularly dairy crossbreds in the Kenyan highlands, where the population density and pressure on land is increasing is a better livestock development option. A particular emphasis has been given to dual-purpose goats obtained by crossing Alpine and Toggenburg with the East African goat (Maigua, 2006).

A notable feature in the design of the dairy goat project to farmers' groups in Central and Eastern provinces of Kenya was its community-based and farmer-led orientation. Farmers and farmer group members were rigorously trained on breeding programme, management and husbandry, including primary healthcare. (Ahuya, Okeyo, Njuru & Peacock, 2005). The project focuses on upgrading the indigenous goat breeds by use of exotic bucks and does of German alpine breeds. The operation involves sharing of one exotic buck by a group of about 20 farmers (Dairy Goat Association of Kenya [DGAK], 2006).

To facilitate participatory management of the project, an association comprising of 106 farmers' groups involved in the dairy goat keeping (Dairy Goat Association of Kenya) was registered in 1994, with the ultimate objective of poverty alleviation among the members. Members of DGAK's management committee were drawn from the member groups. The latter sustain the association and its functions in the following ways: - Participation in the various forums of the association through their representatives; financial support by paying registration, membership, and annual subscription fees; payment of sales tax by selling their goats in the sales and auctions organized by the association; and utilizing the services provided by the association, (DGAK, 2001).

Since its registration in April 1994, DGAK had not only grown to become established as an economically viable national farmers' association but its capacity as a service provider, in the field of extension, marketing and quality control, and input supply had been enhanced. However, in 1998, GTZ, the major funding agency, withdrew part of its financial and logistical support from the project. In 2001, all components of the project except the secretariat were handed over to DGAK. Despite this organizational change, the group members have continued to obtain livelihoods such as better milk yields, and higher incomes from the sale of high quality goats and their products from the dairy goat project. By 2013, the association's networks had even extended to Coast and Western Provinces of Kenya, and the number of DGAK member groups had risen to 1300 with a membership of 16,000 farmers owning 45,000 upgraded goats ((Kariuki, Okore & Indetie, 2013). This credible growth in capacity of DGAK and sustainability of the dairy goat project by the member groups has been attributed partly to leadership effectiveness (DGAK, 2006).

1.2. Concept of Leadership

Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007). The process also involves influencing of others to understand and agree about what needs to be done, how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared goals (Yukl, 2013). Influence as a component of leadership refers to the effect of one party on another. The influence may be over followers' attitudes, perceptions, behaviour or a combination of these outcomes (Forsyth, 2013). Leadership is applicable to all interpersonal relationships in which influence attempts are involved. Leadership influence is therefore built upon a foundation of quality interpersonal interactions and consistent with delivery of mutual outcomes (Lippincot, 2017). At the most basic level of the process of decision making, leadership can be construed if it results in a change in group dynamics or behaviour. Leadership is therefore inseparably linked with action and it is therefore, often judged by the perceived effectiveness of agents in attaining outcomes. Evidence of leadership can therefore be sought in instances of change in relational structure or outcomes, and negotiation and persuasion. (Tredgold, 2014)

1.3. Interpersonal Attributes for Leadership

Interpersonal skills enable leaders to form rich social networks, which enables them access the people, information, and resources they need to identify problems and potential solutions. Consequently, they get things done faster, make better decisions and are more likely to have support for their ideas and plans. Effective interpersonal networks therefore, can have a significant impact on an organization's success (Freifeld, 2013). Interpersonal skills and attributes are center on communication, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution and mediation, team working, problem solving and decision making (Nag, A. October 23 2011). Communication skills enfold verbal and communication, non-verbal communication and listening skills. Team working is the ability to work with others in groups and teams, both formal and informal. Emotional intelligence refers to being able to understand and manage one's own and others' emotions, while negotiation, persuasion and influencing skills is the working with others to find a mutually agreeable outcome. Conflict resolution and mediation involves working with others to resolve interpersonal conflict and disagreements in a positive way, which may be considered a subset of communication. Lastly, problem solving and decision making encompasses working with others to identify, define and solve problems, which includes making decisions about the best course of action (Expert Program Management [EPM], 2013). People use interpersonal skills every day when they communicate and interact both individually and in groups. People with good interpersonal skills tend to work well in a team or group, and are more likely to be successful professionally (Lippincot, 2017).

1.4. Evaluation of Leadership Effectiveness

Leadership effectiveness is assessed in accordance with its purpose and therefore difficult to pinpoint comprehensively, the set of criteria applicable to all situations and organizations (Bryant, 2009). Since human behaviors are so complicated and dynamic, holistic assessment should necessarily be conducted to capture various aspects of leadership, based on the observable outcomes (Lippincot, 2017). Three major outcomes of influence attempts are commitment, compliance and resistance. However, effective leadership stimulates commitment and attracts membership by its charm (Feldman, 1998). Such an outcome depends on the manner in which a leader organizes and directs the group processes under various conditions (Fleenor, 2011). The role of followers is also fundamental for comprehending social dynamics in situations where leadership is assessed. To that end, measures commonly used are based on followers and observers' perceptions on the leader's contribution to group processes. One of the major outcomes of this contribution is group cohesiveness which reflects the social dimension of leadership (Bryant, 2009; Yukl, 2013; Forsyth, 2013). Cohesiveness is the degree to which group members feel attracted to the group, a primary factor in keeping a group in existence and forms the working climate within which a group functions. The greater the attractiveness, the higher the cohesiveness, which is a variable property and differs between groups, between situations and across time (Hogg, M. & Vaughan G., 1995). High group cohesiveness produces unity of the members, member satisfaction and membership stability (Taylor, Peplau. & Sears 1997). These outcomes were adopted for the study of the Dairy Goat Association in central and Eastern provinces of Kenya.

2. Statement of the Problem

Whereas interpersonal attributes that contribute to leadership effectiveness as an interaction process and outcome are generally known, not all of them may be generalized to specific circumstances due to the situational nature of leadership because characteristics that drive positive influence and performance vary from organization to organization (Hawkins, M., 2012). For the Dairy Goat association of Kenya, problem solving, decision making, team working and conflict resolution and mediation attributes were presumed to be more relevant leader interpersonal attributes.

3. Purpose of the Study

This study was designed to determine empirically, how some of the leaders' interpersonal attributes as evaluated by their followers, influence leadership effectiveness in the sustainability of the member groups of the dairy goat project by the Dairy Goat Association of Kenya in Central and Eastern provinces.

3.1. Objectives of the Study

The study sought to determine:

1. Leaders' interpersonal attributes
2. Leaders' level of effectiveness in terms of group cohesiveness as perceived by group members
3. The extent to which leaders' interpersonal attributes influence group cohesiveness

The Hypothesis tested in this study was that leaders' interpersonal attributes have no statistically significant influence on group cohesiveness

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

The research design was a correlational survey, with the data collected at one point in time to determine the extent to which leaders' interpersonal attributes influenced leadership effectiveness in maintaining group cohesiveness in the Dairy goat association of Kenya. The design was appropriate for the study because the independent variables could not be manipulated by the researcher. The study also dealt with human beings who are free to choose what they would or not participate in (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The independent variables of the study were leader's interpersonal attributes (Problem solving, team work, decision making and conflict resolution), while the independent variable was group cohesiveness.

4.2. Study Population

The population of the study consisted of 106 farmers' groups with a membership of 2,199, which existed before or were formed during the initiation of the project. These were distributed within Embu county in Eastern province, and Nyeri, Murang'a, Kirinyaga and Kiambu counties in Central province. The target population which was also the accessible population was the group chairpersons and their followers in Embu and Murang'a counties.

4.3. Population and Sampling

Cluster sampling was used to select two counties: Embu in Eastern Province and Murang'a in Central Province. The two study sites had a population of 47 dairy goat groups with a membership of 865. The entire population of the 47 groups' chairpersons was studied while a sample of 251 chairpersons' followers was selected through proportional stratified random sampling. A further randomly selected sample size of 69 group by-laws covering members' conduct and project operations was also obtained from the 106 DGAK groups, to provide clues on leadership attributes considered important by the groups.

4.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Two sets of interview schedules containing closed and open ended questions, one for the group chairperson and the other for his or her followers were used to collect data. The data collection instruments were suitable for the study because some of the respondents had low or no literacy levels. The Interview schedule for group chairpersons solicited their personal attributes, while that of the leader followers mainly dwelt on the evaluation of the group chairperson' interpersonal attributes and leadership effectiveness. An average score was computed from the interviewed leader followers of a particular group, to obtain the mean leadership effectiveness score. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences software.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Leaders Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics considered were gender, age, marital status education and current occupation. The results are indicated on Table 1.

All the 47 group chairpersons responded to all the questions in the questionnaire. Among the 47 leaders studied (78.7 %) were men while 21.3 % were women, revealing gender disparity in leadership composition in DGAK groups. This trend of low number of women leaders may be attributed to the traditional role expectations and biased community attitudes against

women. The greater proportion (95.7 %) of the leaders were married and living with their spouse while the rest (4.3 %) were single through divorce and widowhood

Variable	No.	%	Mean	SD	Range	N
<i>Gender:</i>						
Men	37	78.72	-	-	-	47
Women	10	21.28	-	-	-	
<i>Marital Status:</i>						
Married	45	95.70	-	-	-	47
Widowed	1	2.15	-	-	-	
Separated/Divorced	1	2.15	-	-	-	
<i>Age (Calendar Years)</i>						
	-	-	56.15	12.71	29 - 80	47
<i>Years of formal Schooling</i>						
			7.85	3.25	1 - 15	47
<i>Current Occupation:</i>						
Fulltime Farmer	32	68.08				
Part-time Farmer	15	31.92				47

Table 1: Group Leaders' Demographic Characteristics

The mean age for all leaders was 56.15 years resulting from a wide range of 29 years for the youngest and 80 for the oldest leader. This indicates that the members of the DGAK groups had no preference for a particular age in choosing their leaders. However, a greater proportion, (68.1 %) of leaders was above 50 years.

The mean years of formal schooling for all leaders was 7.85, with a range of 1 to 15 years. The general notion is that all leaders had some basic education, which may be an important criterion in the choice of leaders. When leaders' mean years of formal education was compared with that of their followers (6.21), it was found out that the leaders' was slightly above that of their followers. This may mean that leaders whose education is above their followers were preferred in the Dairy Goat Association of Kenya. Majority of the leaders (68.08%) were fulltime farmers while the rest were part time farmers, whose second and/or third occupation comprised of teaching, business, clergy and clerical work.

5.2. Leaders' Interpersonal Attributes

Leaders' interpersonal behaviour had four dimensions: - Problem solving, team work, conflict resolution and decision making. Indicators for each of the behaviours are shown on Table 2.

These indicators were measured varying ordinal scales, with 0 representing complete absence of concept and 5, full presence. In each group, selected leader followers evaluated their leader after which, the mean score was calculated for individual group leaders. This score was further used to compute the group mean score for all leaders. The findings are presented in Table 2 below.

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Problem Solving			
Initiating action	3.37	0.35	2.0 - 3.8
Seeks expert information	3.37	0.45	2.0 - 4.0
Develop procedure for	3.38	0.85	1.0 - 4.0
Clarify Issues	3.56	0.66	0.5 - 4.2
Total score	13.68	1.08	5.5 - 15.5
Team Work			
Leader is friendly to all	4.43	0.43	3.0 - 5.0
Do not show favouritism	4.40	0.53	3.0 - 5.0
Focus on group goal	3.37	0.54	0.5 - 4.0
Sacrifice personal interests for the group	3.48	0.59	1.5 - 4.0
Total score	13.68	1.88	5.5 - 15.5
Decision Making			
Encourage participation	3.73	0.38	2.5 - 4.0
Accept follower suggestions	4.37	0.43	3.0 - 5.0
Get consensus	3.56	0.52	2.0 - 4.0
Total score	11.64	1.08	7.5 - 13.0
Conflict Resolution			
Attend to member disagreements	2.77	0.53	0 - 3.0
Accept mistakes	3.24	0.58	4.1 - 4.0
Express group tension	3.20	0.55	1.0 - 4.0
He/she is a good mediator	4.41	0.53	3.0 - 5.0
		0.19	1.5 - 2.3
Total score	11.4	1.54	4.0 - 13.20

Table 2: Leaders' Interpersonal Attributes (N = 47)

The data in Table 2 above shows that resultant mean for problem solving was 13.68. Individual leaders scored between 5.5 and 15.5 against a maximum score of 17.0. The group mean portrays a relatively high problem solving orientation for the leaders. Team work was also a composite variable consisting of four antecedent variables namely: - leader friendliness (scale of 0 - 5), do not show favouritism (0 - 5), focused on group goal (0 - 4) and sacrifices personal interests for the group (0 - 4). The group means on specific team work variables indicate that leaders were high in all. Utilisation of the four indicators to derive the level of team work attribute gave a mean of 13.68 (against a maximum score of 18.0), with a range of 5.5 to 18.0 for individual leaders. This mean and range reveals that, although leaders were generally moderate in team work, a few were quite poor in the attribute. Decision making comprised of three antecedents specifically: - encourage participation, accept follower suggestions and get member consensus. These actions were measured on rating scales of 0 to 4, 1 to 5, and 0 to 4 respectively. Compared to a maximum possible score of 13, the mean for all leaders was 11.64 with a range of 7.5 to 13.0. These findings revealed that, although individual leaders varied in their follower involvement in decision making, the level of involvement was generally high.

5.3. Leadership Effectiveness, (Based on Responses from 251 Leader Followers and 47 leaders)

The results of the analysis on Table 3 below showed that the group members were very satisfied with the group and the leader (means = 4.69 and 4.20 respectively). Individual group and leader means varied from 2.0 to 5.0 and 1.8 - 5.0 respectively). The latter range may be an indicator of a few leaders, whose popularity may have waned in the groups. Trust among members was also high (mean = 4.18), and scores ranged from 1.0 to 5.0 on a scale of 5. The range of scores indicates that, some degree of mistrust exists in few individual groups other than in the entire Dairy goat Association of Kenya. Members support for each other in times of need is relatively low, compared to other cohesiveness indicators (mean = 2.67, with a range of 0.2 to 4.0). This range reveals a wide disparity between individual group members' support for one another. The trend may be an indication of members' preference for task instead of social-oriented groups. During the preliminary survey of this study, a sample of 69 group bylaws revealed that failure to pay instituted fines (in case of violating group conduct or project rules) and subscription fee, were a basis for expulsion from the group.

The readiness and timeliness were thus, indicators of the members' *desire to remain in the group*. On a scale of 1 to 3, the mean score on readiness for all groups was 2.15. Individual group's range of scores was between 1 and 3.0. This range may be a pointer to the presence of reluctant individual group members, which could be a threat to stability of group membership. However, the mean for all groups portrays at least a moderate level of readiness. Payment of subscription fee was timely as shown by a group mean score of 3.23 on a scale of 1- 4.0. Individual leader's evaluation of their followers on this attribute ranged from 1 to 4 points. This range when compared to the relatively high group mean reveals some laxity in a few groups. Frequency of secondary conflict was generally low in that on a scale of 5.0 (with 5 representing complete absence), the mean for all groups was 4.38. Individual group scores ranged from 2 to 5.0. These findings reveal that although there was a general rare occurrence of the phenomenon, a few groups often experienced some degree of secondary conflicts, a threat to group cohesion.

Indicators	No. of Groups	%	Mean	SD	Range	N
Members satisfaction with the group	-	-	4.69	0.44	2.0 - 5.0	251
Follower satisfaction with leadership	-	-	4.20	0.71	1.8 - 5.0	251
Trust among members	-	-	4.18	0.70	1.0 - 5.0	251
Member support for one another	-	-	2.67	0.11	0.2 - 4.0	251
Desire to remain in the group (From Leaders Perspective):						
Readiness to pay fines	-	-	2.15	0.82	1.0 - 3.0	47
Timeliness in paying subscription fee	-	-	3.23	0.73	1.0 - 4.0	47
Absence of secondary conflict	-	-	4.38	0.79	2.0 - 5.0	47
Member cooperation			4.34	0.83	3.0 - 5.0	47
Member unity	-	-	2.34	0.67	1.0 - 3.0	47
Membership stability			3.66	1.11	2.0 - 5.0	47
<i>Reasons for membership decline:</i>						
-Relocation	4	57.10	-	-	-	-
-Dissatisfaction with group	3	42.90	-	-	-	7

Table 3: Group Cohesiveness Indicators (from Followers Perspective)

Generally, members of all groups were at least cooperative when conducting group activities (mean = 4.34). On a scale of 3.0 the group mean for member unity was 2.34. This finding reveals that members in all groups assisted one another at least readily in times of need. Nevertheless, the range of scores (1.0-3.0) for individual groups indicates that, in some groups, members were reluctant to help each other. This phenomenon could be attributed to the fact that the area of study has a culture that is on transition from collectivism to individualism and therefore, individual commitments may override colleagues' needs. When membership stability was coded on a scale of 5, the mean for all groups (3.66) revealed that generally, all groups were almost stable. However, the range of scores (2.0 – 5.0) showed that some individual groups had low stability. In the 7 groups with membership decline, reasons forwarded by 4 leaders was due to member relocation while 3 indicated that the group failed to meet the expectations of the members, of getting free goats.

The ten cohesiveness indicators were utilised to compute a cumulative score for cohesiveness. Consequently, a mean of 35.90 and a range of 10 to 42 were obtained. The results are shown on Table 4.

Variable	Mean	S.D	Range
Group cohesiveness	35.90	3.47	24.9 - 42.0

Table 4: Status of Group Cohesiveness (N = 47)

The maximum score that any group would score was 44.0. The mean score (35.90) therefore portrays a generally high level of group cohesiveness while the range (24.9 – 42.0) shows that, at least every group was above average in cohesiveness.

Spearman's rank order correlation was applied to test the hypothesis that, there is no statistically significant influence of leader interpersonal attributes on leadership effectiveness (Group Cohesiveness). The results are shown on Table 5.

Problem solving, team work, decision making and conflict resolution attributes were found to significantly influence group cohesiveness, the first at $p \leq 0.05$ and later three at $p \leq 0.01$. . These attributes (except problem solving and team work; Problem solving and decision making) were also significantly and positively interrelated among themselves.

Variable	(PS)	(TW)	(DM)	(CR)	(GC)
Problem Solving (PS)	-	.169	.072	.406**	.336*
Team Work (TW)		-	.585**	.580**	.478**
Decision Making (DM)			-	.440**	.585**
Conflict resolution (CR)				-	.580**
Group Cohesiveness (GC)					-

Table 5: Spearman's Rank Order Correlations between Leader interpersonal Attributes and Group Cohesiveness for all Leaders (N = 47).

* Correlation is significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level

** Correlation is significant at the $p \leq 0.01$ level

The findings of this study infer that for group cohesiveness to be maintained in the Dairy Goat Association of Kenya, the group leaders should exercise interpersonal behaviors based on problem solving, team work, decision making and conflict resolution. In absence of these qualities in a leader, the groups are likely to disintegrate. Fortunately, these skills can be learnt through training.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study revealed that all the selected leaders' interpersonal attributes significantly influenced Leadership effectiveness in group cohesiveness. The group chairpersons in the Dairy Goat Association of Kenya groups were at least moderately effective in keeping the groups cohesive. These attributes can be acquired through training, unlike others that are inherent. Leadership training programs should therefore be designed and conducted to polish the interpersonal skills of the current group leaders and equip the future ones with interpersonal skills, to ensure sustainability of the DGAK member groups and by extension, the dairy goat project in Central and Eastern Provinces of Kenya. Moreover, due to the situational nature of leadership, the study should be replicated to other member groups of the Dairy Goat Association of Kenya outside the two provinces in which the study was carried out. This will establish a leadership effectiveness framework relevant to their situation.

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