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RURAL COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

- In every social system organizations, communities or families certain key persons have the ability to influence the ideas and actions of others.

- In very small social systems like the family, such influence may reside in a single individual (the father, mother or maternal uncle, e.t.c.).

- In larger social system however power structures tend to be more decentralized or pluralistic because in such systems are to be found a larger variety of status roles, socially heterogeneous populations and a number of autonomones institutions.

- The terms *decentralization* here refer to the degree to which decisions in a large number of issue areas are made either by a small or large number of actors respectively.

- Decision making is a very important process of a social system. It entails the reduction of the number of available alternative courses of action or behavior in a given situation.

- Every social system makes decisions on the best line of action, behaviour combination of resources for arriving at desirable ends.

- Those who are vested with the responsibility of making decisions for the group therefore obviously influence the actions of others in the group.

- They constitute the *power structure* of the system. Community leadership is also used in this chapter to designate among other things the distinctive characteristics of those actors centrally involved in rural community decision-making.

THE CONCEPTS OF 'LEADERS' AND 'LEADERSHIP'

- H. F. Reading in his *Glossary of Sociological Terms* defines a leader as

- (a) person initiating interaction with other members of group

- (b) person who initiates interaction more frequently than anyone else in an a group, and

- (c) person who moves the group to wards group goal[1].

- The simple dictionary definition of a leader is 'one who leads or goes first'.
- In other words one who first perceives the group's needs far ahead of others and therefore plans and enlists the cooperation of others in its implementation.

- A person is a leader in any social situation in its implementation.

- A person is a leader in any social situation in which his ideas and actions influence the thoughts and behaviours of others.

- The concept of a 'leader' therefore implies role-playing for some time.

- To be styled a leader, one must be performing leading roles repeatedly under varying conditions.[3]

- A headman may or may not be a leader.

- Group is actually being directed or led by another person who is not styled 'the head'. Such terms as "figure head".
- "ceremonial leader", etc. are used to described persons who though at the head of a group, are either incapable of leading that group or relegates the responsibility of leadership to others.
- Gibb further makes the following distinction between a head and a leader.[1]

- Headship or domination is maintained through an organized system and not by the spontaneous recognition by fellow group members, of the individual's contribution to group goals;
- The group goal is chosen by the head man in line with his interests and is not internally determined by the group itself;

- It domination or headship, there is little or no sense of shared feeling or joint action in pursuit of the given goal;
- There is in the dominance relation a wide social gap between the group members and the head who strives to maintain this social distance as an aid to his coercion of the group;

- The leader's authority is spontaneously accorded him by his fellow group members the followers, whereas the authority of the head derives from some extra group power which he has over the group members who may not be meaningfully called his followers.

CHARACTERISTICS AND TYPES OF LEADERS

- Leadership calls for certain qualities or characteristics firstly on the part of the individual to want to become a leader and secondly on the part group to want to respond favourably to the individual's leading acts.

- In all, several types of leaders can be identified according to the following criteria:
- (a) path of attaining leadership position
- (b) visibility, legitimacy and scope of influence and
- (c) orientation.
- It must be noted before hand that these are not mutually exclusive categories.
- As it will soon become evident, one leader can fall into all or most of these classifications.

Types of leaders by paths of leadership

- *Situational leadership*: this refers to one who foresees a crisis or the needs of a group and takes initiative in either rectifying the situation or mobilizing others to meet such a situation.
- This is why some people have argued that leaders are no born[1] but made by situations.

- *Dictatorial Leader:* generally when a situation brings up a leader, there is the tendency for this individual to either feel that he has the obligation to remain at the head to watch over the interest of that group perpetually irrespective of their wishes, or that the only befitting gratitude which the group which he has helped could render him is to allow him rule over them.

- Gouldner A.W. (ed), *Studies in Leadership.* New York: Harper & Brothers 1950. P. 21:, Also see Borgatta, E.F. *et al.,* "Some Findings Relevant to the Great Man Theory of leadership". *American Sociological review* 19. No 6 (Dec. 1954): 755-756:

- *Traditional or Hereditary Leader:* This is one who is born into a heredity leadership position which accustom and tradition recognize.

- His leadership status is therefore ascribed rather than achieved. In other words, he has authority by virture of the tradition of the community.

- In fact case the leader becomes a mere figure head as other people are vested with the role of leading the community on his behalf

- *Charismatic Leader:* The term 'charisma' means a divine or spiritual power.
- It also means a personal characterizer or quality that enables an individual to influence his fellowmen.
- A charismatic leader is therefore the type of person who has such qualities like good looks, high level of intelligence, ability to speak, fearlessness and commitment to certain ideals which when taken altogether makes people follow him almost without questioning his authority.

- He has a more or less magical appeal to the people and they may in fact, come to regard him as their savior.

- He himself may, as time goes on, begin to feel that he has been divinely inspired to lead.

- This type of leader tends to thrive most in crisis situations where he can display or exhibit his qualities.

- A number of political leaders in Nigeria can be looked upon as charistmatic leaders.

Types of leaders by 'Visibility'. 'Legitimacy' and Scope of Influence

- According to Bonjean and Olson, visibility of leaders refers to the extent to which such leaders are recognized as influential by leaders and non-leaders.

- This can be determined by comparing the nominations and rankings of leaders themselves with the no-

- Bonjean, C.M. amd olson, D.M., "Community Leadership: Directions of Research". *Administrative Science Quarterly* 9(Dec. 1964): 278-300.

- Minations and ranking of non-leaders. Such comparison has yielded the following types of ,eaders:

- *Visible Leaders:* These are leaders assigned the same amount of power and recognition by both leaders and non-leaders.
- They play roles which are perceived and known by the community at large and are therefore 'visible'.

- *Concealed Leaders:* These are leaders assigned more prestige by leaders than non-leaders.
- They are called 'concealed' because they have more influence within the leadership circle, and ultimately in the entire community then the community members at large realize.

- *Symbolic Leader:* These are leaders assigned more prestige by non-leaders than by leaders.
- The term "symbolic" indicates that they do not wield as much influence in the community as the masses within the community think they do.

- **The covert power elite is typified by:**
- Leaders who do not hold political or associational offices;
- Are not recognized by the community at large as key decision makers i.e. they are concealed leaders;
- Are active in a wide range of decision areas; and
- Do not work independently or in opposition to each other but always as a group.

Generalists

- Generalists: are those leaders who have a rather wide scope of influence and tend to participate in a wide range of community activities.

- They belong to a number of committee and are present wherever key decisions on community matters are taken.

- The village Head might be regarded as a generalist because he seems to be the key legitimize of all community issues.

Specialists

- **Specialists;** Are those leaders whose interests are restricted to one or few community activities or issues.
- They tend to be professionals in specific areas and may hold specific official positions within the community.
- The pastor and the village school Headmaster may be regarded as specialists as they are usually consulted in matters affecting their areas of specialization and tend to be excluded from other areas particularly where they are non-natives.

Types of Leaders by Orientation

- Leaders are further classified according to whether they are cosmopolitan or local in their orientation.

- By this is meant the extent to which they are mainly interested in matters inside or outside their community.

- Robert Merton[1] has developed a typology for describing local and cosmopolitan leaders:

- *Local Leaders*: are those whose interests care in the community and whose leadership rest on an elaborate network of personal relationships.
- They join voluntary organizations in order to make contacts; tend to read the local newspapers
- Merton, R. K., *Social Theory and Structure*. New York: The Free Press, 1957.p.419.
- Mainly. Their influence depends on whom rather than what they know.

- *Cosmopolitan* Leaders are those leaders whose interests are broader than their local communities.
- They function on behalf of their communities because they are able to transcend their giving limits.
- They tend to use organization membership to improve and exhibit their skills and knowledge.
- They may not hold political offices.
- They read to keep up with developments generally and for self improvement.
- Their influence therefore rests on what they know and can do rather than on whom they know.

Lay Leaders

- The opposite of 'professional leader' is 'lay leader'. Curtis Trent[1] has said that for practical purposes lay leaders can further be divided into 'action leaders' and 'opinion leaders'.

- *Action Leaders* are all lay people actively involved in the planning, execution and/or evaluation of community programmes.
- They may take active part in the organization of the community as volunteer subject-matter specialists teaching specific subjects to others, as activity leaders, as programme planners, councilors or committee members.
- They are those sought after by community workers for training and active involvement in community programmes.

- *Opinion Leaders* are all lay people who by virtue of their social positions, age, education, family background, wealth, prestige, or political contacts, influence opinions on most action programmes initiated in the community.
- They represent the power structure of the community and may either hold formal positions or offices or be informal leaders holding no official posts.
- They are therefore important to be identified for the sake of giving formal approval or legitimation to action programme within the community.
- Trent, C., "Lay Leadership" in H.C Sanders (ed.), The cooperative Extension Service. Englewood Cliffs N. J;. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966. pp. 315 – 330.

LEADERS' BASES OF POWER AND INFLUENCE

- That leadership involves the ability to influence, direct or control others means that leadership involves the use of power.
- The leader must have a recognized power the source of which may be within or outside the group led. When his power is from the group this is spontaneously accorded him by his followers whereas where the source of power is located externally there may be some elements of coercion.
- Power s the ability to exact compliance or the ability to execute one's will irrespective of opposition. Cartwright and Zander[1] have identified five bases of power of a group leader.

- These include
- (a) Reward power which derives from the belief on the part of the followers that they will be rewarded in some way for complying. In this instance power is exercised effectively whenever one party cannot get elsewhere;
- (b) Coercive in punishment;
- (c) Expert power. In this case when a person is evaluated to have needed knowledge, information or skill which cannot be obtained readily elsewhere, that person holds expert power over the group. The rain doctor, the Diviner and other local experts claim this source of power. (
- d) Referent Power. This is the power the leader has as a result of his having qualities which the group members like, admire and want to identify with him.
- (e) Legitimate Power. This derives from th office or official position which the individual occupies and which gives him the right to control the individuals ad equally compels others to do their work.

- *Official position*: this may be elected, appointed or earned office within the political structure.
- The village headship is an official position for instance.
- It usually grants the incumbent a certain minimum of functions and responsibilities which enable him to become involved in and affect the outcomes of community issues more readily than other actors in the community's political structure.
- It provides access to knowledge and information, popularity, friendship, development of skills the expectation of activity and the legitimation of attempts to exercise influence by others.

- *Financial control*: Economic base such as control over money, credit, jobs and other resources or essential services is a recognized strong basis of influence.
- People who are rich may also enhance their influence within the community by donating generously to community programmes.
- In most parts of Nigeria today, they may even purchase traditional titles thereby warming themselves up into the power structure of the community.
- When these types of people have featured repeatedly in community issues, they may later be regarded as being indispensable.

- *Organizational influence*: This derives from one's ability or potential ability to mobilize and organize others into active groups.
- It also derives from participation in organizations and perhaps holding positions within such organizations.
- Most community issues are crystallized in voluntary formal and informal organizations hence people who are active in such organizations are bound to weild considerable influence within the community.
- Moss, G.M., "An analysis of community leaders' orientations towards adult education". Unpublished Ph. D Thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1970, pp. 89-93.

- *Knowledge or Expertness*: this may be related to official position but it involves the possession of particular knowledge or skills above others in the group.
- Gibb[1] has in his study concluded that a person does not become a leader solely by virtue of any particular pattern of personality traits, but by the possession of any attribute that by virtue of its relevance to the situation and its situationally determined evaluation by other group members, establishes a relation of leading and following.
- The Diviner's status and prestige for instance, are based on his ability to 'see' what others cannot see.

- *Interpersonal contacts*: This includes access to and interaction with other persons both inside and outside the community.
- The individual who has many friends and contacts within the community is likely to be more informed, knowledgeable and influential than others.
- Community members may look up to him to link them up with these external agencies and personalities from whom they can obtain the needed resources with which to attain their objectives.

- *Personal Characteristics*: This includes attributes like appealing personality, popularity, esteem, charisma, ability to persuade others, eloquence, honesty, congeniality, etc. these attributes by themselves may not form a solid base for influencing others.
- To be effective, they must go hand in hand with the possession of a combination of the other bases of influence earlier on mentioned.

Suggested Readings

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- Se Chapter 15, Local Government.

SELECTION OF CONTACT FARMER AND SPAT ESTABLISHMENT

- **Who is a Contact Farmer?**
- A contact farmer is the last link in the Heirachail Setup of the training and visit system of extension, who severs as an innovative centre for the diffusion and promotion of recommendation agricultural farm practices to other farmers in order to increase productivity and farm income through the adoption of farm recommendations.
- The EA works primarily through contact farmers by teaching and or demonstrating production recommendation to them on then fields during the regular fixed schedule visits.
- Thus contact farmer have a clear and important role to play in technology transfer process.

Acronyms in Extension Services

- VEA
- FNT
- MTRM
- T&V System of extension
- UAES
- REFILS
- BEA
- BES
- ZM
- SMS
- SPAT
- FAP