

The Evolution of Effective Leadership Practices in Farmers' Associations in Swaziland

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Chapter discusses the evolution of leadership practices in farmers' associations, noting that associations are, typically, not alien to Swazis. It identifies leadership structures and support systems. It reveals that members of farmers' associations are aware of their available leadership structures and support systems and utilize them in day-to-day interaction with their associations; and consider most structures to be operating effectively, except for failure to circulate minutes of some meetings. Members also consider support systems to be operating effectively. The major challenges that ought to be addressed include: failure to recognize youth and women as potential leaders, and to follow the constitution; formation of cliques; abuse of power; favoritism and nepotism; lack of transparency among leaders; inadequate business and leadership training among office bearers; lack of trust between members and leaders; jealousy and enmity among leaders; infighting among and between members and leaders; and interference from chiefs.

INTRODUCTION

In Swaziland, the term “farmer” is used to mean just about everyone in the rural areas, implying that practically every Swazi is a farmer, as an estimated 78.9% of the Swazi population is rural-based (Central Statistical Office, 2010). Ordinarily, extension staff and community members classify rural people into different groupings as farmers: full-time, part-time, subsistence, commercial, resource rich, resource poor, men, women, young, old, progressive/innovator, non-cooperative, members of farmer groups and non-members (Schorosch, Chuma, Keregero & Andrade, 2011).

Small-scale farmers are usually full-time subsistence operators who constitute the majority of farmers and mainly reside and operate on Swazi nation land (SNL), which is held in trust by the King and administered on his behalf by chiefs. This land makes up approximately 60% of cultivated land and accounts for about 20% of total agricultural output. Small-scale farmers operate at subsistence level, are the most difficult to reach and yet need extension services the most. They include some of the most disadvantaged farmers who are least educated, lack self-confidence to seek out new information, have small and marginal land resources, are located far from services and cannot afford to try new technologies (Schorosch et al., 2011).

Elements of Traditional Swazi Governance

Since Swaziland is predominantly rural, families as solidarity groups enhance the effectiveness of leadership structures in communities. Five important factors play a role in the operation of the rural family as a solidarity group: the continuing existence of a fund of resources for social security purposes, the size of the group, its composition, its sustainability and the existence of a normative insurance within the group (Leliveld, 1994). A key consideration in the resources for social security is the right to use and dispose of the productive and reproductive resources which every generation must gain possession of when it reaches maturity. Customary rules, moral principles and community norms constitute a powerful means of ensuring cooperation and enforcement of obligations.

Along with rural families as solidarity groups, social networks also play an important role. A social network is a system of social relationships between individuals. According to Leliveld (1994), three types of social relationships make up the social network: personal, categorical and structural relationships. Personal relationships are in the form of contacts with kin, neighbours, friends and acquaintances. Categorical relationships are those between individuals or groups that are classified according to certain social stereotypes (for example, ethnic features). Structural relationships are those between people according to social positions and roles they have (for example, in the family, in the enterprise, in associations).

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