International Journal of Agricultural Management and Development
Available online on: www.ijamad.iaurasht.ac.ir
ISSN: 2159-5852 (Print)
ISSN:2159-5860 (Online)

Research Paper *https://dorl.net/dor/20.1001.1.21595852.2023.13.3.2.2*

Challenges of Leadership in Transforming Farmers Training Center Services in South Nation Nationalities and Peoples Region, South Omo Zone, North Aari Woreda, Ethiopia

Argachew Bochena Elisi [a,*]

Received: 10 November 2021,
Accepted: 04 August 2022

Abstract

The Farmers' Training Center (FTC) service in North Aari woreda faces hindrances due to ineffective leadership. Effective leaders are crucial for offering guidance and proficiently coordinating human resources and materials to align with organizational goals, resulting in heightened productivity. This study centers on assessing leadership challenges that obstructing the transformation of FTC services in North Aari Woreda. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used in this study, which employs a descriptive research design. The quantitative segment involves 92 respondents selected through stratified simple random sampling, while qualitative insights stem from 12 purposively chosen leaders and SMSs (Subject Matter Specialists), gathered through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Quantitative data undergo descriptive analysis using SPSS software (version 23). The findings reveal significant hurdles to leadership in the context of FTC service transformation. Challenges such as insufficient capacity building, the incongruity between leaders' actions and words, and an inability to manage follower perceptions emerge as pivotal constraints to the successful evolution of FTC services in the North Aari community. Nevertheless, potential avenues for improvement include the presence of Agricultural Development Agents (DAs), supportive local leaders, and the provision of free extension services for farmers. Based on the study's outcomes, several recommendations are put forth. Urgent and prolonged capacity-building efforts are suggested, alongside the imperative to shift leaders', DAs', and farmers' mindsets. It is also advised to allocate budgets for FTC sustainability and to reinforce agricultural extension networks between FTCs, research centers, and farmers.

Keywords:
Leadership challenges, leadership, farmers training center service

[a] *Jinka University, Ethiopia*
Corresponding author's email: woniyeargaw@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Leadership roles in this study pertain to the actions undertaken by individuals involved in providing guidance, making decisions, and engaging in activities to enhance farmer training center services. These efforts aim to elevate farmers' knowledge, attitudes, and skills, consequently amplifying both production and income. Lopes and Theison (2003) emphasize that effective leadership significantly contributes to organizational transformation and desired change. In contrast, inadequate leadership can lead an organization or country to falter, while proficient leadership can propel a country's progress even in the face of limited capacities. Whether on a national or local level, leaders exhibit optimal efficacy when they adopt inclusivity and proactivity, ensuring the appropriate allocation of domestic resources. This underscores that effective leadership can actively facilitate the transformation of farmers' training centers, while deficient leadership may hinder the advancement of farmers' training center services. Adelek et al., (2010) assert that despite numerous efforts to induce transformation in the sector, enhancing agricultural productivity and ensuring food security remain the foremost challenges for rural farmers in Ethiopia. In addressing these agricultural challenges sustainably, as Kuozes and Posner (2003) noted, effective leadership assumes paramount importance. One key rationale for this prioritization is that leaders are the decision-makers who determine necessary actions and drive their implementation. This underscores the influential role of leadership in facilitating the evolution of farmers' training center services.

The Ethiopian government's strategy for national transformation hinges on enhancing agricultural productivity. In this context, the establishment of Farmers' Training Centers (FTCs) serves as a pivotal aspect of the strategy, facilitating the acquisition of novel technologies and improved production methods. A significant milestone has been reached, with a total of 8,500 FTCs established and the training of 63,000 field extension workers, referred to as Development Agents (DAs), as reported by BMGF (2010). The Farmers' Training Centers are envisioned to function as hubs for extension services and information dissemination. They are designed to offer modular training to farmers spanning up to six months, serving as venues for demonstrating various technologies. These centers are intended to provide guidance on farmers' challenges and act as forums for integrating indigenous and contemporary knowledge.

Despite the potential roles that FTCs and DAs can play in disseminating knowledge and information, several factors impose limitations on the effective implementation and success of the program. These encompass various challenges, such as insufficient infrastructure, localized technical information, budgetary management, and the delivery of agricultural extension services in Ethiopia (Davis et al., 2010).

There have been very few studies in this area. Supporting this, Osman (2007) justifies that despite the establishment of 1500 Farmer Training Centers (FTCs) in various woredas of the region (SNNPR), many FTCs have yet to commence farmers' training due to a lack of equipment and a clear implementation strategy for the training. However, his study did not address the challenges of leadership in facilitating the effective transformation of FTCs' services.

Similarly, a study by Hailu (2013) regarding the issues and potential of Farmer Training Centers (FTCs) in SNNPR revealed that major constraints identified by respondents included a high dropout rate among farmers in training, excessive non-extension workload, lack of training materials, and unrealistic expectations of benefits on the farmers' side. These hindrances impeded the effective implementation of farmer training centers. The study primarily focused on the technical constraints of FTCs but overlooked leadership-related problems. In a separate study, Bekelech (2014) examined the impact of FTCs on the

economic well-being of rural adults in the Oromia region. Her findings highlighted that FTCs lacked the necessary materials for teaching best practices and conducting practical experiments. Consequently, the absence of adequate teaching resources hindered the effective dissemination of best practices. However, her study did not encompass the leadership aspects of FTC services. She further recommended a detailed exploration of the administrative challenges faced by these centers to enhance their effectiveness.

In addition to the gaps observed in the existing literature, the study area lacks any research conducted on the leadership aspects influencing Farmer Training Center (FTC) services. Drawing from the researcher's experience in the study area, it becomes evident that the leadership factor significantly contributes to the prevalence of this issue. This is particularly crucial due to the FTC's role as a center of excellence in imparting skills and knowledge to farmers, enabling them to adopt improved agricultural practices. These practices, in turn, have the potential to enhance agricultural production, boost productivity, and ultimately improve the community's food security in the area. Without a thorough scientific investigation and resolution of this issue, there is a real risk of adverse effects on FTC services, specifically, on agricultural production and productivity at large within North Aari Woreda. Thus, this pronounced gap in knowledge has prompted the initiation of this research within North Aari woreda, aimed at offering remedies that can guide the relevant authorities in addressing this concern effectively.

To tackle the research problem, the following research questions were formulated:

What is the perception of leaders regarding the transformation of Farmer Training Center services? What are the enabling prospects that empower leaders to drive the transformation of Farmer Training Center services? What are the primary challenges confronted by leadership in the process of transforming Farmer Training Center services?

The state of farmers' training centers in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian government has initiated the Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training program, a crucial facet of the rural transformation program designed to effectively implement the Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) strategy. The significance of cultivating a skilled and productive workforce has been widely acknowledged as a vital prerequisite for poverty reduction and the advancement of rural development (MoARD, 2005). The program commences by providing agricultural training to students who have completed 10th grade or higher at agricultural technical vocational education and training colleges. Subsequently, these graduates are employed to furnish fundamental training to agricultural communities, primarily focusing on school dropouts. The goal is to enhance their capacity to adopt modern farming technologies. Over time, Farmers' Training Centers (FTCs) were established to extend services and offer junior-level training to farmers, with the overarching vision of cultivating informed farmers. Within the FTC guideline, two primary objectives are outlined for the establishment of these training centers. The first objective involves equipping farmers with essential knowledge and skills, enabling them to judiciously utilize natural resources, produce market-oriented agricultural goods, and navigate the market while engaging in lucrative agricultural practices. The second objective centers on elevating the country's economy by enhancing farmers' subsistence living standards through market-oriented agricultural production, leveraging a fusion of indigenous knowledge and modern science and technology. To realize these objectives, FTC training is structured around two principal categories: modular training and farmers' instruction on agricultural extension packages (MoA, 2017).

The management of FTCs in Ethiopia.

As per the Farmers' Training Center (FTC) working guidelines, in order to effectively

achieve its objectives and facilitate the desired outcomes for its beneficiaries, the organizational structure and management hierarchy of the centers should be concise and transparent. Pertinent points regarding organization from the aforementioned guidelines are summarized as follows: The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is accountable for policy formulation and the initial design of curriculum guidelines for Extension training (MoARD, 2005). The Regional Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development (RBoARD) is tasked with making various determinations concerning FTC matters, encompassing the decision of where and how many centers should be established. This responsibility supplements its role of adapting federally designed curriculum guidelines to regional training needs, providing on-the-job training for development agents, and endorsing financial and material resources for training implementation (MoARD, 2005) as cited in Aregaw (2010). The Woreda Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development (WoARD) allocates budgets for FTCs and oversees their operations. FTCs possess the authority to manage their internal affairs and are required to report to the WoARD. Each FTC is staffed with three Development Agents (DAs), one of whom is designated as a coordinator by the Woreda administration. However, this coordinator reports to the head of the WoARD. FTCs are established in every Kebele, which is the lowest administrative unit in Ethiopia. FTC-based farmer training, facilitated by DAs, is expected to be tailored to demand and trainees are expected to be trustworthy and community role models. They should also possess the willingness to share their acquired knowledge and skills with untrained farmers in their locality after completing their training (MoA, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

Description of the study area

North Aari woreda is situated within South Omo Zonal Administration and is one of eight woredas, along with a city administration. It is positioned at distances of 602 km, 377 km, and 85 km from Addis Ababa, Hawassa, and Jinka – the capital city of the Zone – respectively. The woreda shares its boundaries with Basketo Special woreda and Geza Gofa woreda to the North, South Aari woreda to the South West, and Uba DebereTsehay and Oyda woreda to the East. Comprising 33 rural kebeles and two urban kebeles, the woreda's total population as of 1999 E.C. stands at 78,215 individuals (consisting of 38,704 males and 39,511 females). Among this population, 95 percent reside in rural areas,

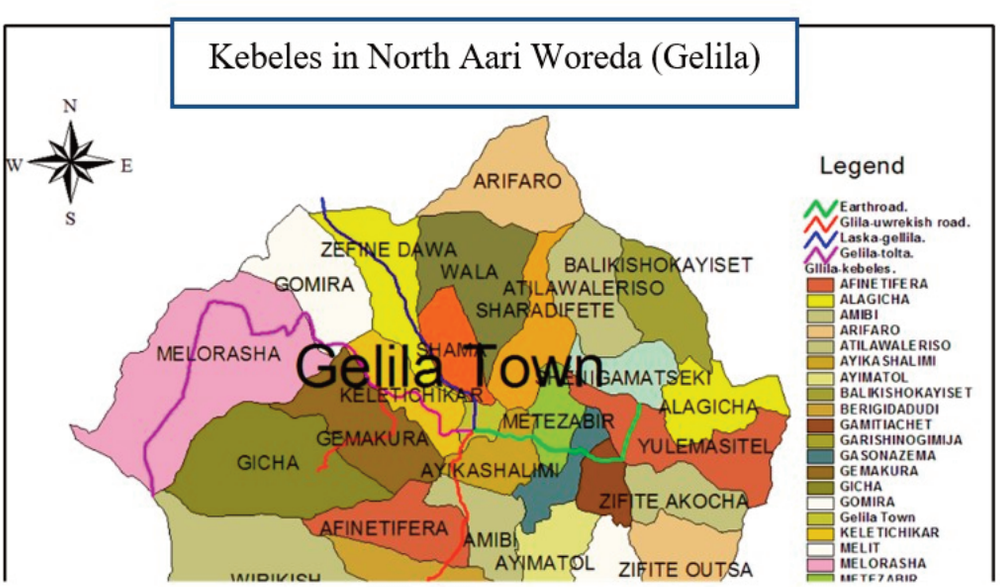

Figure 1. Map of the Study area

Source: North Aari woreda Agricultural department (2006)

while the remaining 5 percent inhabit urban areas. Specifically, the rural area is home to 10,844 households (NAWFED, 2012 report). Rainfall within the region ranges between 800mm and 2600mm, and the woreda's climate is categorized into four distinct agro-ecological zones. These zones are distributed as follows: 50.28% are characterized as Humid (Dega), 8.32 percent as mid-highland (Woynadega), 37.14% as lowland (kola), and 4.26 percent as wurich.

In North Aari woreda, a significant portion of the population, specifically 95%, resides in rural areas, and their livelihoods are directly and indirectly dependent on agriculture. The woreda's agricultural practices are reliant on rainfall and yield two harvests annually, during the summer(*meher)* and winter (*beligi*) seasons. The principal crops cultivated within the woreda include maize, barley, beans, peas, enset, appeal, coffee, and cardamom. The predominant farming tools utilized are hoes and oxen, employed for cultivating their lands. Furthermore, farmers engage in the rearing of various animals, including sheep, horses, mules, oxen, and cows. Within North Aari woreda, a total of 33 Farmer Training Centers (FTCs) exist, but the majority of these centers are not operational.

Research design

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. It helped the study to achieve the research questions mentioned so far.

Target population and samples

The target population was delineated as the executing entity of Farmer Training Centers (FTCs) within the administrative region of North Aari Woreda. This encompassed leaders from the North Aari woreda agricultural office, as well as SMS (Subject Matter Specialists), Woreda extension agents from each FTC in the sampled kebeles of the woreda, and rural kebele model farmers who have undergone agricultural policy training. The sampling frame serves as a comprehensive, precise, and updated inventory of all units within the population, facilitating the selection of a representative sample. Accordingly, for this study, the sampling frame consisted of several components: a list of 120 kebele model farmers who had undergone policy training, selected from two existing strata for administrative purposes, i.e., "*meher* producer kebeles" and "*meher* and *beligi* producer kebeles," encompassing six kebeles; 18 development agents from these six kebeles; and a roster of 48 district leaders and 25 woreda subject matter specialists.

The sample units identified for this study are as follows: Seven senior leaders from the North Aari woreda administrative cabinets; 5 district subject matter specialists from the agriculture office; 12 Development Agents (DAs) representing the six sampled kebeles; and 92 model farmers drawn from six kebeles that encompass "meher season producers" and "meher and beligi season producer kebeles," out of a total of 33 rural kebeles.

In North Aari woreda, a total of 33 rural kebeles exist, with each kebele housing one Farmers' Training Center (FTC), resulting in a combined total of 33 FTCs established across these kebeles. These kebeles are grouped into two distinct strata for administrative purposes, based on their annual production frequency. These strata are labeled as "meher-only producers" (15 kebeles) and "both meher and beligi producers" (18 kebeles). To fulfill the research requirements, the researcher selected six kebeles, with two chosen from the "meher season producers" stratum and four from the "both season producers" stratum, utilizing stratified random sampling techniques. This method was employed to account for varying levels of FTC performance across different kebeles and to ensure proportional representation of beneficiaries, as advised by Samy (2005). In stratified random sampling, strata are defined based on shared attributes or characteristics among members. Random samples are then drawn from each stratum in a number proportional to the stratum's size relative to the entire population. Following this approach,

six kebeles were chosen for this study. After determining the sample area and the sampling design, it becomes crucial to establish an appropriate sample size, considering both the study's cost and reliability. As per Kothari (2004), if the total target population is estimated to be fewer than 10,000, the following formula is recommended to calculate a representative sample size. Consequently, this formula was employed to ascertain the sample size for the questionnaire.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N\,(e)^2}$$

N=population
n=sample size
e= level of precision
2= variance of attributes in the population

The conventional confidence level of 95% will be used to ensure a more accurate result. Margin of error is 5% (0.05)

$$n = \frac{120}{1+120\ (o.\ oo25)}$$ Kothari (2004)

n= 92 subjects from model farmers and 12 Das have filled the questionnaire.

The number of model kebele farmers who received agricultural policy training was chosen as a representative sample size that accurately reflects the population. Within the two defined strata, kebeles were categorized into three performance levels based on their agricultural achievements and associated activities, as evaluated by the Woreda agricultural office. Consequently, for the high-performing North Aari woreda kebeles, Shamabuliket and Aymatol were selected as sample units; for the medium-performing kebeles, Ambi and Sefera were chosen; and for the low-performing kebeles, Aykaselimi and Gomira were selected. The proportional representation of model kebele farmers who received agricultural policy training and participated in the questionnaire was presented in Table 1.

Purposive and convenience sampling methods were employed to collect qualitative data from leaders of woreda cabinets and SMS. These methods were chosen because they allow the researcher to select appropriate respondents based on their availability and relevance to the study.

Data sources and type

The researcher utilized both primary and secondary data sources for this study. Primary data was gathered from model farmers, Development Agents (DAs), subject matter specialists, and leaders through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Secondary data was obtained from routine and statistical reports provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and the North Aari Woreda Agriculture Office. Additionally, various works authored by different researchers, as well as publications such as books, manuals, articles, theses, and journals, were analyzed and incorporated into this study.

Table 1
Stratified Sampling for Quantitative Data

Strata	Sample Frame		Sample size by strata
Only in Meher producing kebele strata	Ayka selimi kebele farmers	20	$n_1=100/120*20=16$
	Aymatol kebele farmers	25	$n_2=100/120*25=19$
	Ambi kebele farmers	18	$n_3=100/120*18=14$
Beligi and Meher producingkebele strata	Shamabuliket kebele farmers	17	$n_4=100/120*17=13$
	Sefera kebele farmers	24	$n_5=100/120*24=18$
	Gomira kebele farmers	16	$n_6=100/120*16=12$
	N	120	$n=n_1+n_2+n_3+n_4+n_5+n_6=92$

Method of data analysis and presentation

Quantitative data analysis (questionnaire)

To administer the questionnaire, the researcher formulated Five-point Likert scale questions in English, which were then translated into Amharic. Training was provided to six Development Agents (DAs), one assigned to each kebele, to aid farmer respondents in completing the questionnaire. These DAs were local to the study area, fluent in the woreda's native language known as Aaraph (Aari language), and familiar with the sample respondents. This process ensured that the questionnaire was completed by farmers with assistance from DAs, under the researcher's continuous supervision. For data analysis, Descriptive Analysis was employed to assess respondents' perceptions and their levels of agreement using the five-point Likert scale. This scale included the following values: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Disagree, and 5 = Strongly Disagree, corresponding to the provided statements under each Likert-type question.

Qualitative data analysis (interview and FGD)

Qualitative data were acquired through interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving purposively selected woreda leaders and Subject Matter Specialists (SMS). A semi-structured interview checklist was devised in English by the researcher, and then translated into Amharic. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with seven top woreda leaders to delve into the challenges they encountered in the transformation of farmers' training center services. The participants' insights were recorded with their consent using a tape recorder. During these interviews, leaders were asked to provide their perspectives on potential future interventions concerning farmers' training center services, and their contributions were substantial. Furthermore, to enhance data triangulation, an FGD was conducted with five woreda SMS. This helped cross-validate the information gathered from interviews and questionnaires. The analytical process commenced with the researcher meticulously reviewing field notes and interview transcripts. Pertinent patterns, themes, and issues in the data were noted in the margins, and these were subsequently summarized and categorized. The researcher compiled an initial set of codes and established agreed-upon definitions for these codes. The data was then organized into corresponding categories, undergoing further categorization and summarization of key themes. Contextual data and additional information were referenced to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the findings. Finally, the researcher interpreted the findings to derive meaningful insights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic profile of the respondents

Table 2, indicates that out of the 104 respondents, the majority, 85 (81.73%), participating in the study were males, while 19 (18.27%) were females. This data highlights the limited involvement of female leader farmers in the transformation of FTC within the study woreda. A significant portion of respondents fell within the age bracket of 20 to 39 years (90.38%), with the remaining 9.62% falling between the ages of 40 and 50. Additionally, two respondents (1.93%) were aged 50 and above. This distribution signifies that the respondents are mature and possess substantial experience, making them well-equipped to contribute their ideas to the study. While this age group is both fertile and productive, their contribution to the transformation of farmers' training centers remains limited. The majority of laborers in the study area are productive, and harnessing their labor to contribute to the transformation of FTCs facilitates the transfer of new agricultural knowledge and technology. Of the respondents, 54 (51.93%) are illiterate, indicating that they lack reading and writing skills. As illustrated in Table 3, 91 (98.91%) of the respondents reported that their land

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Character	Category	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Female	19	18.27
	Male	85	81.73
	Total	104	100
Age (years)	20-29	42	40.38
	30-39	52	50
	40- 49	8	7.69
	50 and above	2	1.93
	Total	104	100
Educational status	Illiterate	54	51.93
	Grade1-4	21	20.19
	Grade 5-8	12	11.54
	High school	5	4.8
	TVET	12	11.54
	Total	104	100

Table 3
Shows Background Information on Model Farmers' Agronomic Practices in North Aari woreda

Number of farmers using technology among respondents	Farmers' level of awareness about modern agricultural technology	Frequency and percentage	Size of land covered by improved seed and fertilizers	Frequency and percentage
92(100%)	Very good	2(2.17%)	Below 10%	91(98.91%)
	Good	25(27.17)	10-25%	1(1.09%)
	Less	65(70.66%)	Above 25%	0
	Total	92(100%)	Total	92(100%)

covered by modern agricultural technology amounts to less than 10 percent of the land they own. Only one respondent (1.09%) utilizes agricultural technology for 10-25 percent of their land, and there are no model farmer respondents within the sample who utilize agricultural technologies above 25 percent.

Leadership challenges to transform FTC services

The challenges of leadership in transforming FTCs were examined in terms of variables (items) presented in Table 4 such as consistency of leaders' action with words, setting a personal example, capabilities to plan, cascading, follow-up, monitoring, and evaluation, and initiating new and innovative approaches.

Consistency of leaders' actions with words

As depicted in Table 4, the first item explored by the sampled respondents regarding the challenge of leadership in the transformation of farmers' training center services was the consistency between leaders' actions and their verbal commitments to providing essential resources. Out of 104 sampled farmers and DAs respondents, 67 (64.4%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this notion. Conversely, qualitative data drawn from interviews conducted with top

district leaders indicated that the actions taken by leaders in terms of resource allocation, budgeting, and the provision of new agricultural technologies did not align with their verbal commitments. This discrepancy suggests that FTCs may not receive the necessary resources, leading to inadequate extension services being delivered to farmers. Furthermore, qualitative data acquired from focus group discussions with woreda subject matter specialists highlighted the inadequacy of demonstration sites within FTCs. Additionally, the discussions revealed that several FTCs were not situated in suitable locations and lacked proper fencing. A majority of the demonstration plots within FTCs were found to be only 0.5 hectares, posing challenges in effectively showcasing new technologies within these centers (Figure 2). Moreover, an overwhelming 80 percent of participants in the focus group discussions expressed the belief that their woreda leaders were not practically implementing what they advocated (i.e., unable to practice what they preach). The actions of these leaders were seen as inconsistent with their words, leading to a lack of trust among farmers, DAs, and SMSs. Translated from Amharic, one of the focus group discussion participants shared, "These woreda leaders merely make promises to farmers when they visit kebeles, but they don't follow through with their promises in

Table 4
Items of Leadership Challenges in Transforming FTC Service in North Aari

Items		Response scales (Frequency and Percent)					Totla	Median
		SA	A	U	D	SD		
The leader's action has been consistent with words in providing necessary resources to the FTC	N	10 9.6%	15 14.4%	12 11.5%	26 25%	41 39.4%	104 100%	4
Leaders set a personal example in the adoption and transfer of technology	N	13 12.5%	18 17.3%	5 4.8%	44 42.3%	24 23%	104 100%	4
Leaders are capable of planning, cascading, following up, monitoring & evaluation	N	11 10.6%	17 16.3%	6 5.8%	37 35.6%	33 31.7%	104 100%	4
Leaders have strong Commitment and attitude	N	15 14.4%	18 17.3%	0	29 27.9%	42 40.4%	104 100%	4
Leaders inspire and motivate DAs and farmers for jobs well done	N	17 16.3%	13 12.5%	0	40 38.5%	34 32.7%	104 100%	4
Leaders celebrate farmers' field day and scale up best practices	N	17 16.3%	11 10.6%	9 8.7%	28 26.9%	39 37.5%	104 100%	4
Leaders seize on the initiative to try new and innovative approaches	N	9 8.7%	11 10.6%	4 3.8%	51 49.03%	29 27.9%	104 100%	4

Figure 2. Ambi kebele demonstration site and DAs residence during a field survey

Figure 3. During FGD with woreda SMSs

practice. Their words are not trustworthy, and they bring false reports to the woreda."

Set a personal example

The existing leadership practices in the process of transforming farmers' training centers in North Aari woreda involve setting a personal example. From the total of 104 respondents, 44 (42.3%) disagreed, and 24 (23%) strongly disagreed with this practice (see Table 4). Consequently, the prevailing leadership approach of leading by personal example in the transformation of farmers' training center services exhibited a notable number of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed. In essence, out of the total respondents, 68 (65.3%) expressed their disagreement, indicating a relatively low level of agreement. Similarly, qualitative data obtained from key informant interviews with the woreda's top leaders indicated that these leaders uphold principles and strive to set examples to earn the trust of their community. However, they fall short of being effective role models for the adoption and transfer of technology. Notably, they faced challenges in convincing their families and relatives to embrace new technologies. Additionally, these leaders exhibited hesitancy in taking calculated risks when it came to adopting new technologies themselves and encouraging their relatives to do the same.

Capabilities to plan, cascade, follow-up, monitor, and evaluation

Regarding leaders' capabilities in planning, cascading, follow-up, monitoring, and evaluating FTC activities, 70 (67.3%) of the responses were categorized as disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (Table 4). Furthermore, qualitative data from focus group discussions with subject matter specialists at the woreda level indicated that participants lacked confidence in the leadership's ability to effectively plan, follow up, monitor, and evaluate FTC activities. Participants expressed that woreda leaders exhibited significant skill gaps in these areas: "*When we visit kebeles with leaders for supervision or other official purposes, we've noticed that leaders merely inquire about reports that summarize male and female farmer participation in skill training. Beyond that, there is minimal discussion with DAs about FTC activities. There's no planning, and leaders are reluctant to visit FTC compounds to observe ongoing activities. They seem to believe that merely constructing FTCs will bring about change. It's clear that leaders haven't internalized the objectives of FTCs.*" Similarly, key informant interviews conducted with district-level leaders highlighted that capacity was a major challenge within the extension system. Many DAs, farmers, as well as woreda-level medium and entry-level leaders, lack adequate technical capacity due to a deficiency in practice-based short- and long-term capacity-building training. From these findings, it is evident that the capacity of leaders in North Ari woreda is at a low level. This suggests that woreda leaders lack the necessary capability and experience to effectively plan, monitor, and evaluate FTC activities.

Initiating new and innovative approaches

Leaders guide their followers toward posi-

tive change, staying connected to them to drive meaningful transformations within their communities. Recognition often comes to leaders when change becomes tangible. A leader's fundamental role is to instigate change, which necessitates introducing fresh systems and innovative strategies. In this study, one of the pivotal challenges identified by respondents regarding leadership in transforming FTC services was the initiation of new and innovative approaches. Among the total of 104 respondents, 80 (76.93%) expressed disagreement or strong disagreement regarding this matter. Furthermore, insights from key informant interviews with district-level leaders and focus group discussion participants highlighted that leaders at various levels don't share an equal level of involvement in the FTC transformation process. This disparity arises because many leaders within the study woreda lack the motivation to explore novel and more effective methods of transformation. The process of transformation inherently calls for the embrace of innovative concepts. Moreover, the approach adopted by leaders and DAs in the study woreda predominantly involved one-way communication, where messages flowed from the top down through the hierarchical structure.

Availability of development agents and local leaders

This was the initial item in Table 5 examined by the respondents concerning the opportunities for leaders in the process of transforming FTC services. Out of the 104 respondents, 59 (56.7%) indicated agreement that there were sufficient local leaders and Development Agents (DAs) in the woreda to align with the prospects and goals of agricultural extension services. This alignment would involve turning farmers' training centers into centers of excellence aimed at enhancing agricultural production and productivity.

Key informants emphasized that having a greater number of leaders at the kebele and woreda levels is a means to transform FTC services. For instance, each kebele in the study woreda boasts over sixty-seven local leaders who have the potential to mobilize and guide farmers towards FTC transformation, thereby boosting the production and productivity of small-scale farmers. As for the assignment of DAs, leaders within the study area have effectively adhered to the provision of DAs at every kebele. Following the MOA standards, which stipulate that one rural kebele should have three development agents (one specializing in crop science, another in animal science, and one in natural resource management), the study area exhibited consistent adherence to this requirement. Furthermore, data derived from focus group discussions with woreda subject matter specialists unveiled that, in addition to having ample DAs and local leaders, the establishment of new structural systems at kebele-level agricultural offices could offer an additional avenue for FTC transformation. These systems would be led by an appointed coordinator (receiving a monthly payment of 700 birrs for their position) who would bear responsibilities for the success or failure of FTCs.

Provision of free extension service

The second solution examined by respondents as an opportunity for the transformation of farmers' training center services in the study area was the provision of cost-free extension services. Out of the 104 respondents, 70 (67.3%) strongly agreed or agreed with this notion. Conversely, interviews conducted with district-level top leaders revealed that a challenge with providing free extension services to farmers lies in the quality of the services. There are concerns that these services are not delivered in a timely or sufficient manner and that some DAs lack the necessary experience and skills, raising questions about the reliability of the extension services. Addressing these issues is essential to ensure sustainable and effective transformation. Furthermore, data garnered from focus

group discussions with woreda subject matter specialists indicated that the provision of free agricultural extension services presents an opportunity for the transformation of FTCs by imparting new agricultural information and technologies to farmers. However, it was noted that the provision of extension services was not consistently based on demand-driven principles but rather on a supply-driven basis. This restricted the flow of extension services to farmers, thereby hindering the effective dissemination of knowledge and technology.

Availability of sound policies, strategies, and programs

As demonstrated in Table 5, a significant number of respondents expressed agreement regarding the availability of robust policies, strategies, and programs that empower leaders to facilitate the transformation of centers aimed at enhancing agricultural production and productivity. According to interviews with leaders at the woreda level, various opportunities existed to transform agricultural extension services. One example is the utilization of Omo-microfinance to bolster access to credit for input supplies such as DAP and Urea, providing economic assistance to farmers in need. The newly established kebele-level agricultural office has contributed to the enhanced effectiveness of FTC services. Additionally, programs like AGP (Agricultural Growth Program) and SLM (Sustainable Land Management) have supported the center by providing resources such as FTC office furniture and budgetary allocations.

Table 5
Leadership opportunities for the transformation of FTC services in North Aari woreda

Variables		Response scales (Frequency and Percent)					Total	Median Value
		SA	A	U	D	SD		
There are adequate DAs and local leaders to transform the FTC	N	20 19.2%	39 37.5%	10 9.6%	35 33.7%	0	104	2
There is a free extension service provision by DAs at every FTC	N	32 30.8%	38 36.5%	0	32 30.8%	2 1.9%	104	2
There are sound policies, strategies, and programs to transform FTC activities	N	14 13.5%	47 45.2%	15 14.4%	18 17.3%	10 9.6%	104	2

Table 6
Leadership perceptions towards the challenges of transforming FTC services in North Aari

Variables		Response scales (Frequency and Percent)					Total	Median Value
		SA	A	U	D	SD		
Leaders have good awareness and interpersonal skills about the objectives of the FTC services	N	13 12.5%	23 22.1%	0	56 53.8%	12 11.5%	104	4
Leaders listen to the opinions of farmers and DAs to transform the FTC	N	5 4.8%	9 8.7%	00	52 50%	38 36.5%	104	4
Leaders provide and get feedback from farmers, Das, and SMS about their weaknesses and strength	N	17 16.3%	30 29.7%	8 7.7%	49 47.2%	100	104	3

Leadership perceptions

The perceptions of leaders in the North Aari woreda regarding the transformation of farmers' training center services have been explored, focusing on their awareness and interpersonal skills. This exploration involved actively listening to the opinions and being attuned to the concerns of farmers and Development Agents (DAs). The parameters for assessing these perceptions are presented in Table 6.

Leaders have good awareness and interpersonal skills

As shown in Table 6, 68 (64.9%) respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the leaders' awareness of FTC objectives. Consistently, data obtained from top leaders at the woreda level indicate that both woreda and kebele leaders have low levels of awareness regarding the objectives of FTC activities. Respondents reported instances of leaders not giving attention to FTC activities, not providing timely and appropriate responses to raised issues, and not engaging in their fundamental agricultural extension tasks, which are the foundation of FTCs. The leaders were also noted to have neglected creating awareness among farmers about the purpose of FTCs. As a result, farmers did not contribute their efforts towards the effectiveness of FTCs, viewing them as mere storage houses for agricultural materials like DAP and Urea. It is illogical to expect individuals with low awareness to effectively raise awareness among others. During focus group discussions with Subject Matter Specialists (SMS), the sentiment expressed was that while farmers might be willing to attend school, they displayed reluctance in participating in FTC activities. The consensus was that farmers have minimal awareness of the benefits of FTCs, coupled with the lack of attractive or innovative actions at FTC compounds to engage farmers. The sentiment was that FTCs did not outshine the benefits of working on their own farms. Furthermore, data gathered from Woreda agricultural office subject matter specialists emphasized that Woreda leaders demonstrated low emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills in the process of FTC transformation. This manifested in their actions, such as not acknowledging the contributions of SMS and DAs in transformation activities, and lacking cooperative relationships with SMS and DAs, resulting in a climate of distrust between leaders, SMS, DAs, and farmers. This hindered the realization of the full potential for FTC transformation.

Leaders listen to the opinions of farmers and DAs

Respondents were asked whether they perceived the leaders of North Aari woreda to be attentive to the opinions of farmers and DAs regarding the transformation of FTCs. In response, 52 (50%) disagreed, and 38 (36.3%) strongly disagreed (Table 5). Likewise, the feedback gathered from top leaders at the woreda level indicated that leaders predominantly enforced directives from upper management to DAs, farmers, and local leaders in a top-down manner. They appeared to disregard the input of local leaders, farmers, and DAs during the process of technology transfer and adoption. This authoritative approach created apprehension among farmers, DAs, and local leaders, as they were subjected to directives without being convinced of the benefits of new technologies. Consequently, trust eroded between the woreda leaders and the recipients of these actions, resulting in challenges in delivering agricultural extension services through FTCs. Furthermore, data obtained from woreda subject matter specialists unveiled that woreda leaders did not attentively heed the ideas put forth by SMS for the transformation of FTCs. Some woreda leaders seemed to prioritize their perspectives, neglecting the value of SMSs' ideas for FTC transformation. The leaders' agricultural knowledge and ideas were often heavily influenced by politics, which left little room for SMSs to apply their expertise. This dynamic hindered the transformation of

FTCs. This suggests that the leaders of North Aari woreda predominantly adopted a top-down approach, rendering DAs, SMSs, farmers, and local leaders dependent on woreda leaders for guidance in FTC activities, while struggling to effectively communicate and incorporate varied perspectives.

Possible solutions to ensure effective leadership to transform FTC services in North Aari woreda

Based on the findings of this study and respondents' suggestions, the following recommendations are forwarded as possible remedial solutions to transform farmers' training center services.

Provide resources for FTCs

The current level of resources available to FTCs, particularly in terms of capital resources like suitable buildings and demonstration plots, as well as the operational capacity of FTCs to deliver effective demonstrations, requires substantial strengthening to make a significant impact. The placement of FTCs itself posed challenges; they were established without adequate consideration for their location in relation to farmers' residences and the accessibility for all farmers, necessitating corrective measures. Furthermore, it is crucial for FTCs to have connections to main roads for accessibility. However, it's notable that all sampled FTCs were situated in remote areas and lacked road accessibility.

Improving Linkages throughout the system

This finding underscores the significance of adopting a comprehensive approach with extensive recommendations that emphasize enhancing connections among extension stakeholders. For instance, bolstering the collaboration between Development Agents (DAs) and Subject Matter Specialists (SMS) by utilizing nearby agricultural research centers could fortify the overall holistic approach. This approach ensures that all stakeholders collaborate effectively toward achieving the common goal of extension services. In particular, the synergy between extension services and research centers should be strengthened to provide farmers with timely and high-quality information and guidance for their agricultural endeavors.

Changing the mindset and capabilities of leaders, DAs, and farmers

DAs serve at the forefront of extension services, making their abilities and expertise in assisting farmers crucial. It is of utmost importance to enhance the education system for DAs and offer in-service training on topics relevant to each FTC based on farmers' needs. This approach will ensure the ongoing effectiveness of the system in serving farmers. Additionally, utilizing farmer-to-farmer programs can play a significant role in reinforcing DA outreach and training efforts.

Strengthen agricultural extension groups

Agricultural extension group discussions play a vital role in increasing farmers' awareness. These discussions contribute to the transformation of FTCs by facilitating the exchange of successes, experiences, and solutions among farmers. Through this interaction, the adoption and transfer of new agricultural technologies are enhanced, subsequently leading to increased productivity and production. This, in turn, contributes to food security in the larger context of the woreda. Hence, leaders should focus on strengthening extension groups to achieve desired outcomes and to ensure that FTCs become hubs of rural transformation and excellence in agricultural technology adoption and extension service delivery.

Discussion

As presented in the results section, the majority of respondents belong to productive age groups and are illiterate. The high level of illiteracy among respondents appears to be contributing to their limited adoption of modern agricultural technologies for cultivat-

ing their land. This also suggests that the nearby FTCs are not fulfilling their essential role in providing skill and knowledge training to farmers, which would enhance their awareness of new agricultural techniques. Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of participation by female farmer leaders in the activities of the North Aari woreda's FTCs. Consequently, this underrepresentation of women in efforts to improve production and income has rendered the FTCs ineffective in delivering extension services.

This study identified several challenges within the leadership sphere for the transformation of FTC services in the sampled kebeles of North Aari woreda. These challenges encompass limited technical knowledge among agricultural leaders, a low level of commitment and attitudes toward the adoption and promotion of agricultural technology, inadequate integration and effective communication between leaders, SMSs, DAs, and farmers, as well as a lack of alignment of their efforts with FTCs' objectives. Additionally, poor resources and infrastructure, including road and market inaccessibility, further hindered the effectiveness of FTCs. Consequently, these challenges prevented the utilization of available opportunities that could facilitate FTC activities, such as the presence of adequate DAs and local leaders, the existence of agricultural extension groups, the establishment of kebele agricultural offices appointing coordinators for FTCs, and the support of projects like AGP and SLM for FTC activities.

Leadership challenges to transform FTC services

This finding is in line with the results from Atsebaha (2010), who highlighted challenges at the operational level of leadership in transforming the agricultural sector to ensure food security. This challenge was observed at the grassroots level of leadership in the study area, where leaders are directly involved in implementing strategies. Similarly, as noted by Hailu (2013), FTCs faced technical constraints. This study validates that FTCs not only encounter leadership challenges that hinder their potential to become centers of excellence for imparting farmers with new agricultural technologies but also struggle with technical skills to deliver the required level of training to farmers.

The actions and words of leaders in the study area do not align when it comes to managing FTC activities. This indicates a lack of relevant knowledge and skills among leaders regarding the objectives of establishing FTCs in each kebele. As a consequence, FTCs were constructed in unsuitable locations that were inconvenient and inaccessible to most farmers. Moreover, the provision of small demonstration plots fell short of the standards outlined in the Ministry of Agriculture's FTC operational manual (2009). This inconsistency in leadership actions and communication eroded trust among leaders, Das, and farmers, impeding the dissemination and adoption of improved agricultural technologies within the study area. It appears that leaders in the study area struggle to serve as role models in executing exemplary leadership roles, such as personally adopting and transferring agricultural technologies on their own farms, prioritizing activities, and generating innovative ideas for Das and others. Consequently, the concept that extension is a means of advising farmers on agricultural practices was significantly challenged and politicized in the North Aari woreda. Moreover, one dimension of transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation, where leaders should encourage followers to innovate and share creative ideas. However, this practice was not effectively applied by the leaders in the study area. Despite the numerous challenges encountered in the study area, there are also available opportunities that could facilitate the activities of FTCs, including the presence of adequate Das, the provision of free extension services, and projects that support FTC activities.

Leadership perception toward FTC activities

The leaders lacked a clear understanding of the objectives of FTCs. This lack of awareness

was evident in their failure to pay attention to FTC activities, delayed and inadequate responses to problems identified by experts, and their inability to foster awareness among farmers regarding the purpose of FTCs. Consequently, farmers felt disconnected from the effectiveness of FTCs, viewing them merely as storage facilities for agricultural materials like Dap and Urea. The communication between leaders and experts followed a top-down approach, with leaders exhibiting reluctance to heed the opinions of farmers and experts. This approach hindered the contributions of DAs and SMSs to the functioning of FTC activities at the desired level. This finding closely aligns with the results of previous studies conducted by Bekelech (2014), which highlighted the constraints faced by FTCs due to resource limitations such as inadequate financial resources and demonstration plots. These constraints were evident in the demonstration site of Ambi kebele's FTC. At the national and study area levels, the study emphasizes the importance of adopting a transformational leadership style to elevate economic development. However, in practice, within these sample kebeles, the study observed a lack of real-world application of this leadership style. Instead, communication seemed to flow in a top-down manner, instilling fear among farmers and experts to achieve political goals set by higher-level leaders. This finding holds significant value as it serves as a foundational insight at the grassroots level for the administrative bodies of FTCs, aiding them in making informed decisions about the current state of FTC services for farmers. Additionally, it sheds light on future research avenues, encouraging in-depth exploration of the technical aspects of FTCs. Moreover, this insight brings awareness to the skill and knowledge gaps among leaders responsible for managing FTC activities. These gaps have a profound impact on the delivery of agricultural technologies to farmers, thereby affecting agricultural production and productivity within the study areas. The limitation of road inaccessibility within the woreda led to a decision to exclude kebeles situated far from main roads from the investigation. This decision could potentially influence the generalizability of the study's findings. Another limitation pertains to the study's sampling approach, which exclusively focused on leaders. The study did not encompass the perspectives of non-leader farmers, and thus, exploring the viewpoints of these farmers would be a valuable avenue for further investigation.

CONCLUSION

The key findings of the study carry implications that highlight the challenges faced by leaders in the North Aari woreda in effectively implementing exemplary leadership to transition agriculture from its current subsistence-oriented approach to market-oriented production systems. This deficiency in leadership has led to an inadequate conceptualization of the agricultural transformation concept by both leaders themselves and the failure to communicate it to farmers, DAs, and SMS.

The lack of effective collaboration and shared understanding among leaders, farmers, DAs, and SMSs in implementing FTC activities has resulted in a misalignment of efforts. As a result, the actions of DAs and farmers have not aligned with the goals of FTCs, leading to misguided extension and advisory services that are supply-driven rather than demand-driven. This ineffectiveness in the extension system has consequently contributed to declining agricultural productivity and increased food insecurity among woreda farmers. Lastly, the absence of committed, experienced, and strategic leaders within the woreda has hindered their ability to be proactive and recognize opportunities that could potentially facilitate the transformation of FTC services. This lack of visionary leadership has prevented the woreda from harnessing these opportunities to improve the effectiveness of FTCs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the administrations of the South Omo Zone and the Northern Aari-Woreda for their extensive support during my study. I would like to also thank IJAMAD and its editors for their tireless efforts in editing and publishing my article in their highly respected journal hope that it can serve as a foundation and springboard for future researchers and have a practical impact on the management of the study area FTC for agricultural improvement.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

The author was solely responsible for the conception and design of the study, data collection, analysis and interpretation of the results, and preparation of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

REFERENCES

Adeleke,S., Kamara, AbdulB., Zuzana,B. (2010). Smallholder Agriculture in East Africa: Trends, Constraints and Opportunities, Working Papers Series N° 105 African Development Bank, Tunis, Tunisia.

Atsbaha, G. (2010). A review of Ethiopian agriculture: Roles, Policy and Small-scale farming system, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Bekelech, T. (2014). The effectiveness of FTCs in the economic life of rural adults: the case of southwest shoa zone wonich woreda. An MSc thesis was presented to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

Hailu, G. (2013). Problems and prospects of farmers training centers: the case of mee'nit Goldia woreda, bench Maji Zone SNNPR, Ethiopia. An MSc thesis was presented to the School of Graduate Studies of Hawassa University, Ethiopia.

Kothari, C.R. (2004). Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques (2nded). New Delhi: New Age International publishers.

Kouzes,J.M. &Posner,B.Z. (2003)3rdedn. The leadership challenge: The five best practice exemplary leadership USA: Jossey-Bass, A wily Imprint.

Kouzes, J.M. & Posner, B.Z. (2007). The leadership challenge (4thed.), San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass

Lopes, C.T. (2003). Ownership, leadership, and transformation. Can we do better for capacity development? Earthscan Publications Ltd London and Sterling, Virginia.

MoA. (2017). Farmers Training Centers Project Proposal. MOA publication, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

North Ari woreda Agricultural Office (2013/2014). Annual report submitted to woreda council. North Aari; Gelila.

Osman, S. (2007). Effectiveness of Agricultural training development program: The case of Teff and live stoke Farmers of Alaba Woreda. An MSc thesis was presented to the School of Graduate Studies of Haramaya University, Ethiopia.

How to cite this article:
Elisi, A. (2023). Challenges of leadership in transforming farmers training center services in South nation nationalities and peoples region, South Omo zone, North Aari woreda, Ethiopia. *International Journal of Agricultural Management and Development, 13*(3), 181-197.
DOR: 20.1001.1.21595852.2023.13.3.2.2