

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **The role of human resource development on the implementation of differential advantage approach in OVOP Projects, Kenya**

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The study seeks to fill an information gap of critical role of human resource development in the implementation of differential advantage approach in Kenya One Village One Product (OVOP) projects. It seems that Kenya OVOP was a government-driven project with emphasis on product development, a deviation from its origin model which was people driven movement and put an emphasis on human resources development. It therefore seems to suggest that lack of deep understanding of requisite role of human resource development in the implementation of differential advantage approach is a matter of apprehension. The overall objective of the study is to assess the role of human resource development in the implementation of differential advantage approach in Kenya OVOP projects with the view of deepening our understanding of the requisite activities for quality workforce for rural development. The study was a descriptive case design. The study took place in three pioneer districts adopted OVOP project in Kenya: Nyeri North, Laikipia West, and Yatta. Three OVOP projects (Jitunze, Rumuruti, and Kionyweni cases) with 72 individuals were selected through quota sampling on the ground of pre-specified characteristics. Questionnaires, interviews guides, focus group discussion (FGDs) and observations were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. A literal replication analysis also involved to confirm predicted propositions through pattern matching and generalizing results. Study recommended the establishment of village business development centres, provision of demand-based skills, and leadership development capacity. It was therefore hoped that the lesson provided may be useful for improvement of rural livelihood through differential advantage approach.

**Key words:** Differentiation, learning, training, development, education.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the year 2006, One Village One Product (OVOP) movement was adopted to provide a mentorship role in the Kenyan Vision 2030, such as identifying of projects

and priorities were heavily based on workable solutions learnt from the South Asian “newly industrializing countries” which achieved rapid growth and also

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improved the lives of their people greatly in a span of 20 to 30 years (Republic of Kenya, 2010). The success of Japan OVOP movement seems to have emanated from a comprehensive effort of strengthening human capacity and mutual cooperation for long term cultural transformation. Nishikawa (2008) agitated that OVOP movement is not a simple process of fabrication of things but an objective-oriented endeavor for the development of human resources through fabrication of things. Schumann (2016) stated that it is clear that human resource development in the communities need to remain at the forefront for starting OVOP and for sustaining its operation. According to Yamazaki (2010), OVOP emphasizes a link between human development and product development. The logic behind this is that human resource development is achieved in the process to develop OVOP product, but on the other hand, OVOP product can be produced by committed and capable human resources who are motivated to contribute to their locality. OVOP initiative had been faced with numerous challenges since its introduction in Kenya. It seems that Kenya OVOP was a government-driven project with emphasis on product development, a deviation from its original model which was people driven movement and put an emphasis on human resources development. According to Republic of Kenya (2013), Kenya's labour force lacks key skills, ingenuity and creativity required for effective productivity mainstreaming. The majority of Kenyan workers lack appropriate and relevant skills, with most of the skills being out of tune with industry demands. It therefore seems to suggest that lack of deep understanding of the effective human resource development activities for successful implementation of differential advantage approach in OVOP projects is a matter of apprehension.

Researchers, commentators and policy makers have stressed the importance of investment in Human Resource Development (HRD) to enhance the quality of human capital and create sustainable competitive advantage (Aragón-Sánchez et al., 2003; Scheel et al., 2014). According to Omar et al. (2009), the HRD activities are essential for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) for long term survival. According to Ahmeti and Marmullaku (2015), it is more than evident that human resource development is crucial for economic development, in particular for developing countries. SMEs are facing many obstacles and are not achieving their maximum, due to incompetency in applying contemporary and substantiated HR practices due to the lack of experience and low level of awareness pertaining to HR development. Rashiti (2013) agitates that if SMEs want to be more competitive, there is need to invest in human resources, thus they can be a serious competitor in the market that is looking for continual skills and capacity building of human resources. Soni and Saluja (2013) stated that HRD in the organizational context is the process of organizing and enhancing the physical, mental and emotional capabilities of individuals for

productive work. CIPD (2001) learning and development is an organizational process of developing people that involves the integration of learning and development processes, operations and relationships. Armstrong (2006) added that the elements of this process are: learning, training, development, and education. Garavan (1997) training, development and education are essentially concerned with learning. One significant reason for the increasing overlap of training, development, education and learning is the speed of change in the modern business world. These changes require a more integrated model, one that facilitates the continuous updating of employee competences and continuous learning within organizations. This paper aims to demonstrate that differential advantage approach in Kenya OVOP projects is likely to succeed with integrated activities of human resource development. The paper therefore assesses critical role played by human resource development on the implementation of differential advantage approach in OVOP projects with the view of deepening our understanding of the requisite factors of quality human resource development which includes learning, training, development and education activities. Recommendations on the necessary intervention for improvement of human resource development in OVOP projects have been made.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted case design with embedded units. The researcher chose a single case with embedded units within the case being studied in order to increase result accuracy. A single case of OVOP movement with embedded units (three OVOP projects) was used in assessing differential advantage model. Due to reason that the study was a qualitative case study, it did not apply quantitative sampling in getting study population. In a qualitative study, there is no strenuous randomization process of sampling procedure because the results cannot be generalized to a bigger population and the only analytical generalization can be conducted where a particular set of results is generalized to a broader theory (Yin, 2009). Quota sampling method was applied to select three units or OVOP projects because of different characteristics of individuals in the three pioneer OVOP projects. The three units (OVOP projects) of case study were chosen into a sample on the ground of pre-specified characteristics so that the total sample had the same distribution of characteristics assumed to exist in the population being considered. The researcher started sampling process by identifying relevant categories among the study population to capture diversity among three units or OVOP pioneer districts, that is, OVOP project members and district ministry of industrialization staff. The next step was to determine how many cases to get for each category as quota. The researcher began by mapping up the three pioneer districts with projects adopted OVOP movement in Kenya into quotas or units. One project from every quota was purposively selected for the study on the basis of pre-specified characteristics. The selected project had to have the following characteristics; established before 2008 and having met OVOP basic criteria and supported by OVOP program (financial or other capacity building). After scientific sampling process of three projects from the pioneer districts instruments were administered to the selected population. Conclusively, Jitunze trout

**Table 1.** Population of respondents in OVOP Projects.

| OVOP project  | Questionnaires administered | Questionnaires analysed |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Jitunze group members and industrial district officials   | 25 + 3 = 28                 | 22 + 3 = 25             |
| Rumuruti group members and industrial district officials  | 15 + 3 = 18                 | 15 + 2 = 17             |
| Kionyweni group members and industrial district officials | 32 + 3 = 35                 | 27 + 3 = 30             |
| Total   | 72 + 9 = 81                 | 65 + 8 = 72             |

fish project from Nyeri North district, Rumuruti aloe vera project from Laikipia West district and Kionyweni basket weaving project from Yatta district were sampled. The study involved 72 individuals whom were members of three OVOP projects and district industrialization officials as sample study. Each of these case was analyzed both qualitatively (interviews, observations, narratives) and quantitatively (matrix observations, questionnaires and demographical information) and the results replicated in terms of learning, training, development and education themes of human resource development. Analytical generalization through literal replication logic of three cases of OVOP projects was applied to predict the study proposition that quality human resource development plays critical role in the implementation of differential advantage approach in OVOP projects.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jitunze project is located in Nyeri North district, Nyeri county situated between longitudes 36° 38' east and 37° 20' east and between the equator and latitude 0° 38' south. Rumuruti project is found in Laikipia West district, Laikipia county which lies between latitudes 0° 18' South and 0° 51' North and between longitude 36° 11' and 37° 24' East. Kionyweni location is situated at Yatta district, Machakos County which lies between latitudes 0° 45' South and 1° 31' South and longitudes 36° 45' East and 37° 45' East. Most respondents were at 36 to 45 years bracket where females were 55% respondents and males 45%. Most group members were averagely primary school holders at 45% followed by secondary at 30%, then post-secondary education level at 25%. On socio-economic status, most group members were poor class at 55% followed by poorest class at 30%, middle class at 12.5%, and upper class at 2.5%, respectively. Most type of business activity was production at 50% followed by commodity at 27.50%, service at 12.50%, and then value addition at 10%, respectively.

The result of Table 1 shows that most respondents strongly agreed at 34% that the quality of human resource development was important in OVOP projects followed by that agreed at 26%, neutral at 20%, disagreed at 13%, and strongly disagreed at 7%, respectively.

The study objective seeks to examine the role of human resources development in the implementation of differential advantage approach in Kenya OVOP projects. The result shown in Table 2 establishes that the role of human resources development in OVOP projects is very crucial in terms of learning, training, development and

education for successful implementation of differential advantage approach in Kenya OVOP projects.

## Learning activities

It is evident from the finding that learning activities are regarded to be crucial for differential advantage approach in OVOP projects. The replication results from three cases shown in Table 2 at 22% agreed that learning activities have moderate strong influence on the successful implementation of differential advantage approach in OVOP projects. However, most discussants overwhelmingly reveal that there are insufficient learning activities in OVOP projects. For example, the findings reveal that learning activities such as familiarization trips and exposure exercises at Jitunze trout fish project to have been organized by project leaders. The group happen to have visited other local fish farming project such as Sagana fish project to learn more about fish farming. Some of the topics that the members are interested in learning include hatching fingerings, feeding, processing, harvesting, and marketing. However, the study finding establish that learning exercises are limited due to lack of facilitation fund, such as transport and gate charges, lack of partnership and comprehensive learning programme nationally and internationally, lack of willingness for partnership learning with leading private companies in fishing industry e.g. Wamagana fishing company located in the same Nyeri County. The study reveal that Rumuruti aloe vera project learning activities are conducted in the form of having learning sessions with old traditional medicine men who demonstrates how to extract aloe vera juice from the herbs. The project members has an opportunity to attend exposure lessons from Kivuko private commercial farm on the best variety of aloe vera plants and best techniques of extracting juice. At Kionyweni basket weaving project, the study reveals that members learned extraction of sisal threads and weaving techniques from aged women who have wealth experience in weaving. The study establishes that traditional women experts are invited in the members meeting to demonstrate best skills of extracting sisal threads and knitting baskets. It is therefore evident from the study that there are limited learning exercises in three OVOP projects in terms of an organized and continuous process, inadequate international and national partnership with large private fishing companies and lack

**Table 2.** Human resources development in OVOP projects.

| Quality human resource development | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Total |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| Learning activities                | 22             | 18    | 17      | 9        | 5                 | 72    |
| Training activities                | 29             | 18    | 13      | 7        | 5                 | 72    |
| Development activities             | 23             | 18    | 15      | 10       | 6                 | 72    |
| Education activities               | 24             | 20    | 14      | 11       | 5                 | 72    |
| Total                              | 98             | 74    | 59      | 37       | 21                | 288   |
| Percentage                         | 34             | 26    | 20      | 13       | 7                 | 100   |

of relevant stakeholders' mutual support for learning activities among OVOP projects. The study concludes that awareness through practical exposure and sharing real life experiences of successful stories create excitement by provoking minds of learners, thus, leading to clear reflection of their status. For example, according to Schumann (2016) in Japan, both the overseas experience and the shift to plum and chestnut production helped to elevate the desire of residents to develop their own skills to contribute to their community. The process therefore helps learners to embark on a process of collectively defining their problems, searching for and implementing solutions, and assessing the value of a solution for a specific practice. Kolb et al. (1974) identified a learning cycle consisting of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization (theorizing) and active experimentation stages. It is therefore attested that interactive learning among different actors is crucial for promoting the awareness of OVOP members.

### Training activities

The result in Table 2 of replication result of three OVOP cases reveal that training activities have extremely strong influence at 29% on the implementation of differential advantage approach in OVOP projects. As Omolo (2015) puts it, SMEs with good practices of training and development were found to perform higher than those without. However, most discussants reveal that there are inadequate training activities in OVOP projects. The study result reveals that training activities in terms of systematic formal instructions sessions, lectures, seminars, role playing, case study, discussions and workshops for equipping OVOP project members' skills were insufficient in three OVOP cases. For example, at Jitunze trout fish project trainings is organized by group leaders, sometime during their quarterly meetings. Project leaders invites government official from department of fisheries to lecture on certain topic of their interest such as hatchery, nurturing fingerings and marketing. The study establishes lack of continuous training activities especially on quantity, quality, finances and management due constraints of experts, lack of

mutual partners, high facilitating cost and lack of relevant information and training equipment. Rumuruti aloe vera project training activities are conducting informally by members gathering in open public field where officials demonstrate how to extract aloe vera juice and mix concoction. Once in while the group hire private expert for technical instructions on how to improve the production process of aloe vera lotion and soap. The result from Kionyweni basket weaving project reveals that training activities are inadequate and limited only to traditional instructions from local experts. The study attests that the project officials did receive some training marketing and quality improvement of OVOP products by Jomo Kenyatta University in partnership with OVOP national secretariat and JICA. There are a few trainings on new value addition skills for quality, branding and marketing improvement. A conclusion is drawn that training activities which aims at provision of individual competence and commitment requires multiple techniques by using instructions, lecture, discussion, case study, role-playing, simulation, group discussion and e-learning.

### Development activities

The replication result of three OVOP cases as shown in Table 2 establishes that development activities at 23% have strong influence on the implementation of differential advantage approach in OVOP projects. However, most discussants reveal that development activities in OVOP projects are inadequate. For example, at Jitunze trout fish project where membership is dominated by out of school youth with no technical skills, it reveals that there are limited long term exercises of improving members' technical capability. It is evident from the study that none of Jitunze project member has received comprehensive technical skills on whole value chain of fish production. Most discussants at Jitunze project attest that they desperately need to improve their technical capacity in fish production, processing, branding, quality, management and market programmes in order to achieve competitive advantage in fishery industry. At Rumuruti aloe vera project which is dominated by women, there has been no development

programmes such as on-job courses in manufacturing, cosmetic, packaging, branding or marketing field. It is evident that despite the project being in cosmetic industry, none of the project member has technical skill in this field. The result of Kionyweni basket weaving case reveals that the project lack comprehensive development programme. Most discussants agreed that provision of on-job courses for OVOP project members which are market demand course, time flexible and delivered in local language will be more ideal for these most semi-illiterate memberships. According to Yamazaki (2010) in Japan, technical assistance was enhanced by establishing the prefectural technology centres which provided technical support to producers to develop more value-adding products. The most prominent activity of Oita's OVOP was adult education on local development, which was a two-year part-time programme. As Ohaya et al. (2014), Kenyans should move down the technical assistances to local level. The local assistance should exist closely to local people. This newly born Kenyan OVOP should adapt a successful lesson from other developed schemes in order to get fruitful result, real sustainable development for the local community. A conclusion is drawn from the study that effective development in OVOP requires long term cultural change in terms of perception, attitudes and practice through coaching and mentorship activities. The study establishes that development process in OVOP projects will result to a sense ownership by members being self-reliant (initiative) and creative communities and proud to collectively identify their problems and give solution to the problems in adding value to local unique product for global market.

### Education activities

The summary replication of results of three OVOP cases shown in Table 2 establish that education activities at 24% have very strong influence on the implementation of differential advantage approach in OVOP projects. However, most discussants reveal that education activities in OVOP projects are insufficient in term of development of knowledge, value and understanding system life aspect. The study establishes that in the three OVOP cases there were high prevalence of low level of formal education and limited skills and competences especially in running competitive enterprise. The case of Jitunze trout fish project reveals that most members who are school leavers lacked necessary value, knowledge and understanding entrepreneurial development and value addition in productivity. Most of Rumuruti aloe vera project members are either house wives or casual laborers in commercial farms and businesses. Overwhelming evident reveal that most members who are primary school leaver have not acquired necessary practical entrepreneurial knowledge from formal

education system. As Republic of Kenya (2005), put it that there is low levels of education and technical training of the majority of MSE operators. Most of the operators in the MSE's sector are primary leavers, only a few of whom have ever had technical training. Overwhelm evident from the three cases is the need to introduce homegrown education system that is market demand based aiming at improving entrepreneurial skills and value addition skills at all levels and stages of human development. According to Ong'olo and Awino (2013), there is need to establish tailored training institutes for SMEs at the county level enabling environment such as infrastructures; incentives and mutual cooperation among key actors are also needed to guarantee successful implementation of interactive learning. Promotion of demand-based curriculum or industry based programme in county vocational and technical institutions need to be intensified. There is also a need to introduce flexible short courses which were tailor-made competency and based training in county village vocational institutions among other county learning institutions. Therefore, mutual trust, reciprocity, common norms, networks and practices are needed for an interactive learning. It is therefore concluded that the government needs to provide qualitative aspects of leadership, infrastructures, incentive and mutual cooperation in promoting collective learning in productivity.

The study concludes that human resource development has extremely strong influence on the successful implementation of differential advantage approach in Kenya OVOP projects. Through literal replication logic of three OVOP projects, the findings confirm the study proposition that quality human resource development plays critical role in the implementation of differential advantage approach in OVOP projects. However, overwhelm evident reveals insufficient activities of human resource development for achieving competitive advantage in OVOP projects. It attests that lack of creative integration human centred design approach of learning, training, development and education activities which facilitate effective human development was the greatest hindrance of successful implementation of differential in OVOP projects. The study attests that proper integration of human resource development activities will facilitate quality human development cycle; awareness, commitment and self-ownership. This systematic process will help individual to develop physically, mentally, emotionally and collective willingness of groups having a sense ownership by being self-reliant and creative communities and proud to collectively identify their problems and give solution the problems in adding value to local unique product for global market. Enabling environment such as infrastructures, incentives and common behaviour were also needed to guarantee successful implementation of interactive learning. The success of collective training requires actualizing of collective activities, establishing

supporting facilities and relevant incentives in terms of exposure trips, institution collaboration, exchange programmes, mentorship programmes incubation centres and village business development centres. Promotion of demand-based curriculum or industry based programme in county vocational and technical institutions need to be intensified. However, collective action may require a coordinated behavior toward a common interest for learning organization. Mutual trust, reciprocity, common norms, networks and practices needed to be inculcated among stakeholders for common conducts in an interactive learning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study made the following recommendations:

- (1) There is an urgent need to establish Village Business Development Centres (VBDC) as a focal unit for rural development. Establishment of village promotion centre just like Japan's Michino Eki (roadside stations) serves as venues for the provision of a wide variety of services such as economic e.g. quality product and marketing function and public services to the local community such as sanitation, health care, education and training, as well as cultural activities. These village centres also provide necessary local linkages between producer and consumer; link of business development with human and social development and connects social capital among different localities. The village centres will utilize existing village or "Kijiji" structures, networks and assets among other social capital to pursue a share value of productive processes. Just like other existing village social and economic organization, the new organization will integrate relevant structures such as church to leadership, register membership, own shares, regular meetings, group events, twinning programmes, educational tours, inter-village and county contests, and various sub-committees, that is, marketing, production, training and quality assurance. The centres would also make use of existing community facilities like shopping centres, cattle dips, collection centres or village markets.
- (2) There is a need to promote demand-based curriculum in Kenya school system and industry based programme in technical and vocational institutes. A tailor-made competency courses that is market demand based aiming at improving entrepreneurial skills and value addition skills at all levels and stages of human development critical in promoting quality human resources in OVOP projects. This homegrown programme requires creative integration human centred design approach of learning, training, development, and education activities. Provision of on-job training courses is necessary which are friendly in term of language, methodology, flexible, part-time short courses for illiterate and adult learners in villages.
- (3) There is a need to establish county special training

institutes and village business development centres to support in building technical capacity of OVOP projects. The establishment of specific training institutions focusing on county's unique product will help to create competitive advantage needed in OVOP projects. Promotion of county special training institutes and village promotion centres will streamline interactive learning by defining county problems, searching for and implementing solutions, and assessing the value of a solution for a specific practice through experience sharing, mentorship and nurturing village initiatives.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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