

Research Article

Local NGO Executive's Gender, Experience and Academic Qualification as a Predictor of Strategy Performance - Evidence from Uganda

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Abstract

Whereas local non-governmental organizations (LNGO) have been widely appraised as the third largest employment sector in most developing countries, there is a common concurrence among scholars that their strategic success depends on leadership traits. As the localization among LNGO programming gains pace, recent policy debates on gender, equity, diversity and inclusion rekindles the need for empirical studies on the un attendant strategy influence of gender, education and experience of leaders whose performance outcomes in leadership remain unknown. Specifically, this study examined the influence of gender, experience and academic qualifications of local NGO executives on strategy performance. The study was informed by performance theory of management which laid emphasis on how human actions convey meaning in an organization. The study conceptualized the variables of sociodemographic gender, experience and qualifications as the independent variables and fund stability, strategy timeliness, and community satisfaction as dependent variables. A total of 349 LNGO staff were interviewed from the 14 sister branch networks of LNGOs operating in Uganda. The study determined that whereas the variable of gender was less influential, experience and qualifications were significantly influencing the performance of local NGO strategy in Uganda. Considering the current political discourse, this study concludes that gender of a leader is not a critical parameter for better strategy performance. The study therefore contributes to strategic human resource planning with a focus on experience and qualifications when selecting staff. To ensure equity in employment of local NGO leaders, this study recommends continuous local NGO network executive mentorship programs.

Keywords

Sociodemographic Characteristics, Local NGO Leadership, Strategy Performance

1. Literature Review

Despite the wider attraction, socio demographic characteristics of a leader manifest in the level of grants attracted, community acceptance and funding stability and agility of responses to the needs [1]. Recent extensive studies confirmed that employment in the sector has been extensive in the

past 20 years [2] and yet the yardsticks for identifying the performing executives are not known [3]. Over the past years, there has been consistent argument for diversity as part of optimal human resource management strategies in many organizations. In a study conducted on diverse inclusion of

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minority groups in medical field practice, Kelly [4] argued that the role of diversity in workforce and leadership practice in an organization is the simplest way of amplifying the voice for the underserved communities. There is also a similar concurrence by other scholars that gender, experience and qualification of a leader determines the extent to which they commit to the organizational goals and activities [5]. This argument resonates with the current set of NGOs that find themselves serving the underprivileged and yet the leaders are often not underprivileged.

According to Auden as cited from Thakur [6], demographic characteristics such as age and educational background determine the level of employee productivity. According to April [7], measuring workplace diversity contributions to strategic gains has suffered from lack of tools and approaches which allow employees to feel appreciated.

In an empirical study on how individual characteristics lead to inequality in leadership, it concluded that strong diversity practices are strongly correlated with profitability [6]. Although this study was majorly focused on academic profit-making institutions, non-governmental organizations are not exceptional. In Uganda the number of female NGO leadership is still not within acceptable gender parity index [8]. Previous publications had hinted that while the sector registered a significant number of players, executives were more focused on attracting funds, timeliness of execution and satisfactory acceptance for sustainability and growth. The Quality assurance mechanism (QUAM) report of 2019 indicated that Ugandan local NGOs employ on average 10 leadership staff [7]. Also, Barr [2] reported that Ugandan local NGOs benefits from renewed traditional western donor interest to experiment local funding mechanism at the expense of locally led resource mobilization efforts within the public space of Uganda.

1.1. Gender and Performance

The gender of an individual affects his or her performance and as such human resource management should have the same in consideration when assigning duties and when looking at employee performance. According to Heilman [10], there are many stereotypes in existence concerning the differences in abilities between men and women in many organizations. They therefore point out the possibility of having stereotypically driven performance results at the time of appraisal. According to various scholars, there are only a few, gender related differences that will affect the performance of men and women [11]. The scholars argued that that while women are good in obeying rules and following instructions, men on the other hand are more aggressive and aim at seeing the results quickly. The differences are however minor and might not be universally applied as an explanation as to why men and women attain different performance standards is because of mere feminist orientations [12].

Sinclair [13] observed that there is a common tendency to

believe that highly visible and effective women in public life have been designated as something other than leader, such as 'community activist' or 'pioneer'. As such it is important to re-imagine the image of local women in the leadership roles within the cultural context. Conservative believers in the male dominant theory tend to believe that leadership of women are doubtful because they are granted a longer maternity leave compared to their male counterparts who just get a few days and sometimes denied depending on the policies of the organizations they are working for. From a cultural context, women are more responsible to immediate family matters such as looking after children more than their male counterparts. According to Awori [14], women leaders value their capacity to manage their own lives, not having to wait for others to carry out their plans. The study by Awori also revealed a dark side of empowerment which is the burden of responsibility especially when they did have partners.

Recent gender, equality and social inclusion (GESI) studies conducted in Indonesian higher education showed that despite its prominence in government policy with a strong movement associated with gender advocates; higher education had not yet made full commitment to implement it [15]. Even though people all over are fighting for an alleviation of the position of women, this has not yet been achieved and therefore women are still being denied leadership positions which are full of challenges that can be used to measure their ability to outperform men.

1.2. Experience

The number of years that one has spent within an organization can have an impact of whether they will perform better or not. In addition to gaining work experience, many years of work within an organization indicate that the employer and employee relationship is sustainable as far as achieving the goals of the organization is concerned [16]. Lewis argued that having experience is not about metaphysics because you can't learn about team challenges by simply being told but rather through experience.

Experience spent on a job has also been found to cause perceptual relativism. According to Crane [17], perceptual Relativism' – entails that a scientist and a child may look at a cathode ray tube and, in a sense, the first will see it while the second won't. The claim is not, of course, that the child's experience is 'empty'; but that, unlike the scientist, it does not see the tube as a cathode ray tube. Employees who stay longer in an organization help the organization to reduce training costs while their performance increases over time [18].

The author believed that employees who stay long in an organization point out that they are satisfied with the job and their stay in the organization while those who exit are dissatisfied and are hopeful of getting better places that can satisfy their employment needs. Previous classical studies on the added value of experience have been heightened in experience and prediction as a structure of knowledge which recognized

that experienced people were more likely to predict events including risks and situations for right management response beforehand [19].

1.3. Education Qualification and Performance

Education level has become one of the critical aspects of employment in both public, private and non-profit entities. Although youths make up 70% of the entire population in Uganda, unemployment has compelled many to join voluntary organizations after completing diploma and degree courses. These higher proportion of youth who end up participating at early stage in management of local NGO activities are likely to become effective leaders in future. According to recent research on learning to lead, youth who had taken an earlier voluntary role in NGO activities were found to be effective learners [20].

The current times are seeing education take the central stage in employment. Most employers insist on certain minimum educational qualifications before considering one for a particular job. The recent high rates of unemployment in many countries are seeing graduates accepting jobs that they are either under-qualified or over-qualified for [21]. The authors argued that there is no underutilization of skills among the overqualified youths who engage in managing small entities such as local NGOs.

Various scholars concur that skills gained through education are a mark of performance level that an employee can exhibit. However, different fields of specialization are needed to meet the labor needs within the universities [22]. Educational qualification, merits and skills are seen as forces that can be interplayed with based on the performance environment. Scholars are currently arguing that the ideal western meritocracy which has been propagated over the year can be adjusted through flexibility [23]. This may not be reflected in the description of the job. In line with this is the fact that organizations are majorly interested in talents, or what can be positively established as possible contributions to organizations if hired, more than the academic qualifications that the workforce has. This can result in low motivation and poor performance. Little research has been done on the same as evidenced by lack of dedicated literature and any research findings concerning the effect of educational qualification and role requirement mismatches in relation to performance.

2. Problem Statement

Performance of an individual leader in attaining strategic goals differ significantly due to traits and characteristics that shape unique leaders. According to Muthel [3], unique leadership traits are determined by socio demographic makeup of an individual fosters team's performance. While previous studies on leadership traits tended to acknowledge the added value of managing demographic culture in an organization as part of individual self-gratification and organizational perfor-

mance, the nature of local NGO, the set up and mechanism for regulations may inhibit optimal capitalization of strong demographic traits. Local NGOs in Uganda are small and yet they could optimize their strength through selection and retention of staff with high performance traits. Currently, not much is known about the extent to which local NGOs are optimizing the traits of gender, experience and education level for the benefit of their strategy. It is against this background that this study intends to examine the empirical evidence on the linkages between demographic characteristics of local NGO leaders and strategy performance of local NGOs in Uganda.

2.1. Study Objective

The main objective of the study is to examine the influence of local NGO executive's gender, experience and educational qualifications on the performance of local NGO strategy in Uganda.

2.2. Materials and Methods

2.2.1. Study Location

This study was conducted in fourteen NGO forum network spread across Uganda. It is a network of 600 registered members of civil society organizations that seeks to ensure coordinated advocacy, resource mobilization and capacity development of local NGOs in Uganda.

2.2.2. Study Design

The study adopted a survey research design. A survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. According to Mugenda and Mugenda [24] (1999), a survey could be applied to quantitative information about people's attitudes, opinions or any variety of education or social issues. The design presents a clear picture of the influence of sociodemographic characteristics and performance of local NGOs.

2.2.3. The Target Population

The target population for this study was 600 local NGOs who are spread across Uganda. The study population was selected because they had benefited in capacity building and network resource mobilization which benefits heavily from rich socio demographic characteristics as a strength for each of the member NGO. These participants were targeted because they had the required information as opposed to the field staff of the different agencies.

2.2.4. Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The study sampled a total of 349 respondents based on the Morgan and Krejci [25] (1973) table of sample size definition. This sampling was deemed appropriate because the 600 local NGOs were reported to be employed on an average of 10 staff at a leadership level [9] (QuAM, 2019). The researcher sought

ethical clearance from Uganda national council for research as part of the overall PhD research project. The researcher took measures to ensure professionalism, confidentiality, privacy and the rights of the participants.

2.2.5. Data Collection Tools and Variables

The researcher used a self-administered questionnaire. Sociodemographic characteristics were coded on nominal scale and strategy performance was coded on ordinal scale using a Likert score. A Likert score was used by the respondents in scoring the perspectives of leaders on local NGO performance.

3. Results

This study results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis to determine the relationship between the socio demographic characteristics and performance of local NGOs.

3.1. Background Characteristics of the Study Population

The study established the demographic characteristics of the respondents, which included their gender, educational qualification, and experience in the NGO sector. Results indicated that of the 349 respondents, the majority (66 %) were male while 34 % were female. The majority (47 %) of the respondents had the highest qualification for a bachelor’s degree. Nearly one third (28%) of the local NGO leaders interviewed had post graduate qualifications. In terms of the length of work achieved, the majority (52%) spent less than 5 years, followed by one third who had spent 5-10 years and nearly one fifth who had spent over 10 years. Overall, the result shows that there were more males in the leadership compared to female and that most of the leaders had a bachelor’s degree. **Table 1** below summarizes the socio demographic data of the NGO staff interviewed.

Table 1. Socio Demographic Characteristics of LNGO Staff (N=349).

Background Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	230	65.9
	Female	119	34.1
Highest Level of Education	Postgraduate	99	28.4
	Bachelor	165	47.3
	Diploma	51	14.6
	High school	22	6.3
Length of Work	Others	12	3.4
	Less than 5 years	181	51.9
	5-10 years	107	30.7
	Over 10 years	61	17.6

American Journal of Education and Learning, 2018, 3(2): 54-63.

The dependent variables in this study focused on strategy performance aspects of community satisfaction, fund stability and timeliness. NGO staff were asked to reflect on their experience and score what factors had defined the strategy performance in their organization. Study participants used the

scales as follows: 1-Not at all, 2-Small extent, 3-Moderate extent, 4-Great extent, and 5-Very great extent. Responses on multiple variables from the sampled population were computed and measured in terms of means (averages) scores for each response. **Table 2** below presents descriptive statistics which were generated from NGO staff’s responses.

Table 2. Mean Scores for Strategy performance variables.

Fund Stability	Mean (N=349)	Std. Deviation
C1.1 Attracting new streams of grants	3.24	1.044

Fund Stability	Mean (N=349)	Std. Deviation
C1.2 Maintaining donor relationship	3.80	1.022
C1.3 Delivering programs within the budget	3.63	1.022
C1.4 Saving costs	3.28	1.092
C1.5 Meeting audit requirements.	3.57	1.025
C1.6 Management supervision directives	3.56	.962
Community Satisfaction		
C2.1 Reaching more marginalized community beneficiaries	3.73	1.041
C2.2 Innovation towards beneficiary wellbeing	3.48	1.035
C2.3 Addressing competition by rival entity in the community.	3.22	1.059
C2.4 Acceptance of the organization by the beneficiaries	3.75	1.028
Timeliness		
C3.1 Capability to deliver service as and when needed	3.73	1.004
C3.2 Delivering program within agreed time	3.70	.993
C3.3 Responsiveness to opportunities within time	3.70	.979

Source: Primary data, 2023

Findings from the table above show that all strategy performance variables of fund stability, community satisfaction and timeliness were rated between the average scores of 3.2-3.8, this implies that the respondents were more inclined to rate the variables as moderate extent and great extent. Under the study variable of fund stability, respondent scores of saving costs and attracting new streams of funding were mostly rated as a method reaching marginalized community was also rated towards a great extent scale and this resonates with the ever-increasing demand of leaving no one behind which is articulated in sustainable development goals. Maintaining donor relationships was rated high and this implies local NGOs tended to value constructive engagement with the donors compared to making efforts in gaining community acceptance. Similarly, under the study variable of community satisfaction respondents mostly rated addressing competition by rival entity in the community on moderate extent scale.

All other dimensions under timeliness were more largely included. The finding implies that the majority agreed that timeliness is a factor of great influence for the performance of strategic actions. The mean scores of 3.5 above implies a favorable perception towards largely prioritizing it. None of

the mean scores were skewed towards the score of 2 or 5, and this implies that there were slow but progressive favorable opinion towards achieving the dependent strategy variables indicated in the study.

3.2. The Influence of Socio Demographic Characteristics on the Performance of LNGO Strategy

The study tested had posited that there is no significant the relationship between sociodemographic characteristics of an NGO leader and the performance of local NGO in Uganda.

The results show that there was no significant relationship between gender and performance of NGO strategies ($\chi^2=1.26$, $df=2$; $p\text{-value}=0.41$). The study found that there was a significant relationship between level of education, experience and the performance of local NGO strategy ($P\text{-value}<0.05$). This finding means more educated and experienced local NGO leaders were more likely to impact local NGO instead of gendered dimensions.

Table 3. Summary of Chi Square Results.

Sociodemographic characteristics	Pearson chi square value	Df	P. value
Gender	1.26	2	0.41
Highest Qualifications	16.14	6	0.004

Sociodemographic characteristics	Pearson chi square value	Df	P. value
Experience	25.55	12	0.006

Source: Authors Calculation, 2023

In summary, it can be said that rather than focusing on gender, management should emphasize attracting candidates with the highest qualification and experience for the success of local NGO strategy. It therefore means both women and men should be treated equitably as long as they have qualification and experience.

4. Discussion Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings from the results above shows in the local NGO context of Uganda, not all the sociodemographic characteristics matters. The community within which the NGOs find themselves have valued that gender is not a strong predictor of strategic performance of an NGO. This finding counteracts earlier studies by Heilman [10] who had observed that women are likely to have wrong stereotypical appraisal of their performance in an organization. The poor rating of gender as a predictor of performance could also be explained by the findings from Awori [14] which acknowledged that empowerment comes with burdens which inhibit performance of strategic results.

The positive significant relationship between education and performance of NGO leaders can be attributed to the early exposure of youth to NGO work through internship programs. Similarly, education leads to innovation and additional skill sets which influence performance. The findings concur with Rogers 2013 who had earlier on observed that Education creates flexible mindsets for performance.

On the length of experience, the findings also concur that leaders with more experience have more learning and are more likely to shape the direction of the organization. The findings concur with earlier studies conducted by Reichenbach.

4.1. Conclusion

In conclusion, one can argue that, except for gender, the demographic characteristics such as age, highest qualification and experience are critical in predicting better strategy performance. Therefore, this calls for unbiased consideration in the composition of the local NGO leaders if they have qualifications and experience to lead.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the conclusion and discission of the results, the following are recommended:

Broaden engagement on Gender: Local NGO human resource process should sustain equitable engagement of women and men in capacity building effort and long-term succession mentorship programs.

On job mentorship of local NGO executives for strategy performance: Donors and consultants should continue funding for job mentorship for leaders to improve on experience, skills and focus towards delivering strategic results in the local NGOs sector.

Strengthen peer mechanism and process monitoring in strategy oversights: Government and quality assurance agencies should focus on strengthening peer performance process reviews on a routine basis as part of ongoing capacity support for strategy performance.

Abbreviations

GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organization
QUAM	Quality Assurance Mechanism

Author Contributions

Lawrence Rafaih Okello is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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