



THE ROLE OF NIGERIAN WOMEN AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVES IN FOOD SECURITY

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Abstract

The study examined the role of women in agricultural cooperatives in food security in Kuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State. Data for the study were derived from two purposively selected communities, they are Kuru and Kono. Forty respondents were randomly selected from each of the two communities giving a total of 80 women. Tools for the analyses were descriptive statistics to identify socio-economic characteristics of co-operators, identify benefits derived for participation and constraints in participation. Multiple regression Model was used to determine factors influencing women participation in agricultural cooperative societies. The results show that a majority of respondents (77.6%) were between 30 and 49 years and married (77.5%). About (17.1%) had secondary school level education while (7.5 %) had tertiary education. About (40%) were primarily involved in farming. All of the women interviewed were small scale farmers having less than 10ha of farm lands. Major benefits derived by members include access to credit (31.3%), loan and fertilizer (18%). Poverty (22%) and poor cooperative management (22.6%) were found to be the major constraints militating against women participation in cooperatives. Factors that influenced women participation in co-operatives were age and credit, these were significant at .01 level of probability. The study established a high potential for enhancing economic growth in co-operatives in spite of the problems faced by the women. Recommendations were made.

Keywords: Women agricultural cooperatives, food security, Kaduna, Nigeria

Introduction

Food security has been described as an important aspect in any consideration of wealth and economic sustainability of a nation. It is generally defined as access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life (World Bank, 1986). Important aspects to be considered in food security issues include the availability of food stuff, the quality of the diet, the stability of supplies over time and space and access to food produced (Honfoga and van den Boom, 2003). It is widely recognized that co-operatives form an indispensable component of rural and community development. Through community organizations, co-operatives serve the basis and platform for bringing together the economically weak members of the society with a view of enhancing their individual capacities (Alkali, 1991). The contributions of co-operatives to the economy, especially in the developing countries, are enormous, ranging from provision of credit to its members and sourcing of inputs at reasonable price, to marketing of members' produce (Okonkwo, 1991). UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon (2012) highlighted the important role of agricultural cooperatives in improving world food security, calling for participation in an initiative to end hunger. "The world food situation continues to cause serious concern. Millions of small food producers -- many of whom are women -- are struggling to cope with economic and climatic shocks, and with high and volatile food prices," In a message marking World Food Day, which was on Oct. 16, 2012. According to (Ban-Ki Moon 2012) 'newly released figures now put the number of hungry people worldwide at nearly 870 million,

which is "unacceptable in a world of plenty, a world in which, if food were distributed properly, every person would have enough to eat."

Agricultural cooperatives can generate employment, alleviate poverty, and empower poor and marginalized groups in rural areas, especially women, to drive their own destinies. As enterprises with a social conscience, cooperatives have also proven to be an effective vehicle for social inclusion, promoting gender equity and encouraging the involvement of youths in agriculture (Ban-Ki Moon (2012). Women form one of the segments of the society that is disproportionately represented below the poverty line (Corbett, 2006). Ogunbameru (1986) also estimated that 52% of Nigeria's population is women and that 70% of such women live in rural areas. It is also on record (Adebayo and Amao, 2003), that 53% of the poor in Nigeria are women. Ani (2002) observed that only a small fraction of women in Nigeria had the benefit of higher education and that the majority is engaged in petty trading and peasant farming. Despite the low educational and poor economic background of Nigerian women, they are still responsible for more than half of the nation's food basket and contribute more than two-thirds of the working hours on the farms (Barret et al 2001). Barret *et al.*, (2001) also reported that African women are responsible for 60% of micro processing activities, especially the processing of agricultural produce.

Women co-operative societies have proven to be successful in channelling loans to women engaged in agricultural production, micro processing or marketing (Emah, 1986). In a study on the contributions of co-operatives to the efficiency of agricultural production, Yakubu (2000) reported that the evolution of women cooperatives in rural Africa has led to increased participation of women in economic activities and increase in farm output; and Ashanti (1993) observed that through the participation of women in agricultural activities, benefits such as educational services have also reached rural women. Co-operatives are regarded as one of the main institutional machineries for empowering the economically weak members of the society. To transform agricultural production and raise the standard of living in the rural areas, many agricultural co operative societies have been formed all over the country. Despite the efforts of government, it appears that a significant proportion of rural women are either unaware of the existence of such co-operative societies or are lacking in the basic socioeconomic characteristics that form the prerequisite for participation in such activities. The position for asking such question is further strengthened if the roles played by women in agricultural production are considered. It was in an attempt to address such problems that this study was designed to:

1. Describe the socio-economic characteristics of women in co-operatives in the study area;
2. Determine the benefits derived by members of various co-operative societies;
3. Identify factors influencing women participation in cooperative societies in the study area.
4. Determine major problems militating against the participation of women in co-operative activities.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Kuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State. Kuru is located in the Southern part of the State. Several varieties of crops and livestock are produced in the area. The Local government has three districts: Kuru, Geshere and Chawai. Two districts, Kuru and Geshere were purposively selected for the study because there were an appreciable number of women involved in co-operative activities. However, within the districts a village each was purposively selected, The villages are Kuru and Kono. From each village 40 respondents were randomly selected from a list of registered members of co-operative societies.

This was done through assigning numbers and for balloting. To that effect, a total of 80 respondents were interviewed. Primary data for the study were collected with the use of structured questionnaire administered to 80 respondents. Both descriptive and multiple regression model were used to analyze the data.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents: Table 1 shows that majority (77.6%) of the respondents were between 30-49 years while only 21.3% were above 49 years. The finding in this study is similar to that of earlier studies by Yakubu (2000), Windapo and Olowu (2001) and Bzugu *et al.*, (2005) which revealed that younger people participated more in agricultural and community development activities such as cooperatives. Table 1 also revealed that the majority (77%) of the respondents were married. The educational status of the respondents revealed that about (42%) had no formal education while (58.8%) had attained adult literacy to tertiary education, adult. literacy 17.5%, primary 17.5%, secondary 17.3% tertiary 7.5% and 3.8% No response, respectively. The educational background would no doubt help in decision making especially in terms of leadership and investments.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to socioeconomic characteristics

Socio-economic variables	Frequency	Frequency %
Age in years		
Range	39	48.8
20-29	12	15.0
30-39	11	13.8
40-59	8	10.0
60 -69	9	11.3
Marital status		
No response	1	1.3
Single	4	4
Married	62	62
Divorced	2	2
Widowed	11	11
No response	1	1
Educational level		
Illiterate	34	42.5
Adult literacy	14	17.5
Primary Education	14	17.5
Secondary	9	17.3
Tertiary	6	7.5
No response	3	3.8
Primary Occupation		
Farming	32	40.0
Trading	19	23.8
Craftsmanship	1	1.3
Tailor	3	3.8
Civil servants	20	25.0
Others	5	6.3
Farm size(ha)		
1-2	31	38.8
3-4	31	38.8
5-6	0	0
7 and above	2	2.5

About (40%) of the respondents were engaged in farming, (23%) were traders, (1.3%) craftsmanship, (3.8%) tailoring, (25%) civil servants and others (6.3%) as their primary occupation. The nature of the primary occupation of the respondents made it imperative for them to join cooperative societies. Except for the civil servants, most of them were engaged in risk-prone jobs and they might have had to rely on the co-operative societies for reimbursement in the event of loss. The table also showed the farm sizes of respondents, 1-2ha (38.8%), 3-4ha (38.8%), 7ha and above (2.5%) and (20%) No response. This shows that all members were farmers in small scale when compared with international standard where all farm size less than 10hectares are classified as small (Olayide *et al.*, (1980).

Benefits derived by Members from Cooperative Societies: Table 2 shows that the most important benefits were easy accessibility of fertilizer (61%), and confidence in discussing issues with others (17.5%). While some said they enjoy team work (7.5%), attending trainings and workshops (1.3%), got loan (7.5%), use of improved seeds (1.3%) and other benefits (3.8%). This shows that members have benefited in one way or the other. The highest perceived benefit is access to fertilizers this indicating that the use of fertilizer has been adopted by the women farmers.

Factors Influencing Participation of Women in Cooperative Societies from regression analysis: The result showed that age (t-value = -3.622) and credit (t-value = -2.594 had a significant relationship with the participation of women in co-operative activities. This could be due to the fact that younger persons have higher capacity to take advantage of most opportunities, including participation in co-operative activities and its potential benefits.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to benefits of membership of co-operative societies

Benefit	Frequency	Frequency %
Fertilizer	49	61.3
Confidence in Discussing issues with others	14	17.5
Enjoy team work with others	6	7.5
Attending trainings and workshops	1	1.3
Got loan	6	7.5
Use of improved seeds	1	1.3
Others	2	3.8

Table 3: Regression result showing factors affecting participation in Cooperative Societies

Variable	Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	T-Value	LOS
Perceived benefit	-0.181	0.210	-0.862	0.39
No. of extension visit	0.254	0.705	0.360	0.72
Education	0.178	0.810	0.220	0.82
Farm size	-0.246	1.078	0.228	0.82
Loan/credit	-4.496	1.733	-2594	0.01*
Non-farm income	-0.604	0.834	-0.725	0.47
Farm income	-0.645	0.417	-1.545	0.13
Occupation	-0.686	0.489	-1.401	0.17
Age	1.937	0.535	-3.622	0.01*

Adjusted R² = .46733; Degree of freedom (DF) = 79; * = significant at 0.01 level.

Table 4: Constraints faced by cooperatives

Constraints	Frequency	Frequency %
Poor economic circumstances	20	22.0
Strained relationships among members	1	1.3
Poor cooperative management	18	22
Personal motives	1	1.3
Lack of good perception of cooperative	6	7.5
Lack of means of communication	1	1.3
No time for attending meetings	1	1.3
Family ties	4	5.0
Others	28	35.0

Constraints: The study showed in Table 4 that the major constraints are poor cooperative management (22.5%), poor economic circumstances/poverty (22%) while others are lack of good perception of cooperative (7.5%), family tie (5%) lack of means of communication (1.3%), no time for attending meetings (1.3%), personal motives (1.3%), strained relationships (1.3%) and others (35%) who indicated illiteracy, illness and nursing babies

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings of this study co-operative activities had high potential for enhancing economic activities and indeed poverty reduction among women in Kauru Local Government Area. Furthermore, age and credit have influence on co-operative participation. Younger women were found to be more numerous in the cooperatives. Poverty, poor co-operative management, family ties and poor perception of cooperatives are among the main barriers to women's participation in co-operative activities in the study area.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Women should be given more access to education, especially by encouraging them to go beyond the secondary level of education;
- ii. Co-operative societies should expand their services to their members. They should go beyond the provision of loans, production inputs and marketing of produce and focus also, on educating their members;
- iii. Local government councils should ensure that women are fairly represented in micro credit schemes such as the Poverty Alleviation Programme loan disbursement; and
- iv. Micro-processing training centres should be established at community levels, preferably by co-operative societies, with a view to providing skills to rural women.

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