

ASSESSMENT OF BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN SHIRORO AREA OF NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Despite the significant role of cooperative societies in the economic development of rural areas, many cooperative societies still face several challenges which hinder full participation of individuals and enjoy the benefits of its formation. With this problem one may be in doubt as to whether the objectives of the cooperative societies are achieved or not. It is the light of this the study was conducted to analyze the benefits of participation of rural women in cooperative societies in Shiroro area of Niger state, Nigeria. One hundred and fifty respondents were randomly selected and interviewed in line with the objective of the study. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistical tools were used for data analysis. The findings indicate that younger people (58.7%) within the age range of 21-40 years participate more in cooperative societies in the study area and have taken combination of farming and trading (57.3%) as their major occupation. The study revealed that majority of the respondents belongs to marketing cooperative societies (76.7%) and acquisition of credit facilities (68.0%) was the highest benefit derived by members participating in cooperative societies in the study area. The findings of the study also revealed that major problems encountered by respondents participating in cooperative societies in the study area include bad leadership style (69.33%), inadequate working capital (65.33%) and inadequate benefit accrued to participating members. The results of analysis of variance (ANOVA) that was used test the formulated hypothesis revealed that there is no significant relationship between selected socio-economic (age, educational level and household) characteristics and benefits derived by respondents participating in cooperative societies in the study area. Women should be given more access to education, especially by going beyond secondary school level. The government and non-governmental organization should create more avenues for cooperative societies to access funds either in form of grants or loans to boost the cooperative activities.

Key words: Women, Cooperative society, Participation, Benefits, Constraints.

INTRODUCTION

Cooperative forms an indispensable component of rural and community development that serve as the basis and platform for bringing together the economically weak members of the society with a view of enhancing their individual capacities and contribution to the economy of developing countries, especially in the provision credit to its members in agricultural production, micro processing and marketing, wealth creation and poverty reduction and as well promote the socio-economic well being of its members (Alkali, 1991; Lawal, 2006).

Cooperative societies play significant roles in agricultural activities at both the on-farm and off-farm levels. Evolution of women cooperative societies in rural Africa has led to increased participation of women in rural economic activities and overall increase in farm output. Women cooperative societies have proven to be successful in channeling loans to women engaged in agricultural production, micro processing and marketing (Oguoma, 1994; Toponzi, 1990). Similarly, Cooperative societies have played the role of nurturing small groups with little financial means into larger groups through provision of funds from which individual members take loans to meet respective needs. Many cooperative societies make investments in business ventures, stocks or real property to generate returns that could be shared as dividends to members periodically, depending on surplus that accrues to the fund, through this individual have the opportunities to do on his own what cannot be done as a group (Akinwunmi, 2006). Cooperative societies have also serve as instrument of social transformation, especially in rural areas and have proved to be useful in achieving increased domestic production of food, industrial raw materials and equitable distribution of farm inputs, farm products and other commodities (Asaolu, 2004).

Agricultural cooperatives serve as sources of income through which enable small holder farmers to construct decent houses, send their children to school, and provide health insurance to sustain rural livelihood. Members of cooperative societies have the advantage of accessing cooperative education, business development capacity building and acquire the skills of running business and this is why rural development would greatly be enhanced if people become members of agricultural cooperative in general (Chambo *et al.*, 2007; Volamen, 2010). As far as market development is concerned, it has been evident that agricultural cooperative have been responsible for introduction of the exchange economy in remote areas of Africa. By doing so, cooperative provides a ready market for farmers' crops and also absorb transaction cost which would otherwise hinder small farmers from market and production integration (Holloway, 1999).

The formation of cooperative societies by women can provide an insight into the use of these organizations as vehicles for development in various part of the world. In developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, cooperative institutions and especially the agricultural cooperatives serve as agencies that hold enormous potential for the development of women, and more particularly the rural women who are actively involved in the process of food production, processing and marketing. Cooperative institutions can help accelerate the process of development and participation of women in their organizational and business activities (Prakash, 1999). Cooperative societies are effective tools for development pervading all areas of rural economy ranging from provision of

micro financing, improved facilities for farming, marketing of scattered rural farm produce and information. Despite this fact, the level of participation of rural women in agricultural cooperative societies seems inadequate considering its existence in Nigeria for over half a century.

The percentage of membership of rural women especially in agricultural cooperatives in developing countries of Africa including Nigeria is low, although they are very active in agriculture, trade and other activities. Prakash (1999) reported that in countries like India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, women comprise just 7.5% as compared with men (92.5%) of the total membership. Over the years, the government of Nigeria and many non-governmental organizations have encouraged the formation of cooperative societies especially by women in the rural areas because of the important role it plays in the economy such as facilitation of quick transfer of technical knowledge and the efficiency of the cooperative approach to problem solving (Akinwumi, 2006). Despite the significant role of cooperative societies in the economic development of rural areas, many cooperative societies still face several challenges which hinder women's full participation and benefits of its formation. With this problem one may be in doubt as to whether the objectives of the cooperative societies in the study area are achieved or not. It is in the light of this, the following research objective was raised to analyze the benefits of participation of rural women in cooperative societies in Shiroro area of Niger State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to: describe the socio-economic characteristics of women participating in cooperative societies in the study area; determine the types of cooperative societies in the study area; identify the benefits the benefits derived by members of various cooperative societies in the study area; examine the major problems that hinder the participation of women in cooperative societies and determine the relationship between some selected socio-economic characteristics (age, educational level and household size) and the number of benefits derived by participants in cooperative societies.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Shiroro local Government area of Niger State, Nigeria. The study area lies between latitudes 8°20'N and 11°30'N and longitudes 3°30'E and 7°20'E. The study area has a population of about 159,626 people (NPC, 2006). The study area has a Guinea Savannah type of vegetation with an annual rainfall range of between 110mm to 1600mm and temperature range of 25°C to 35°C. The major occupation of the people is agriculture and trading, the major crops grown include yam, sorghum, groundnut, maize, rice, millet and cowpea; vegetable grown include tomatoes, pepper, garden egg and okra. For this study, multi stage sampling technique was employed to purposively select Shiroro Local Government area for the study based on the prior knowledge of high number of women cooperative societies in the area. The second stage involved random selection of five communities namely: Erena, Gussoro, Zumba, Gwada and Kuta for the study. Similarly, random sampling technique was also employed to select 150 respondents from the selected communities. A well structured interview schedule comprising of open and close questions was used as a primary source of data collection from the sampled respondents to meet up with the objectives of the study. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and percentages to determine the objectives of the study

while one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to achieve the formulated hypothesis.

Results and Discussions

Age is one of the demographic characteristic that is used to classify rural population into targetable groups. The result in Table 1 below revealed that more than half of respondents (58.7%) within the age range of 21-40 years actively participated in cooperative societies. This implies that younger people actively participate in cooperative activities (Windapo and Oluwu, 2001). Hence, age is an important factor that influences the cooperative activities of respondents as it determines the effectiveness and competence required to boost the movement of the cooperative towards achievement of its targeted goals. The Table also shows that 10.7%, 32% and 16.7% of the respondents had primary, secondary and tertiary education respectively. Although the categories of formal educational levels are very low, however, this could be an advantage in the decision making process, ability to accept responsibilities and leadership competency in running the cooperative. The Table further revealed that more than half of the respondents (57.3%) engage themselves in both farming and trading as their major occupation while only 30% are fully engaged in farming. Except for the civil servants, most of the respondents were engaged in risk-prone jobs and are likely to rely on cooperative societies for reimbursement in the event of loss.

Table 1: Socio - economic Characteristics of Respondents in the Study Area (n =150)

Age (years)	Frequency	Percentage
Below 20	2	1.3
21-40	88	58.7
41-60	45	30.0
>60	15	10
Total	150	100
Educational level		
No formal education	41	27.3
Quranic	14	9.3
Ault education	6	4.0
Primary education	16	10.7
Secondary education	48	32.0
Tertiary education	25	16.7

Total	150	100
Primary occupation		
Farming	45	30.0
Farming & trading	86	57.3
Civil servant	19	12.7
Total	150	100

Source: Field survey, 2011.

The result in Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents (76.7%) belongs to marketing cooperative societies and it's the cooperative society that has the highest level of participation. Other major cooperative societies participated by respondents include Processing cooperative (58.0%), multipurpose cooperative (45.4%) and fisher/women cooperative (44.0%) societies. The higher level of participation of women in these cooperative societies may be explained by the risky nature of their occupation that made it imperative, for them to join cooperative societies to avert risk or fall back to the cooperative societies in the case of eventuality.

Table2: Distribution of Respondents According to Types of Cooperative Society they belong to (n=150)

Types of Cooperative Society	Frequency*	Percentage
Farmers cooperative	56	37.3
Consumers cooperative	18	12
Marketing cooperative	115	76.7
Processing cooperative	87	58.0
Multipurpose cooperative	68	45.4
Fisher/women cooperative	66	44.0
Thrift and credit cooperative	24	16.0

Source: Field survey, 2011

*Multiple responses

Cooperative societies have proved to be an important instrument of social transformation to meet the needs of the people in all spheres of development especially in the generation of funds from which individual members take loans, generate returns that could be shared as dividends to members periodically, transfer technical knowledge about the major commodities to groups of farmers, provide ready markets for members produce, provide available retail goods for the consumption of the members, etc. (Akinwumnmi (2006); Asaoulu, (2004). The result in Table 3 revealed that close to three quarter of the respondents (68.0%) benefited from the cooperative societies through acquisition of credit

facilities, 46.7% and 25.3% of the respondents respectively got access to market information and access agricultural inputs through their cooperative societies.

Table3: Benefits derived by Respondents for Participating in Cooperative Societies (n=150)

Reasons	Frequency*	Percentage
Access credit facilities	102	68.0
Access agricultural inputs	38	25.3
Access market information	70	46.7
Access extension service	6	4.0
Access loans from financial institutions	34	22.7
Total	250	100

Source: Field survey, 2011

***Multiple responses**

Despite the significant role played by the cooperative societies in the social and economic development of rural areas, many members encountered several problems that hinder the effectiveness of its performance in fulfilling its major objectives. This situation hampers the contribution of women to agriculture and other sectors of the economy. The result in Table 4 shows that major problems encountered by respondents participating in cooperative societies in the study area include bad leadership style (69.33%), inadequate working capital (65.33%) and inadequate benefit accrued to participating members. Other problems encountered by respondents include experiences of complicated administrative procedure (46.70%) in the process of seeking for financial or any other assistance, incidences of corruption and embezzlement by cooperative leaders (44%), unwillingness of cooperative to assist some members (35.33%) and discriminative attitude of the officials in the distribution of cooperative benefits. The critical problems highlighted above can lead to poor performance and death of some cooperative societies. Bad leadership, insufficient working capital to execute cooperative programmes, corruption and embezzlement of cooperative funds and other political and socio-economic factors limits the efficiency of cooperative societies in meeting its objectives (Asaolu, 2004; Akinwunmi, 2006).

Table 4: Problems encountered by respondents Participating in Cooperative Societies (n=150)

Problems of participation	Frequency	Percentage*	Rank
Complicated administrative procedures	70	46.67	4 th
Corruption and embezzlement by cooperative leaders	66	44	5 th
Unwillingness of cooperative to assist	53	35.33	6 th
Discriminative attitude of cooperative officials	53	35.33	6 th
Inadequate benefit	80	53.33	3 rd
Bad leadership style	104	69.33	1 st
Inadequate working capital	98	65.33	2 nd

Source: Field survey, 2011

*Multiple responses

Testing of the Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between some selected socio-economic characteristics (age, educational level and household size) and the number of benefits derived by participants in cooperative societies. The result in Table 5 revealed that F-calc. of 1.66, 1.818 and 1.717 at 0.05 level of significance are less than the estimated F-tab of (5.13, P = 0.05) of all the selected variables. Hence, there is no significant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics and the number of benefits derived by respondents participating in cooperative societies. This implies that age, educational level and household size of participants did not significantly influence the number of benefits enjoyed by respondents participating in cooperative societies in the study area. Therefore, other things being equal, the young and the old, literate and none-literate, small and large household size that participate in cooperative societies are likely to enjoy equal benefits from the cooperative societies.

Table 5: ANOVA Result of Relationship between Socio-economic characteristics (age, educational level, household size) and the number of benefits derived by Respondents in Cooperative Societies (n=150)

Socio-economic characteristic	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F cal	F tab	Decision	
Between groups	132.276	4	330.069	1.664	5.13	No significant	
Within groups	28766.584	145	198.390				
Total	30086.860	149					
Educational level (No. of years spent in school)	Between groups	262.153	4	65.538	1.818	5.13	No significant
	Within groups	5227.341	145	36.051			
	Total	5489.493	149				
Household size	Between groups	245.392	4	61.348	1.717	5.13	No significant
	Within groups	5181.281	145	35.733			
	Total	5426.673	149				

Source: Field survey, 20

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that more than half of respondents that participated in cooperative societies fall within the active age range of 21-40 years, therefore younger people participate more in cooperative societies in the study area and have taken combination of farming and trading as their major occupation. The study revealed that majority of the respondents belongs to marketing cooperative societies. The higher level of participation of women in this cooperative society may be explained by the risky nature of their occupation that made it imperative for them to join cooperative society to avert risk or fall back to the cooperative society in the case of eventuality. The study concludes that acquisition of credit facilities was the highest benefit derived by

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members participating in cooperative societies in the study area. The most severe constraints encountered by respondents participating in cooperative societies in the study area include bad leadership style, inadequate working capital and inadequate benefit accrued to participating members. The study also revealed that there is no significant relationship between the selected socio-economic characteristics and the number of benefits derived by respondents participating in cooperative societies in the study area. Women should be given more access to education, especially by going beyond secondary school level. The government and non-governmental organization should create more avenues for cooperative societies to access funds either in form of grants or loans to boost the cooperative activities. Administrative mechanism should be set not only to check the activities of cooperative societies but also to ensure that embezzlement of cooperative funds are controlled and people of questionable characters are not allowed to lead the cooperative societies in the study area.

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