

EFFECT OF YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP ON PROFITABILITY OF FARM OPERATIONS OF WOMEN AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE IN ANAMBRA STATE.

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to assess the effect of years of membership on profitability of farm operations among women cooperative members in Anambra State. The population of the study was 2020 registered women farmer's cooperatives societies in Anambra state. The sampling strategy that was used in this study was the multistage and proportional sampling technique. Questionnaire item for data collection was structured in a 5 point Likert Scale. Data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation and regression. The tool was applied using the statistical package of the Social Science (SPSS) software for data analysis. Findings of the study revealed that the strength of the independent variables in explaining variations in the dependent variable was 5.592 which is significant at 0.019 levels. Thus, null hypothesis was rejected, and we therefore conclude that years of membership/participation in women agricultural cooperatives has significant effect on profitability of farm operations of members. The study therefore recommends that Agricultural cooperatives in the area should do more to provide and improve support services such as credit, farm input, marketing and so on, to enhance the profitability of members.

Keywords: Cooperative Membership, Profitability, Women Agricultural Cooperatives, Agricultural Cooperatives.

Introduction

It has been established that about 70 percent of Nigeria's population is engaged in agriculture (Obasi and Agu, 2000). Ninety percent of Nigeria's total food production comes from small farms, and 60 percent of the country's population earn their living from these small farms (Oluwatayo, Sakumade & Adesoji 2008 ; Izekor and Alufohai , 2010 and Awotide, Aihonsu & Adekoya, 2011). Today, there is a growing advocacy for achieving sustainable food security in Nigeria and a lot of effort has been

directed at finding appropriate structure for organizing millions of small- scale farmers towards achieving food security. Agricultural cooperative societies have been touted as the appropriate vehicle for harnessing and pulling the resources of millions of smallholder farmer producers together to enjoy the benefit of large- scale production. (Onugu & Abdulahi, 2012).

Women are actively involved in agriculture in most parts of the country. In Nigeria, women supply most of the needed labour in agricultural activities, and this is the most important factor of production to farmers, as it is needed at the stages of agricultural production. Consequently, they have been taking advantage of the cooperative business model to advance their farming operations as well as increasing its profitability. Even women in seclusion (Purdah) generate substantial income through food crop processing (Yahaya, 2002) and cooperation.

Cooperatives have a role to play in reducing different shocks, and paving the way towards recovery that is socially and economically sound and sustainable. Ultimately, cooperatives can create a safe environment where women increase their self-confidence, identify their own challenges, make decisions and manage risks. As a result, women are empowered and become active agents of change, entrepreneurs and promoters of social transformation who can improve their own lives and those of the community (Karunakaran, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

According to IFAD, in Onugu & Ojiagu (2009), women own less than 2% of all land, and receive only 5% of extension services worldwide. It is estimated that women in Africa receive less than 10% of all credit going to small farmers and a mere 1% of total credit going to the agricultural sector.

Regardless of the level of development achieved by the respective economies, women play a pivotal role in agriculture and in rural development in most countries of the Asia-Pacific region. Evidently, these are serious constraints which militate against the promotion of an effective role for women in development in those societies which were bound by age-old traditions and beliefs. Patriarchal modes and practices motivated by cultures and/or interpretations of religious sanctions and illiteracy hinder women's freedom to opt for various choices to assert greater mobility in social interactions. As a result of these situations, women's contribution to agriculture and other sectors in the economy remain concealed and unaccounted for in monitoring and measuring economic performance. Hence their opting for the cooperative business model so as to enhance their profitability.

This study seeks to investigate the effect of years of women cooperative membership on their profitability in Anambra State in order to establish the extent to which they have overcome these issues highlighted.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is assess the effect of years of membership on profitability of farm operations among women cooperative members in Anambra State.

Hypothesis of the Study

Ho: Years in agricultural cooperative service has no significant effect on profitability of farm operations of members.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

Agricultural Cooperative

Agricultural Cooperatives have been known for organizing small farmers into producer organizations to increase their bargaining power vis-a- vis other actors in the value chain (Roldan and Ellen, 2009). They emphasized that agricultural cooperative offers such a possibility by means of organizing and empowering individual small producers through provision of farm input and credit. Nevertheless, new challenges associated with emerging consumer demands, global standardization processes, market requirements and price instability require different roles and capacities from agricultural cooperative operating in agro-food value chains worldwide. Agricultural Cooperatives are now challenged to take on a more pro-active approach in marketing, updating their organizational structure and engaging in value chain integration.

Adefila (2011) noted that the history and importance of agricultural cooperative organizations in Nigeria is a long- standing one. Before the enactment of the Cooperative Society Law in 1935, there had been indigenous attempts to form associations such as Cocoa Farmer's Society and KolaNut planters Union. These associations were formed in major cocoa producing areas and they were independent of government support (Adefila, 2011). Cooperative organizations have undergone changes over the years from traditional, informal to modern and formal institution. (Harris et al, 2005).

Cooperatives were competing favourably with private individuals, including multinational companies amidst various challenges such as price fluctuations, legislation controls and low capital accumulation. They embarked on many agricultural development strategies such as input subsidization, market boards and institutional reforms geared towards improvement of agricultural production. (Adefila, 2011).

Mainly, agricultural cooperative societies engage in the production, processing, marketing and distribution of agricultural products. (Adefila, 2011). An important form of agricultural cooperatives in Nigeria is the Group Farming Societies (GFS). Members of these societies engage in the production of a variety of crops, while they also arrange for the marketing of the products. Some other agricultural cooperatives are devoted to the cultivation of single crops and such societies are named after the crops such as Tobacco Growers Cooperatives (TGC), Cooperative Credit and Marketing Societies (CCMS) etc. Modern agricultural processing cooperatives for crops such as Oil Seed and Farmer's Cooperatives have played far reaching roles in agricultural development. (Adefila, 2011).

Membership of agricultural cooperative societies is very instrumental to the empowerment of women farmers towards agricultural production hence should be encouraged as a strategy for improving the agricultural productivity and livelihoods of the women farmers which is crucial to their empowerment and achievement of sustainable rural development in Nigeria (Deji, 2005).

Women Empowerment

Women empowerment is defined differently by different scholars. Mayoux (2005) and Mosedale (2005) define women empowerment as a mechanism where women become strong by increasing their confidence to make appropriate choices and control over resources. Naryaan (2002), on the other hand, define women empowerment as women increasing control and ownership of assets to influence and bargain over any decision that affects their lives. Most often, the term “empowerment” is directly related to the development of vulnerable and weaker segment of society, particularly women and is used in different expressions and in different contexts. They include gender equality, development, freedom, women's autonomy, gender integration, social inclusion, financial inclusion, self-reliance, status and wellbeing. The galaxy of literature on women empowerment encompasses process of empowerment, provision of enabling conditions, strategies, techniques and proliferations of outcomes rather than the crux of the empowerment. Hence, there is the need to have a conceptual clarity of this ideology as critiqued by the advocates of women empowerment. (Sudha, 2015)

The concept of women's empowerment (by some authors referred to as "gender empowerment") has also been described differently by different authors. A key factor in all definitions, however, is that gender empowerment relates to the ability of women to manage their lives. Empowerment refers to the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. The empowerment of rural women is about expanding women's assets and capabilities to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable the institutions that affect their lives (FAO, 2015).

Economic Empowerment of Women through Agricultural Cooperatives

Empowering women through cooperatives, according to Kokanova (2009), is to improve the socio-economic conditions of rural women and their families. Empowerment of women through cooperatives is crucial to poverty reduction and human development leading to the enhanced productivity and higher growth trajectory. (Sudha,2015). Government has made efforts to empower women's cooperative members by training cooperative members on micro credit financing, as well as on how to boost agricultural production and their access to local market. Onwuka, Otaokpukpu and Okonkwo posits that women farmers' cooperative societies tend to increase their productivity, income and also improved their welfare when exposed to extension services and trainings. The aim of empowering women through cooperatives is to increase the capacity of the cooperatives to achieve a higher and more sustainable income. The government will work closely with women's cooperatives, specifically identified as dynamic but with vulnerable members (Kokanova, 2009).

Sourbani (2009) suggests that in order to integrate the vast majority of poor women into the main stream of the society, government has introduced measures to create social and economic awareness among the woman. Certainly, such measures have improved their standard of living. Cooperatives, which are social and economic in character have been recognized as the most suitable institutions to undertake such tasks for the women. She also said that after rapid industrialization of their country India, women are presently actively participating in economic activities and are not mere "house wives" looking after household responsibilities. As cooperative members, the women have a new sense of direction, hope and empowerment, because they are in control of their lives and are able to contribute to their family's needs and the economic growth of their communities.

Almaz (2006) argued that an increase of the income controlled by women gives them confidence which helps them obtain a voice and vote in:

- i) Household decisions such as domestic well – being decisions. For instance, women tend to use their income clout for more support of equitable decisions about children’s diet, education and health.
- ii) Economic decisions: like acquiring, allocating and selling assets.
- iii) Fertility decisions which have proven that economically -empowered women tend to have fewer children.
- iv) Land use and conservation decisions that show rural women tend to favour sustainable environment practices since they are usually the ones that collect the families’ natural resources, such as water and firewood.

She noted that women’s economic power also enhances the “wealth and well-being of nations. Again, women who control their own income tend to have fewer children, and fertility rates have been shown to be inversely related to national income growth. Furthermore, women are also generally more willing than their male counterparts to send daughters, as well as sons to school, even when they earn less than men.

Since women represent half of the world’s population, and gender inequality exists in every nation on the planet, to discriminate and prevent half of humanity from reaching their full potentials is economic folly. Denying women and girls equality and fairness not only hurts them, but also hinder the rest of the society. (Almaz, 2006).

Cooperative Membership

People who organize and belong to cooperatives do so for a variety of economic, social and even political reasons. Cooperating with others has often proven to be a satisfactory way of achieving one’s own objectives, while at the same time assisting others in achieving theirs. Cooperatives are defined as “an autonomous association of persons who unite voluntarily to meet their common economic and social needs and aspirations through a jointly -owned and democratically -controlled enterprise (ICA, 1995). Cooperatives are established by like-minded persons to pursue mutually beneficial economic interests.

The Concept of Profitability

Profitability is the primary goal of all business ventures. Without profitability, the business will not survive in the long run. So, measuring current and past profitability and projecting future profitability is very important in every enterprise. Profitability is measured by deducting expenses from income.

Income is money generated from the activities of the business. For example, if crops and livestock are produced and sold, income is generated from the price for which they were sold. However, money coming into the business from activities like borrowing money does not create income. This is simply a financial transaction between the business and the lender to generate capital for operating the business or buying assets. Expenses are the cost of resources used or consumed in the course of running the business. For example, the purchase of corn seeds is an expense of a farm business because it is used up in the production process. Repayment of a loan is not an expense; but a financial transaction between the business and the lender, though interest on all loans is expenses.

Profit and profitability are two different terms. Profit means an absolute measure of earning capacity, while profitability is relative measure of earning capacity. (Nimalathan, 2009). The word profitability comprise of two words profit and ability. The word profit has already been defined but its meaning differs according to the use and purpose of the enterprise to earn the profits. Thus, the word profitability may be defined as the ability of given investment to earn a return from its use. Profitability ratios measure a firm's ability to generate profits and central investment in relation to security analysis, shareholders, and investors. Profitability is the primary measure of the overall success of any enterprise. The analysis of profitability ratios in a business is important for the shareholders, creditors, prospective investors, bankers and government alike. Nimalathan (2009) mentioned that the profit is the primary objective of a business, and measures not only the success of a product, but also of the development of the market for it. Further, profit is the report card of the past, as well as the inventive gold star for the future.

Review of Empirical Studies

Ekesionye & Okolo (2012) in their study on women empowerment and participation in economic activities described both as indispensable tools for self-reliance and development of Nigerian society. The objective of their study was to examine women empowerment and participation in economic activities as tools for self-reliance and development of the Nigerian society. Research questions and hypothesis were used to guide the study. A structured questionnaire was used as the major instrument for data collection. Copies of the questionnaires were administered to 402 women, randomly selected, from 6 out of the 21 Local Government Areas of Anambra State. Three hundred fifty one copies of the questionnaire returned were analyzed using mean to answer the research questions and t-test statistic to draw inferences in relation to the hypothesis. The results showed that farming, trading, crafts, food processing, hair dressing, poultry and the likes were the major economic activities engaged in by women in Anambra State. Personal savings, family assistance, philanthropist's assistance, loans and

credits, cooperative society's assistance and group contributions, were the sources of funds for the women for their economic activities.

Aregawi and Haileslasie (2013) in their study on *The Role of Cooperatives in Promoting Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women*, worked with data from multipurpose cooperative societies in South- Eastern Zone of Tigray, Ethiopia. Both primary and secondary data were used. Out of the target group of 75 multipurpose cooperative societies (MPC's), the researchers purposely selected MPC's established before 2005. Out of the selected target group of MPC's, 25% were randomly selected and 30% of women members were also selected randomly. The data collected were then analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results of the study indicated that women participation in cooperatives was very limited in that part of Africa. More than 80% of the respondents were involved in farm activity and only 5% are engaged in paid work. Ninety percent of the respondents have joined their cooperatives to access financial resources and improve their bargaining power. The results revealed that women members have improved their income, livestock holdings, autonomous decision making and spending power after joining cooperatives. They also found that the female memberships in cooperatives were severely limited and hence governmental and non-governmental organizations need to consider gender equality in their cooperative member's capacity building programmes.

Fatemeh (2011) in his study on *Women's Empowerment for Rural Development*, provides strategy for women's empowerment for rural development. He emphasized that empowerment can enable women to participate, as equal citizens, in the economic, political and social sustainable development of the rural communities. The findings outlined in this paper suggest that, designed and implemented in ways that meet rural women's diverse needs, community participation processes can be important to facilitate social, technological, political and psychological empowerment of women in terms of rural development. The findings of this investigation can assist rural development by the implementation of community development strategies that promote women's empowerment.

Otaokpukpu, Ogbuand Okonkwo (2017) revealed that there is a relationship between the variables – types and participation as affecting cooperative performance in Orumba LGA of Anambra State. Although, these two variables are not considered as the major variables affecting the cooperatives' financial performance as the results indicated weak positive and negative relationship between the variables. The specific objectives of the study titled - effect of type and participation on cooperative financial performance in Orumba South L.G.A of Anambra State - are to; identify the types of cooperatives in Orumba South L.G.A., evaluate the relationship between type of cooperatives and cooperative financial performance, to estimate the relationship between member participation and

cooperative financial performance. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The sample size of 318 was determined using Taro Yamani formula. The simple random sampling technique was adopted in questionnaire distribution. The data collected was analysed using simple descriptive statistics such as averages, percentages and frequency counts. Pearson moment correlation was used. Also tabular analysis was extensively employed to present data and make comparisons of data. Findings revealed that cooperative types and participation of members are factors that contribute to the cooperative societies' financial performance. Cooperative types and cooperatives financial performance measured by their gross margin had Pearson correlation value 0.141, $r = 0.141$. Also, members' participation and cooperatives financial performance measured by their gross margin had Pearson correlation value -0.173, $r = -0.173$.

Abdulahi, Udunze and Agbasi (2015) in their study on Effect of Cooperative Membership on the Economic Empowerment of Women in Osun State of Nigeria observed that cooperative societies are organizations that have the primary aim of providing the needs of their members and enhancing the quality of their member's livelihood. The study then examined the effect of cooperative membership on the economic empowerment of women in Osun State of Nigeria. Data were obtained from 375 women cooperative members across two senatorial zones of Osun State. Data obtained were analyzed with both descriptive statistics and inferential model of regression, T-test, ANOVA non- parametric correlation test, as well as the post –hoc test. Evidence from the study revealed that socio-economic variables of the respondents were determinant factors for their membership in cooperative societies. It was also revealed that women cooperative societies in Osun State were involved in different economic empowerment activities that were accessible and capable of empowering them. Findings further revealed that economic empowerment activities of women cooperatives gave rise to the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by the women cooperative members in Osun State.

Ugwa, Okonkwo and Igwegbe (2019), in their study examined the influence of culture on women entrepreneurship in Nigeria, with a specific emphasis in Enugu state. Data for the study was collected from 163 selected female entrepreneurs in Enugu state by means of questionnaire. The data collected was analyzed with a non-parametric chi – square statistics. From the analysis of data and literature reviewed, it was discovered and concluded that cultural values have significant influence on the performance of women entrepreneurship in Nigeria and other sub-Sahara Africa. Based on the conclusion, the study recommended among others that government at different levels should ensure that human rights are enforced especially as it concerns women.

Okon and Okon (2015) noted that Women Empowerment Programme (WEP) is generally built upon the notion that though women represent a greater percentage of the continent's population, yet, they constitute an endangered group challenged by illiteracy, discrimination, and poverty which are hidden under the web of obnoxious cultural practices. Data from the study show that efforts to get the women out of the web of poverty and discrimination continued to be hindered by negative socio-cultural practices such as their exclusion from sharing in family assets, restriction from acquiring landed properties in their father's or husband's homeland and the submission of whatever property acquired to the control of the husband or male member of the family, etc. The study recommends, among others, that governments and donor agencies should encourage the formation of co-operative societies and also initiate programmes that should empower women through co-operative societies by eliminating the use of collateral in order to promote women's economic independence and participation in socio-economic development in their various communities.

Abdul and Zainab (2011), in their study, assessed the effects of a government -run participatory development project on the social and economic empowerment of women and its implications for poverty alleviation in Nasirabad area of Balochistan (a province of Pakistan). The need to evaluate the project's effect in terms of empowerment arose from the perception that interventions in the form of programs and projects have little effects on women development in the province due to institutional and cultural factors. To test the validity of this proposition, a case study of the Pat Feeder Command Area Development project which was the largest community- based development project of the government was taken for analysis. The project was evaluated in terms of participation, access, and sustainability. The project provided useful insight into the issue of women empowerment. The findings show qualitative improvements in the indicators such as capacity building, access to micro credit, involvement in economic activities and reduction in the workload. The study suggests considering the viability of these group's future follow up/new development projects.

From the empirical literature reviewed, a myriad of factors have been identified that influence the empowerment of rural women yet none examines years of membership as affecting profitability of farm operations of women cooperative in Anambra State.

Theoretical Framework

The present work is anchored on collective action theory.

1. Collective action refers to action taken together by a group of people whose goal is to enhance their status and achieve a common objective.
2. It is enacted by a representative of the group.
3. It is a term that has formulations and theories in many areas of the social sciences, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science and economics.
4. For collective action to take place, there must be joint action for the same goal and actions to achieve a common objective, when the outcome depends on interdependence of members.

Collective action can manifest itself and can be understood as an event, as an institution or as a process. When farmers act collectively on a regular and structured basis, they do so through group organizations, such as informal clubs, associations and cooperatives (Tiago & Ngo, 2006). When farmers decide to cooperate, they do so in the expectation that they will obtain benefit which would not be possible to achieve when working alone.

Methodology

Survey and descriptive research design was chosen for the study. Survey research design was chosen because of its relatively low cost considering the need to collect information from a large number of people this study as the representative sample. The questionnaire was administered to the One hundred and fifty-two (152) respondents that were randomly selected from Two thousand and twenty registered (2020) women farmers' cooperatives, forming the population of the study. The study area is Anambra State, South East Nigeria.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire item was structured in a 5 point Likert Scale. Data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation and regression. The tool was applied using the statistical package of the Social Science (SPSS) software for data analysis.

Regression model

$$1. \quad \text{MEMEXP} = f(\text{MPROFIT}) \quad (1)$$

Where MEMEXP = Members' Years in agricultural cooperatives.

MPROFIT = Members' farm profitability

The model is further explicitly specified as follows:

$$\text{MEMEXP} = \alpha + \beta 1 \text{MPROFIT} + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

Test of hypothesis

Ho: Years of membership/participation in agricultural cooperatives has no significant effect on profitability of farm operations of members.

Table 1: Model Summary of regression showing the effect of cooperative membership on profitability of farm operation.

R	R ²	Adj. R ²	Std error	Summary of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Significance
.128	.016	.013	.117	428.012	338	6.966	5.592	.019 ^b
			.000		339	1.246		

Dependent Variable: Profit margin

Source: Field summary, 2017.

From the regression results (Table 1), the coefficient of multiple determination $R^2 = 0.016$, describes the extent to which the dependent variable (Farm profit margin) is being explained by independent variables (member's years in cooperatives). This implied that 1.6% of variations in profit margin are caused by the variable analyzed. Also, the adjusted R^2 was 0.013; showing 1.3% of variation in profit margin was explained by changes in the variables analyzed.

Decision

The regression analysis shows that the F ratio which measures the strength of the independent variables in explaining variations in the dependent variable was 5.592 which is significant at 0.019 levels. Thus, null hypothesis three is rejected, and we therefore conclude that years of membership/participation in agricultural cooperatives has significant effect on profitability of farm operations of members.

Discussions

Profitability of farm operation has inverse relationship with membership duration. This could also imply that members who have not stayed long in cooperatives would not notice the impact of cooperative in their farm operations as much as those members that have stayed long. This affirms the theory of collective action to which this work is anchored. The theory of collective action becomes apt in this work especially as agricultural cooperative groups are organized, incorporated organizations.

This is buttressed more by Chavez (2003) who opined that the collective action theory definition, principles and practices directly or indirectly relate to cooperative seven internationally recognized principles. The collective action theory enables us to understand the reason and rationale that move women farmers to join cooperatives in their bid to find solutions to the various challenges affecting agricultural production in their areas. Cooperatives being organizations that their activity center on group or collective action are also the veritable tools that could be used to achieve objectives which could not be achieved on individual basis. Hence through collective action sustainable rural economic empowerment could be achieved.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Agricultural Cooperatives have indeed performed well in the provision of farm support services such as farm input, credit and agricultural marketing. Women members of agricultural cooperatives in the area have been empowered economically through these farm support services which invariably have enhanced their income level.

Recommendations

Cooperatives in the area should empower their members through diversification into other means of livelihood other than agricultural production. They should train their members in sustainable off-farm activities that will enhance income. Agricultural cooperatives in the area should do more to provide and improve support services such as credit, farm input, marketing and so on, to enhance the profitability of members.

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