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CONSTRAINTS TO ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN EMURE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF EKITI STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the constraints hindering activities of women agricultural cooperative societies in Emure Local Government Area of Ekiti state. A total of 110 Women in agricultural cooperative societies were randomly selected from six women cooperative societies. Data were collected using interview schedule and analysed using frequency distribution, percentages, and means. The results indicated that the mean age of women farmers is 45 years and most of the respondents were educated. Majority (78.2%) of the respondents indicated that the major source of information on improved inputs, marketing of produce and other Agricultural services were from members of cooperative societies as well as 74.5% have inadequate extension contact. Constraints faced by the cooperative group include inadequate access to credit facilities ($\bar{x}=3.64$), high interest ($\bar{x}=3.61$), mismanagement of fund ($\bar{x}=3.55$), leadership problem ($\bar{x}=3.47$) and gender discrimination ($\bar{x}=3.28$). Access to credit facilities is the major constraint facing the respondent, therefore, there is need for government to extend credit facilities to the women agricultural cooperative societies and the extension agent should be involved in training of farmers in women agricultural cooperative societies.

Keywords: Women Farmers, Agricultural Cooperative Societies, Credit facilities

INTRODUCTION

Women grow 70.0% of Africa's food on smallholder farms, a task anchored by physical labour (Africa Renewal, 2019). Women are the backbone of the rural economy and are actively employed in agriculture (Assefa and Tadesse, 2012). They are involved in agricultural production, processing and utilisation (Sahel, 2014). Rural women play critical roles in bringing about food and economic security for their households (Food and Agriculture Organisation, FAO, 2011). A woman's role in the agricultural sector is significantly affected by socioeconomic factors such as income, education and access to infrastructure (Sahel, 2014).

Cooperatives are defined as an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise (Arayese and Mammi, 2010; Maleko and Msuya 2015). On the other hand, it could be defined as a voluntary association of people with common economic and social needs who operate democratically using some underlying principles.

Women's participation in agricultural cooperatives is important for sustainable cooperative development and their involvement is an effective means to empower women in rural areas to overcome constraints they face in accessing knowledge, information and productive assets (Alkali, *et al.*, 2018). Regardless of the sector they belong to whether marketing, financial, workers or housing for instance, cooperatives are powerful vehicles of social inclusion as well as the political and economic empowerment of their members. Women agricultural cooperatives have played an important role in rural development by mobilizing limited resources for women farmers

and producers. Therefore, cooperatives play an important role in bringing in more agricultural inputs, produce marketing services, savings, credit services, ways to meet some service needs of members, provide an avenue to articulate members needs and views to political decisions and self-sufficiency in basic food commodities.

Agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. However, the sector is underperforming in many countries because women, who are often a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their productivity (Sofa and Cheryl, 2011). Across the globe, women make up a large part of agricultural labour, but women own fewer assets (land, livestock, human capital), and have less access to inputs (seeds, fertiliser, labour, finance) and services (training, insurance) than men (World Bank, 2017)

Women play significant roles in production and are often key determinants of the size and quality of the final commodities produced. However, they have proportionately less access to quality farm input, lack collateral security for bank loans, less access to agricultural information, training and extension services. Hence, women depend heavily on their own income sources from farming activities to meet their responsibilities and sustain their farm (International Finance Corporation, IFC, 2016).

Women experience a lack of funding (financing and capital) throughout all stages in the life cycle of cooperatives - start up, operational and expansion (International Co-operative Alliance, 2016). The rules on membership and opportunities for women to benefit from and contribute to cooperatives are slowly improving, but meanwhile women and girls who work in agriculture largely remain powerless and uneducated labourers, with

the dual task of working the land and running the household (FAO, 2011; Rawlings and Shaw, 2016). Women's lack of business acumen such as technical knowledge and skills in marketing, management and operations result in low productivity and an inability to compete. Women have often not had access to training and have little knowledge of how to run a business or a cooperative and therefore do not necessarily know about and understand cooperative structures and the cooperative principles (ICA, 2016).

The study therefore aimed at the major social, economic and institutional constraints that hinder women agricultural cooperative societies in Emure Local Government Area in Ekiti State.

The general objective of the study is to examine the constraints hindering activities of women agricultural cooperative societies in Emure Local Government Area in Ekiti State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Describe the socioeconomic characteristics of women farmers in the study area
2. Identify the sources of information of women farmers in the study area
3. Identify the constraints hindering the activities of women agricultural cooperative societies

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Emure Local Government Area of Ekiti State which was part of Emure Ise Orun Local Government before 1st of October 1996, it is bounded to the north by Agbado Ekiti and Imesi Lasigidi, south by Owo, East by river Oyinmon and west by Orun and IseEkiti. The study area includes settlements such as Eporo, Oge, Owode, Ibeji, IdoOpe, Igbo Eku, Akeye, Kajola, Owosi Elemure, Odose camp, Edu camp, Ose, Oyimo. Igbo Aye, Alapoto, Ajebamidele, Okeseri, Adebayo, with Emure as the main town. In terms of tribal composition, majority of the people living in the study area are Yorubas, followed by a considerable number of Ibo and Idonma people, who can be purposely used for employment in agricultural activities. The major economic activity of the study area is predominantly farming-growing food (yam, rice, cassava, plantain, and cocoyam) and cash crops (cocoa, kolanut, palm oil, coffee). Some also engage in garri processing, cassava flour processing, etc.

Study population was all the women farmers in agricultural cooperative societies in Emure Local Government Area. The sample frame

was collected from the Local Government Area. Random selection method was used to select 110 women from six Agricultural Cooperative Societies which served as the sample size. Primary data were used in the study. Interview schedule was used to elicit information from the respondents.

Respondents identified constraints from a set of eleven constraint items with the response options of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree with scores of 5,4,3,2 and 1 assigned. The mean of the scale was determined by summing the values attached to the scale and dividing by the number of scale to obtain a value of 3.0. Any item with a mean greater than 3.0 was regarded as constraint. Data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages and mean.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic characteristics

The mean age of the women who are in agricultural cooperative societies was 45years, this showed that they are matured women and mostly within the same age group. Most of the respondents were educated to an extent. Olabisi, *et al*, (2015) revealed that most women posed the basic educational qualification. Most of the respondents were married in their selected villages. This is as a result of early marriage or to increase labour in agricultural production which will considerably reduce the cost of production. It is also revealed in Table 1 that half of the respondents have above 9 years of farming experience. Likewise, a study by Enete and Amusa, (2010) indicated 78% of women farmers had above 21 years of farming experience. This is because of their level of exposure to agriculture at early stage or interest in practicing farming activities. Also, majority of the women farmers have low income from their farming activities and it affects their standard of living.

Different sources of information

Table 2 shows that majority (78.2%) of the respondents have easy access to information from members of their cooperative societies while (74.5%)rarely got information from extension agents. Through in-depth interview, the women also got information from friends, radio and television; as a result of being a group, there is fast flow of information and the rate of adoption of information disseminated is high. There is a competitive response about NGOs dissemination of information. The women revealed that some of their cooperative societies are visited while others were not.

**Table 1: Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Women Agricultural Cooperative Societies**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Age in years			
30-50	64	58.2	45
Above 50	46	41.8	
Educational Level			
No formal Education	18	16.4	
primary	47	42.7	
secondary	33	30.0	
tertiary	12	10.9	
Marital Status			
Single	17	15.5	
Married	66	60.0	
Divorced	4	3.6	
Widow	23	20.9	
Farming experience			
Below 2yrs	6	5.5	
2-5yrs	18	16.4	
6-9yrs	31	28.1	
Above 9yrs	55	50	
Weekly Income			
Below ₦1000	18	16.4	
₦1,000-₦2,000	30	27.3	
₦2000-₦3,000	29	26.4	
₦3,000-₦5,000	27	24.4	
Above ₦5,000	6	5.5	
Extension contact			
Frequently	28	25.5	
Not frequently	82	74.5	
Total	110	100	

Source; Field data, 2011

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by the sources of Information

Variables	Percentage (%)
Easy access to information from member	78.2
Information from other farmers	74.5
Information by extension agents	38.2
NGOs usually disseminate information	29.5

Source; Field data, 2011

Constraints hindering activities of women agricultural cooperative societies

The constraints influencing activities of women cooperative societies that were identified by the respondents include inadequate access to credit facilities ($\bar{x}=3.64$), high interest rate on loans ($\bar{x}=3.61$), mismanagement of fund ($\bar{x}=3.55$), leadership problem ($\bar{x}=3.47$), combining farm activities with household work ($\bar{x}=3.28$) and gender discrimination ($\bar{x}=3.28$). Credit facilities are not readily accessible to the women agricultural cooperative societies in the study area. Labintan (2010) analysed that women's lack of access to finance is due to lack of collateral, complicated

administrative procedures and unsuitable loan sizes or interest rates. Mismanagement of fund and dishonesty practices will hinder the growth of cooperative endeavours which will discourage farmers from participating fully in the cooperative activities. Sofa and Cheryl (2011) indicated that rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining homes.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Constraints hindering the Activities of Women Agricultural Cooperative Societies

Variables	Percentage (%)	Mean score
inadequate access to credit facilities	73.6	3.64
high interest rate on loans	72.7	3.61
mismanagement of fund	67.3	3.55
leadership problem	64.6	3.47
gender discrimination	60.0	3.28
combining farm activities with household work	60.0	3.28
inability to read and write	57.3	2.92
refusal to educate female children	54.5	2.87
laziness on members part	53.7	1.89
marketing of agricultural produce	48.2	1.66
lack of interest among members	38.3	1.60
lack of technology improvement	37.3	1.59

Source; Field data, 2011

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In a region where there is a heavy dependent on women farmers for food production, Women agricultural cooperative societies have constraints that affect their activities have been indicated, mostly access to credit facilities.

To minimise these, the following recommendations were suggested:

1. Efforts should be made by government to provide adequate credit facilities through agricultural banks to women agricultural cooperative societies.
2. Education plays a major role in improving the status of women, nutrition of their families and national food production. The government should improve women farmer's literacy and knowledge on handling the latest technology that will make them find it easier to adopt innovation which will emphasize the easiest ways to handle their major tedious and laborious activities.
3. Extension agents should render services to address specific needs of women; relevant programmes scheduled for them that will improve and better the life of the women. They should be involved in training of farmers in organisation/ societies

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