



Research Article

Challenges of Women Members in Multipurpose Agricultural Cooperatives in North Gondar Zone of Amhara Region, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The cooperatives were not financially sound to address women financial request and as the study indicated, the majorities of multipurpose agricultural cooperatives have no modality and internal regulation which are approved by the general assembly to support and motivate women members. Due emphasis must be given for the empowering areas of women in multipurpose agricultural cooperatives. financial limitation, uncomfortable rules and Regulations, reluctance of directives, Willingness of women to support, Government support, Opinion of men for women etc. are the major challenges which were observed for empowering women. The study covered the North Gondar Administration Zone with different representation of the multipurpose agricultural cooperatives. As far as sampling is concerned, based on the accessibility and livelihoods zones, five districts namely Debark, East Belesa, Quara, Chilga and Metema districts were taken purposively. The household survey from 274 members of 5 multipurpose agricultural cooperatives in five districts, documents reviews, key information interviews, observation and focus group discussion were the important data collection techniques that were used. Different analytical techniques ranging from descriptive statistics to institutional analysis were used. As a recommendation, attention must be given to continuous awareness creation, due emphasis for motivational areas, internal and external financial sources, modality and internal regulations, invitation of women to participate in their democratic rights and business activities. Finally, the observed challenges must be resolved for empowering them.

Keywords: Empower women member, livelihoods, financial sources, household survey, agricultural co-operatives.

Introduction

The study highlighted some of the problems faced by agricultural cooperatives: Poor management, lack of capital resources, inadequate training, extension and education programme, lack of communication and participation among members, weak linkages among the activities of the cooperatives (production, credit, marketing, etc.). Here, managerial problems are problems related to participation, transparency, loyalty, good governance, Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2010). Similarly the Ministry of Agriculture indicated that the inefficiency of the management of cooperatives has affected the facilitation of inputs and credit supply (MOA and ATA, 2012). Although cooperatives play an important role to sustainable development through the services they rendered and significant numbers of agricultural cooperatives (410) have been established, sustainability of these cooperatives still becomes the controversial issue. As a result, the visibility of the role of some of the cooperatives for addressing the real needs of the members is not well recognized.

According to the available data from cooperative promotion office, of the 410 registered multipurpose Agricultural Cooperatives, only some of the cooperatives are relatively actively working to their members. On the other hand, many of multipurpose agricultural cooperatives are in staggered position (or stop working) to serve their members, and against of them are not totally functioning. This would highlight that the performance and sustainability of multipurpose agricultural cooperatives has been the controversial issue, as large numbers of cooperatives becoming inactive to serve their members. This research will, therefore, seek to provide empirical knowledge about the problems of sustainability of multipurpose agricultural cooperatives in the context of North Gondar Zone, Amhara Region.

Ethiopia has long lasting history in traditional cooperatives, the modern cooperative was introduced in 1960s (Bazabih, 2009). It is common to observe that agricultural cooperatives in general and multipurpose cooperatives in particular have faced different technical and managerial problems and they fail to provide the anticipated benefits to member and larger community.

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Table 1. Distribution of sample respondents by district and Gender.

S.No.	District	Name of cooperatives	District	Agro-Ecology	Number of respondents		
					Male	Female	Total
1.	Quara	Dubaba	Quara	Low land	31	11	42
		Gelegu	Quara	Low land	22	6	28
2.	Metema	Genda wuha Birshign	Metema	Low land	20	0	20
		Meka	Metema	Low land	26	0	26
3.	W/ Belesa	Hamusit	E. Belesa	Mid land	18	6	24
		Guhala	E.Belesa	Mid land	22	4	26
4.	Chilga	Alemtsehay	Chilga	Mid land	12	4	16
		Eyaho Seraba	Chilga	Mid land	14	2	16
5.	Debark	Debark Zuria	Debark	Highland	30	8	38
		Mikara	Debark	Highland	18	6	24
Total					94	49	143

Source: Primary data.

Multipurpose agricultural cooperatives in the region and the country at large are characterized with their technical and managerial problems which also include inefficient and ineffective performance, malfunctioning, embarrassment, external interference, lack of technical and managerial knowledge member and leaders, corruption and violation of the rules and regulations. The reason behind such manifold problems could be explained from different angles ranging from the policy environment and to active and proactive participation of the members. Apart from these facts, there are limited evidences in policy aspects and institutional performance of multipurpose agricultural cooperatives. Among economically weak and vulnerable segments of the population women, rural youth and the poorest of the poor can seat on the first rank. They provide input services and create market opportunities to their members' products. In most developing countries, female farmers are marginalized from participating and benefiting from such groups (Thomas *et al.*, 2015). While reviewing previous studies, most of them were give attention on the challenges and the fate of multipurpose agricultural cooperatives instead of looking women separately in terms of gender dimension and putting the way forward. Women's participation as active members equally as men's in multipurpose agricultural cooperatives may enhance their bargaining power, exercising freedom, fair beneficiary, and build their capacity in both indoor and outdoor. Considering the facts in view, the present study was aimed with the following objectives:

- To Analyze the Challenges of women empowerment in multipurpose agricultural cooperatives
- To offer suitable solution to women empowerment.

Methods and materials

Study area: This study was conducted in the five sample districts of North Gondar Zone of Amhara region namely, Chilga, Debark, East Belesa, Quara and Metema.

These districts were considered as representatives of multipurpose agricultural cooperatives in North Gondar Zone in terms of accessibility, livelihood zone and various agro-ecology. North Gondar was selected as a study area where there is diverse agricultural production and farming systems and 410 multipurpose agricultural cooperatives established legally in the zone. The lists of the multipurpose agricultural cooperatives considered in this study were shown in Table 1.

Data collection: The main source of data for this research was both quantitative and qualitative with mixed cross-sectional survey. Both primary and secondary data sources were necessary. The primary data sources were collected by using household survey, FGDs, KII and on site observation. Secondary data was also collected from panel data, line cooperative office, library and University of Gondar internet service and other pertinent documents and grey literatures.

Sampling techniques: This study followed a multi-stage sampling procedure. In the first stage Northern Gondar Zone was deliberately selected because of its diverse livelihood option and agro ecology zone. In the second stage, five representative districts were selected based on the presence of multipurpose agricultural cooperatives and their accessibility and performance. Among the five districts, a total of 267 sample households' were selected from sample multipurpose cooperatives by using systematic random sampling technique taking into consideration proportion to the size of the member in each sample multipurpose agricultural cooperatives.

Data analysis: The researcher employed for data analysis both qualitative and quantities analysis techniques. Qualitative data were analyzed qualitatively whereas quantitative data gathered from household survey was analyzed by using descriptive statistical tools.

Table 2. The presence of women members in the cooperative.

No.	Are there women members in your MPAC	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes	112	78.3
2.	No	2	1.4
3.	I don't know	29	19.6
	Total	143	100.0
No.	How many women members in your MPAC?	Frequency	Percentage
1.	<5	9	6.3
2.	6-20	19	13.3
3.	>20	35	24.5
4.	I don't know	80	55.9
	Total	143	100.0
No.	Did your coop motivate women to be a membership	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Yes	91	63.6
2.	No	46	32.2
3.	I don't know	6	4.2
	Total	143	100.0

Sources: Primary data.

Table 3. Challenges for empowering women in MPAC.

No.	Characteristics	Yes a challenge		Not a challenge	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	Challenge of financial limitation	82	57.3	61	42.7
2.	Regulations and rules are not comfortable to support women	78	54.5	65	45.5
3.	Problems of reluctance of directives	82	57.3	61	42.7
4.	Willingness of women to support	70	49.0	73	51.0
5.	Problem of government support to empower women	88	61.5	55	38.5
6.	Opinion of men for women is very less	88	61.5	55	38.5
7.	Think that women are inefficient for election of d/t committees	89	62.2	54	37.8
8.	Burdon of women inside the house	99	69.2	44	30.8
9.	Problem of inviting training women for training	87	60.8	56	39.2
10.	Gap of information about women issues	96	67.1	47	32.9
11.	Women think about themselves that they are less than men	97	67.8	46	32.2

Source: Primary data.

Results and discussion

Women members and motivation to attract new members:

It is clear from Table 2 that, the respondents are asked whether they know the presence and number of women members in their cooperative or not. So, 78.3% of them knew that there were women members, 1.4% didn't know and the rest 19.6% of the respondents responded that they don't know whether there were women members or not in their cooperative. 6.3% of the respondents said the number of women members were less than five, 13.3% of them said the number of women members were about 6-20 and the rest 55.9% of the respondents didn't know the number of women members in their cooperative society. Regarding to motivational aspects to attract the new women members, 63.6% of the respondents responded that their cooperative was using different motivational mechanisms to attract new women members, 32.2% of them said their cooperative didn't motivate women to be member of their cooperative and the rest 4.2% of them said that they didn't know whether their cooperative motivated the women or not the attract them to be a member.

Challenges to empower women members in multipurpose agricultural cooperatives:

It is clear from Table 3 that, there are many challenges to empower women members in multipurpose agricultural cooperatives. The respondents were asked to tell the challenges to empower women members in their cooperative. So, financial limitation, uncomfortable rules and Regulations to support women, reluctance of directives, Willingness of women to support, Government support to empower women, Opinion of men for women, Thinking of women ability to elect as a committee, Burdon of women inside the house, inviting women for training, Gap of information about women issues, thinking of women about the equality of men and women are some of the challenges which tackled the empowerment of women in multipurpose agricultural cooperatives.



Recommendations

There are challenges which were observed in empowering women in multipurpose agricultural cooperatives. Among the them financial limitation, uncomfortable rules and Regulations to support women, reluctance of directives, Willingness of women to support, Government support to empower women, Opinion of men for women, Thinking of women ability to elect as a committee, Burdon of women inside the house, inviting women for training, Gap of information about women issues, thinking of women about the equality of men and women. So, all of them must be solved by the stakeholders for women empowerment in multipurpose agricultural cooperatives.

Conclusion

As the result indicated, there are challenges which were observed in empowering women in multipurpose agricultural cooperatives. Among the them financial limitation, uncomfortable rules and Regulations to support women, reluctance of directives, Willingness of women to support, Government support to empower women, Opinion of men for women, Thinking of women ability to elect as a committee, Burdon of women inside the house, inviting women for training, Gap of information about women issues, thinking of women about the equality of men and women were the major one.

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