

# **PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF WOMEN FARMER COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN OWERRI AGRICULTURAL ZONE OF IMO STATE, NIGERIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The study assessed the performance of women farmer cooperatives in Owerri Agricultural Zone of Imo State. Data were collected from 50 women farmer cooperators studied in four local governments within the Zone. Factors such as age of cooperators, family size, farm size, input costs and labour costs were identified to have significant influence on output level of women cooperators while factors such as level of education and membership strength were found to have no significant influence on the output level of women farmer cooperators. Based on the findings, the study recommended among others improvement in practice of channeling loans to rural women through cooperatives, adequate and timely provision of agricultural inputs to cooperatives, adequate supervision of cooperatives and creation of effective link between local government agricultural extension and state cooperative office as strategies to improve the efficiency and performance of women farmer cooperatives in the zone.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The term cooperative refers to an association of persons, usually of limited means who have voluntarily joined together to achieve a common economic end through the formation of a democratically controlled business organizations, making equitable contributions to the capital required and accepting a fair share of risk and benefits of undertaking. In Nigeria, Agricultural cooperative was established in

early 1970's and 1980s to take care of farmers need from supply, production, processing and marketing, and gradually it became dominant. Thus, according to Young (1977), the farmers cooperation offer the farmers a complete service embracing the whole cycle of their farming activities.

Women farmer cooperatives is among some organizations like the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Better Life Programme for Rural women, National Directorate of Employment, Home and Abroad women Association, and women Age Grade that emerged due to the increasing role of women in the process of economic and national development.

Eboh (1988) recognized that despite women's major responsibilities in the household health and nutrition, women's role in Agriculture cover all facets of Agribusiness including food production, Livestock production, fishing as well as farm management. Cooperative associations are often used in the implementation of agricultural and rural development projects and programmes as they are easy and acceptable avenues for reaching the larger majority of the poor rural population engaged in agricultural and other rural development activities. One of the measures that have been adopted in order to solve the agricultural problem and increase productivity is the establishment of cooperatives included in both agricultural and non-agricultural activities (Osuntogun et al,1981). There are farmers cooperatives, multi purpose cooperative societies, marketing cooperatives credit cooperatives and industrial cooperatives, all of which engage mostly in agriculture and related business.

In recent times and with the introduction of the Better Life Programme for rural women, cooperatives have been established on the initiates of government. Ihimodu (1989) explained that under the Better Life Programme, women cooperatives are being used as means of getting farm inputs and other forms of assistance to rural women. However, these women cooperatives do not seem to

be performing creditably because of problems related to poor management and organization as well as shortage of capital and facilities needed to engage in successful agricultural and other related non-agricultural activities.

Cooperative was borne out of human suffering, degradation and exploitation. According to Olayide (1981), three factors are discernable when one examines the growth of cooperatives in various parts of the world. First is the appreciable vital role of the cooperatives in the utilization of the farmers resources pooled together to produce better results. Second is the tendency of the society to be strong enough to support the self generating development out of the pooled resources. Third, is the tendency to natural information dissemination mode due to the brotherhood economics which solve the problem of creating awareness or publicity.

In Nigeria, our traditional society has a rich socio-cultural heritage enriched with traits of communal cooperative and even in the farming activities, craft or environmental sanitation, housing. This communal cooperative was for the collection, preservation and dissemination of technical and cultural knowledge, while also exhibiting elements of joint participation in all facets of human existence ranging from the provision of three basic human needs of clothing and shelter to community development and more exotic purisuit of life (Odubanjo, 1995).

In most developing countries like Nigeria, cooperative movement is seen as a means of general economic development and increased Agricultural production. Agricultural cooperatives were the first to evolve in the history of Nigeria. Their primary objectives are the dispersal and marketing of farm products to her members at the least possible price. They also help in the -procurement of farm inputs to their members at reasonable cost and at appropriate time.

Research noted that during the quest for pragmatic and positive solutions to some of the agricultural problems in the country, the government accepted the idea and use of agricultural cooperatives as means of bringing about increased food production and thus make agriculture take its prime position in our national economy. Vyas and Ruse (1974) opined that these solutions have taken the form of conventional provision of cooperatives credit, supply of inputs, joint ownership and group farming practice.

Preliminary results from IDRC (1991) project in African Countries shows that legal and cultural constraints placed on women access to input hamper their ability to make effective contribution to Agricultural production and hence household food security. They also observed that women have been transferred into simple labourers on cash crop farms with most of land owned by women being of poorer quality. This situation further hinders women farmer cooperative productive capacity. Eboh (1988) opined that the gap in inequality of gender access to farm inputs tends to be wider because of the strategies adopted by extension agents which neglected female heads of household. Government planners also use the mechanisms that is discriminatory for farm land and farm credit distribution. Rural women can play a more predominant role in food production if they are given the necessary farm resources at appropriate time ( Odii et al 1989).

Women farmer cooperatives also lack access to adequate credit facilities or loan schemes. This is a major problem in Imo State and Nigeria, even though banks in the state claim that there is no gender discrimination in lending. Women farmers cooperatives also have problems in areas of education. Women farmers education have been viewed as one that is not important, hence to lopsided basis in favour of the males. Education of the female members of many households is never considered a priority.

But it is important to note that the level of literacy has much implication for agricultural innovation and its adoption.

Women cooperatives seek to enhance economic improvement, serve as an instrument of education, operate as school of democratic living, work as a centre for social harmony, function as an agent for international understanding and strive continually to attain cultural and spiritual improvement. Women cooperatives need help to break the cycle of poverty and restricted opportunities. Poor rural women need access to major production farm resources.

Despite the multiplicity in the number of women cooperatives, it does not appear that they have made significant impact in agriculture and other sectors of the Nigerian economy. The outcome of efforts of women cooperatives have not been fully assessed as very limited research attention has been given to them. Thus, this paper aims at estimating the relationship between the output and socio-economic characteristics of cooperative members, identify their constraints and make suggestions towards enhancing the development and performance of women cooperatives.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was carried out in Owerri Agricultural Zone of Imo State. The Zone is made up of nine local government areas out of which four were selected – eleven from Owerri West, 14 from Ngor-Okpala, 10 from Ikeduru, and 13 from Ohaji- Egbema. Two women farmer cooperatives societies were randomly selected from each local government area giving a total number of eight women cooperatives societies selected for the study.

From the eight women cooperative societies randomly selected, fifty women farmer cooperators were interviewed. The analytical tool

used in this study is the ordinary least square multiple regression technique.

The econometric model formulated is specified implicitly as follows:

$$Q_{gp} = f(Ac, Ed, Mz, Fs, Fsz, lc, Lc, e)$$

- $Q_{gp}$  = Value of goods produced measured in Naira (N)
- $Ac$  = Age of cooperators in years
- $Ed$  = Level of education measured as the number of years spent in acquiring formal education.
- $Mz$  = Membership strength measured as number of persons that make up the society
- $Fs$  = Family size
- $Fsz$  = Farm size in hectares
- $lc$  = Input costs in Naira (N)
- $Lc$  = Labour costs in Naira (N)
- $e$  = Stochastic error term

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

**Table 1: Mean Values of the Explanatory Variables.**

<b>Explanatory Variable</b>	<b>Mean value</b>
Age of cooperators (Ac)	45.00
Level of Education (Ed)	13.00
Membership Strength (Mz)	39.00
Family Size (Fs)	6.00
Farm Size (Fsz)	1.38 ha.
Cost of Input (Lc)	₦1546.60
Cost of Labour (Lc)	₦1039.02
Value of Output (Qgp)	₦7383.60

Source: Field survey data, 2001.

Table 1 shows the mean values of the explanatory variables used in the study . From the table, the women cooperators have a mean age of 45 years. This is the age at which the cooperators are expected to have gained enough experience on how to efficiently and effectively manage their resources. At this age also, their marginal physical productivity is on the increase. This accounts for the increased profit(Rodda, 1993)

The mean number of years spent in acquiring formal education by the women cooperators is 13 years, indicating that all the cooperators attended at least up to secondary school level. Onyenweaku (1978) maintained that level of education is correlated with rate of technology adoption, population growth and quality of labour force. This accounts for their low number of family size and increased output. The mean value of membership strength stood at 39 indicating a higher number in each cooperative . The mean household size is six (6) while the mean farm size cultivated is 1.38 hectares. This small farm size results from their inability to have easy access to land according to the tradition and customs of the area under study. While the mean cost of input and labour stood at ₦1546.00 and ₦1039.02 respectively, the mean revenue accruing from the sale of their output is ₦7383 per cooperator . This does not indicate a good performance as the per capita net profit is not encouraging.

**Table 2: Regression Result**

Explanatory Variable	Regression Coefficient	T-Ratio
Age of Cooperators (Ac)	-0.307	-2.172**
Level of Education (Ed)	0.117	1.146
Membership Strength (Mz)	-0.149	-0.093
Family Size (Fsz)	0.149	2.299**
Farm Size (Fsz)	0.675	4.576*
Input Costs (Ic)	0.817	3.951*
Labour Costs (Lc)	0.992	2.588**
$R^2$	0.854	
F-Ratio	34.974	
Standard Error	0.104	

Source: Field survey data, 2001

\*\* = Significant at 5%

\* = Significant at 1%

A combined effect of the factors included in the model revealed that about 85.4% of the variations in value of goods produced are due to the age of cooperators, their level of education, membership strength, family size, farm size, costs of input and labour costs as shown by the values of the t-ratios, f-ratio and the coefficient of multiple determination ( $R^2$ ).

The coefficient for age of cooperative is negative but statistically significant at 5percent level of probability showing that age is inversely related to output of women cooperators. This suggests that as age of women increases, their marginal physical productivity decreases, hence a decrease in output. The coefficient for women level of education is positive and is not significant. This means that greater number of the women cooperators (86%) attended at least post primary school showing a high level of literacy.



This positively influenced their output level. Onyenweaku et al (1987) proved that the level of education is correlated with the rate of technology adoption.

The coefficients for family size and farm size are positive and significant at 5 and 1 percent respectively. This is consistent with the findings of Rodda (1993) who maintained that the population of human beings in a family increases with their increasing need for food. The significance of the variable, farm size, implies that the larger the farm size the greater the output produced due to increased plant density and scale of production.

The coefficients of input and labour costs are positive and statistically significant at 1 and 5 percent respectively. This finding shows that an increase in input and labour supply is likely to increase the output of women cooperators.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study evaluated the performance of woman farmer cooperative societies in Owerri Agricultural zone of Imo State. The result of the multiple regression showed that age of cooperators family size, farm size, input costs and labour Costs are significantly associated with the output level of women cooperators while level of education and membership strength have no significant influence on the output level of women cooperators.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made;

1 There should be adequate and timely provision of agricultural inputs to the cooperators through cooperatives.

2 Effective link should be created between the local government Agricultural Extension and the divisional cooperative office. These two bodies should work closely to forestall effective dissemination of information and cooperative education of members.

3 The Ministry responsible for cooperative development should intensify the level of supervision of cooperative societies and advice them on economically viable activities to make cooperative profitable.

4 There is need to recognize and support the profitable role of women farmer cooperatives if the goals of meaningful and increased food productivity, poverty alleviation and national development are to be actualized.

5 Government should improve the method of channeling loans to rural women through cooperatives. Such credit tend to increase membership size loyalty and also finance profitable investment by cooperatives which enhances members propensity to save.

In conclusion, it is suggested that government should improve the method of channeling loans to rural women through cooperatives. Such credits tend to increase membership size, loyalty and also finance profitable investment by cooperatives which enhances members propensity to save.

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