

Gender Barriers to Women's Empowerment in Agricultural Cooperatives in Gog District of Gambella, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Gender based inequalities constrain women's ability to participate in agricultural production in many parts of Ethiopia. To study the forms of gender barriers to women's empowerment in agricultural cooperatives, this research designed to assess the current status of women and the forms of gender barriers against women's empowerment in specific agricultural cooperatives. To address the objectives of the study, researchers used both quantitative and qualitative approaches where quantitative data collected from primary sources through questionnaires and qualitative data through focus group discussion with leaders of the selected agricultural cooperatives. Gog was selected purposively due to inadequate studies conducted on gender barriers to women's empowerment in the agricultural cooperatives. To select the sample size, first 12 agricultural cooperatives with both men and women members selected purposively. Then, 127 respondents were selected by using simple random sampling techniques based on the probability proportionate to size. To analyze the data, simple descriptive statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used for quantitative data and qualitative data were narrated in textual form. Results show that the overall status of women is less compared to men members in all agricultural cooperatives established in the district. Majority of women were the victim of many socio-cultural barriers that hinder their participation in many activities including cooperatives. Except for the year 2009, 2013 and 2017, the numbers of women joined agricultural cooperatives every year since 2006 were less than ten. They represent 31.7%, 16.7% and 25% in the management committees, control committees and as chairpersons respectively. Therefore, the general findings of this study on gender barriers to women's empowerment are lack of control over resources including land and personal income, gender based domestic violence and division of labor, marriage and dowry system, poor decision making power at households over women's activities, lack of access to training and low participation in the leadership of their specific agricultural cooperatives.

Keywords: Barriers, Cooperatives, Empowerment, Gender and Gog

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Throughout the world, there are over 500 million smallholder farms that produce about 80% of the food consumed in Asia and Sub-Saharan African (IFAD, 2011). Agriculture is the backbone of Africa's economy and the main source of employment and income in rural areas where most of the world's poor and hungry people live (AfDB, 2015). To support these agricultural producers and marginalized groups such as women and young people, agricultural cooperatives playing an important role by empowering their members economically and socially and create sustainable rural employment through business model that is resilient to economic shocks (IYC, 2012).

Empowerment increases a person's freedom to choose and act (SIDA, 2009). Women's empowerment is the ability of women to take control of their lives, pursue their own goals and live according to their own values (IFAD, 2012). The process of women's empowerment means that women acquire the power to think and act freely, exercise choice, and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of their society.

Women play a major role in the agricultural economy by making two-third of agricultural labor force and produce the majority of Africa's food. However, women farmers have less access to essential inputs – land, credit, fertilizers, new technologies and extension services that resulted in lower yields than that of men's (FAO, 2011). In Ethiopia, female farmers produce 26% and in Ghana, they produce only 17%. Like many African countries, the majority of women in Ethiopia hold low status in the society. Women have been denied equal access to education, training and gainful employment opportunities and their involvement in policy formulation and decision making process (AfDB, 2015).

As a patriarchal society, gender norms and rules are biased in favor of men in Ethiopia, although variations across spaces and ethnicities exist (MoWA, 2006). According to Alebachew (2011), rural women, and specifically female household heads are identified as the most disadvantaged groups in highland farming communities where gender disparity in access to and over productive resources such as credit, extension services

and land is dominant. Despite the recent attempt to affirm women's right and gender equality through progressive laws and policies often remain on paper and gender gap still persist due to deep rooted gender norms and implementation failure (MoWA, 2006). Eliminating the barriers to women to become more efficient could help more women find route out of poverty (AfDB, 2015).

In Gambella regional state of Ethiopia, the overall statistics of women membership in all cooperatives was 43.45% (FCA, 2013). According to the study carried out by Dorgi and Gala (2016), the percentage of female membership was only 16.5% from fishery cooperatives established in the entire region in June of 2016. Therefore, even if women empowerment is a current development agenda, it becomes relevant and reasonable to assess the gender barriers limiting women's empowerment in agricultural cooperatives in Gog district of Gambella, Ethiopia.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Empowerment has always been fundamental to the cooperative idea where people get together to achieve goals that they would not be able to achieve on their own. Governments in many developing countries are promoting the use of cooperatives as organizations that could help the development of small-scale farmers. Develtere, P, et al (2008) reported that African women are known to produce up to 80% of the food. Yet, when it comes to agricultural inputs and services, the share going to women is meager. They receive only 7% of agricultural extension services, less than 10% of the credit offered to small-scale farmers, and own only 1% of the land. In this context, women are often found concentrated in subsistence agriculture and unpaid farm work, and excluded from more lucrative agricultural opportunities.

As reported by the ICA and SCC (2007), in many developing countries, women work individually, often isolated in the informal economy, operating at a low level of activity and reaping marginal income. Joining forces in small-scale cooperatives can provide them with the economic, social and political leverage they need. African labor markets are heavily gender-segregated, with women working primarily in low-paying occupations (AfDB, 2015). They are far more likely to be self-employed in the informal sector than to earn a regular wage through formal employment. Within the formal sector, women hold 4 of every 10 jobs and earn on average two-thirds the salary of their male colleagues. Only 15 African countries have laws against gender discrimination in hiring.

According to the report of the Federal Cooperative Agency (2016), there were recorded 74,904 primary cooperative societies with a total membership of 14 million. The same report has shown 747 primary cooperatives in Gambella region with total members of 15,522 of which 5,829 (37.5%) were females. Compared with the minimum requirements for the establishment of cooperative society which is 50 members, the average members of all cooperatives established in Gambella is 20.78. The same is true for women where their average membership in every cooperative is only 7.8. The study conducted by Dorgi and Gala (2016) revealed that women were only 16.5% in fishery cooperatives in the region. What made women's participation in cooperatives to be poor was not known due to inadequate empirical studies published on gender barriers to women empowerment in cooperatives in Gambella and Gog in particular. Therefore, in view of all the above gender related inequalities and discriminations, this research is designed to investigate the gender based barriers to women's empowerment in agricultural cooperatives established in Gog district of Gambella, Ethiopia.

1.3. Research Objectives

1.3.1. General Objective

- To investigate the gender barriers limiting women's empowerment in agricultural cooperatives established in Gog district, Gambella, Ethiopia.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

1. To assess the current status of women membership in the agricultural cooperatives.
2. To identify the forms of gender barriers to women's empowerment in agricultural cooperatives.

1.4. Research Questions

1. What is the current status of women membership in the agricultural cooperatives?
2. What are the forms of barriers limiting women's empowerment in agricultural cooperatives?

1.5. Significance of the Study

Women empowerment might be limited by different gender based barriers. Addressing gender based barriers against women empowerment in agricultural cooperatives in the study area will provide background information about the forms of gender barriers to women's empowerment within agricultural cooperatives in Gog district to policy makers, government organizations, NGOs and other researchers who may use it as secondary data for further studies.

2.2.2. Sampling Frame

Table 1: Sampling Framework of the Study

Cooperative societies	Members			Sample size per Cooperative
	Male	Female	Total	
Pinyudo	10	2	12	$(12*127)/359=4$
Nyudhi	23	3	26	$(26*127)/359=9$
Jo-poo	17	3	20	$(20*127)/359=7$
Wakwow	46	136	182	$(182*127)/359=64$
Wanajiey	0	10	10	$(10*127)/359=4$
Ony-maal	9	4	13	$(13*127)/359=5$
Wi-buul	5	5	10	$(10*127)/359=4$
Kuto-beer	4	25	29	$(29*127)/359=10$
Wito-beer	20	1	21	$(21*127)/359=7$
Beeratich	8	2	10	$(10*127)/359=4$
Wapaarago	12	2	14	$(14*127)/359=5$
Amanynya	0	12	12	$(12*127)/359=4$
Total	154	205	359	127

Source: Gog District Agriculture and Rural Development Office (2017)

2.3. Types, Sources and Methods of Data Collection

Depending on the nature of this study, the researchers employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Based on the research designed, the data were collected from primary and secondary types. Primary data collected through structured questionnaires from 127 respondents and the focus group discussion with key informants and leaders of the selected agricultural cooperatives in the study area. For the purpose of this study, the researchers developed structured questionnaires for 127 respondents and sent to them with the help of data collectors selected by the researchers. On the other hand, a total of two focus group discussions (FGDs) were held in the field by the researchers together with the participants during the data collection to ascertain the results collected through questionnaires. The secondary data were collected from the available documents of cooperatives and review of related literatures such as books, published journals and internet websites.

2.4. Methods of Data Analysis

After the completion of data collection, data were processed and analyzed. Data processing is an essential part of the whole survey operation. To analyze the data, descriptive statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and likert scales were used to analyze the quantitative data with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). And the data collected through focus group discussions (FGD) were analyzed in narration and textual forms.

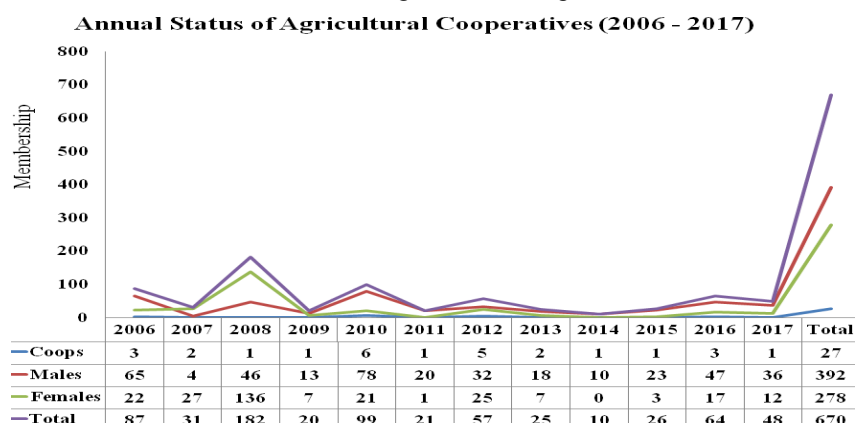
3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Socio-Demographic Factors

The socio-demographic characteristics of the sample members selected for the study are: age, marital status, family size, educational status, farm land size and annual income. The results of the survey for marital status show that majority of 77.17% (59.85% females and 17.32% males) of the respondents were married followed by 8.66% (4.72% females and 3.94% males) of those who were single and divorced. The remaining 5.51% of them were respondents who had lost their spouse (widows/widowers). The results of the study descriptively show that the average age of the respondents was 28.9 years with the standard deviation of 7.67 and minimum and maximum of 18 and 47 years respectively. Survey data for family size depict that the average family size of the respondents was 3.88 with the standard deviation of 1.541 and minimum and maximum of 1 and 7 persons respectively. In this study, the average educational level of the members was 8.39 with the standard deviation of 2.2 and minimum and maximum of 3 and 13(10+3) respectively. Descriptive statistical results of the annual income show that the average annual income of the respondents was 3286.87 with the standard deviation of 824.656 Birrs. The minimum and maximum annual incomes were 2000 and 5750 Birrs respectively. The study indicated that, the average land size of the respondents was 0.58 hectares with the standard deviation of 0.171 and minimum and maximum of 0.5 and 1.3 hectares of land respectively.

3.2. The Status of Women and Agricultural Cooperatives

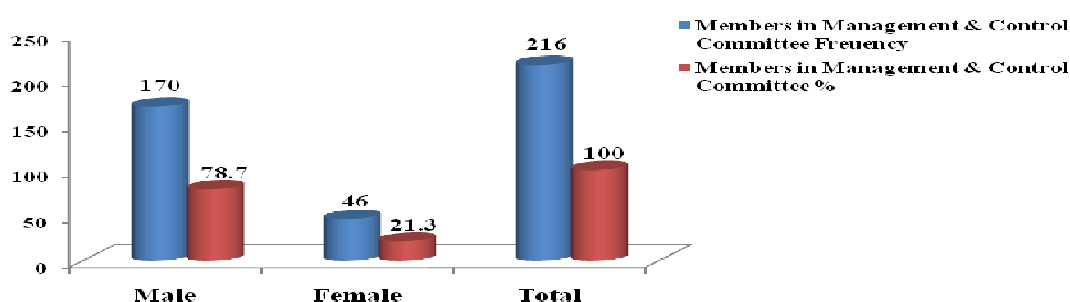
- Figure 3.1: The Overall Status of Members and Agricultural Cooperatives



Source: Gog District Agriculture and Natural Resource Office (2017)

Line charts are used to display trends over time period. For the purpose of this study, chart used in order to show the overall status of member (both men and women) and agricultural cooperatives established in Gog district of Gambella for the last twelve years since 2006. As presented in the figure 3.1 above, the result of membership and agricultural cooperatives in Gog district shows up and down in their growth for the last twelve years. In 2006, only 3 agricultural cooperatives were established with total members of 87 (65 men and 22 women). In 2007, the number of new members joined two new cooperatives decreased to 31. It was in 2008 that the highest number of 182 members (46 men and 136 women) established one agricultural cooperative in 12 years followed by the year 2010 when 99 new members joined six agricultural cooperatives. Currently, in 2017 the overall status of members and agricultural cooperatives in Gog district show that there are 670 (392 men and 278 women) members and 27 agricultural cooperative societies.

- Figure 3.2: Women in the Committees of Cooperatives



Source: Gog District Agriculture and Natural Resource Office (2017)

Committee is a body elected by the General Assembly for the purpose of overseeing the day-to-day operation of any cooperative societies.

According to Cooperative Societies Proclamation No.985/2016, *Article 34(1)*, it written as “Any cooperative society shall have a management committee which are loyal and respectful and also can overcome their responsibility and accountable to the general assembly and whose members and manner of election to be determined in the byelaws of the cooperative society” and *Article 34(7)*, “Where there is possible number of female at least 30% of any cooperative society management committee shall be held by female members”.

As presented in the figure 3.2 above, 78.7% of the members in management committees of the 27 agricultural cooperatives were males and the remaining 21.3% of management committees were female members. So, it can be concluded that, the percentage of female members of the management and control committees were below what is written in the proclamation No.985/2016.

3.3. Forms of Gender Barriers in Agricultural Cooperatives

3.3.1. Economic Barriers

○ Access to Land

The result depicts that out of 127 respondents, 100% said women have access to land for agricultural activities. As far as control over land own by the respondents, majority of 70.1% said the land was controlled by the husband followed by 21.3% of respondents who said it controlled by wife. The remaining 8.7% were

respondents who said that the land for farming is controlled by both husband and wife at same time.

○ **Access to Financial Institutions and Credit**

As described in the result, only 19.7% of the respondents replied that they have access to financial institution where as majority of 80.3% have no access to financial institutions. From the same result regarding access to credit, still 87.4% have no access to credit where as only 12.6% has access to credit. The means of getting credit for the respondents who have access to credit is through personal contact without any help from the cooperatives.

○ **Access to Personal Income**

Personal income is the amount of money received over a period of time either as payment for work, goods or services as profit on capital by an individual. Respondents were asked about women's own personal income and 100% of them said women have personal income. Concerning the sources of personal income, 64.6% of the respondents get their personal income directly from agriculture followed by 22.8% who get their income from business. The remaining 12.6% get their personal income from both agriculture and business. Results of the same table, reveals that though 100% of women have personal income, 66.9% of respondents said that their incomes are controlled by the husbands followed by 22.8% who said women control their income. The remaining 10.2% of them said their personal income controlled by both wife and husband.

○ **Right to Inherit Family's Properties**

Right to inherit is the right of an heir to inherit wealth or title when an ancestor dies. The result shows that only 4.7% of the respondents said women have the right to inherit family properties where as majority of 95.3% said women right to inherit their families properties due to culture don't have related factors.

3.3.2. Socio-Cultural Barriers

○ **Gender Based Domestic Violence at Household level**

Gender-based violence set forth in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993 defined gender based violence as "any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (UNIFEM, 1998). The results reveal that 73.2% of the respondents agreed that they have gender based violence at their household levels where as the remaining 26.8% of them do not have such gender based violence at their households. The same result shows that 46.2% of the respondents who experience gender based violence said that the violence is caused by exercising personal right followed by 34.4% whose violence is caused by making personal decision at household levels. The remaining 19.4% of them said that their violence caused by managerial role at household level.

○ **Gender Based Division of Labor at Household Level**

Results of the study depict that 100% of the respondents said that there is gender based division of labor at their households that affect women participation in cooperative activities. 44.1% of the respondents said farming activities were assigned to women and 55.9% said that most of farming activities were assigned to men. 100% of them agree that domestic work, fetching water and selling local wine were assigned to women. Results of the same table show that 26.8% and 23.6% of the respondents agreed that fishing and selling of fish products were assigned to women and majority of 73.2% and 76.4% said that fishing and selling of fish products were men's work.

○ **Harmful Traditional Practices**

Results show that 100% of the respondents said that there are harmful traditional practices affecting their women's participation in agricultural cooperative societies. The major types of traditional practices that affect women participation were marriage system, dowry system and decision making power within marriage. 52% of the respondents agree that marriage directly affect the performance of women in their respective agricultural cooperative societies followed by 25.2% who strongly agree. The remaining 22.8% of the respondents were those who were undecided because they were singles, divorced and widow/widowed. From the same result, in can be seen that 45.7% of the respondents agree that dowry negatively affect women participation followed by 31.5% who strongly agree with the problems of dowry in women's life. 22.8% of the respondents were undecided. Dowry highly affected women's participation in their respective cooperatives because the highest the level of dowry paid to women's family, the highest the level of power given to husbands. Again, 60.6% of the respondents strongly agree that women have less decision making power in their cooperatives compared to men and 39.4% who agree the same.

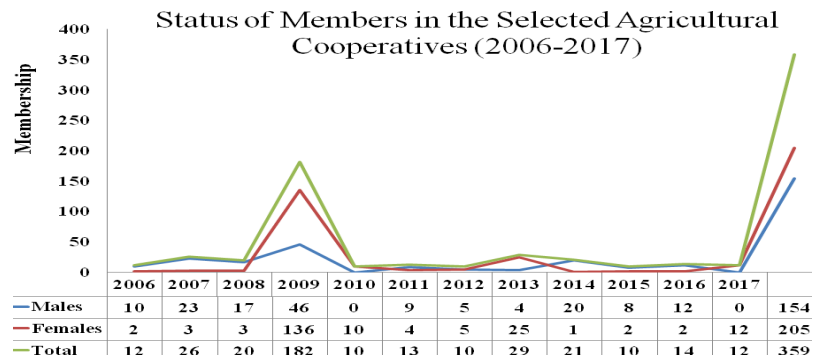
○ **Decision Making Power within Marriage**

100% of respondents who were married said that women's decision making power within marriage at households including cooperative societies is affected by their marriage and the dowry paid to their families. From the same result, only 37.7% of the respondents said women make personal decision within their marriage and the remaining 62.2% believe women do not make personal decision.

3.3.3. Institutional/Organization Barriers

o Annual Status of Women in the Selected Cooperatives

Figure 3.3: Annual status of women in the selected cooperatives



Source: Field survey data (2017)

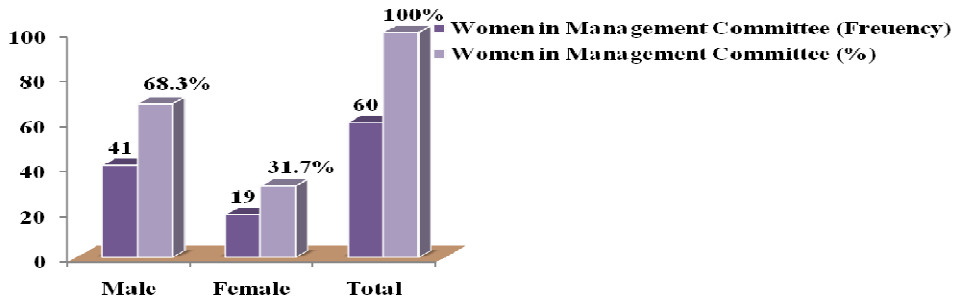
From the figure 3.3 above, the results for annual status of women in the selected agricultural cooperatives in Gog district reveal that the highest number of women (136) joined cooperatives in the year 2009 followed by 25 women members who joined cooperatives in the year 2013. The annual status of women in the selected agricultural cooperatives shows that except in 2009, 2013 and 2017, the number of new members who joined cooperatives was less than 10. But, women are more than men members in the selected 12 agricultural cooperatives due to the reason that the researchers excluded cooperative that had no women members.

o Women in the Leadership of Agricultural Cooperatives

Results of the study shows that 100% of the respondents said that there were women elected in the leadership of the selected agricultural cooperative societies. From the same result, more than 77% of the respondents said that there were women elected in different committees and the remaining 22% said that there were no women elected in the committees of their respected agricultural cooperatives.

– Women in Management Committees

Figure 3.4: Women in management committees

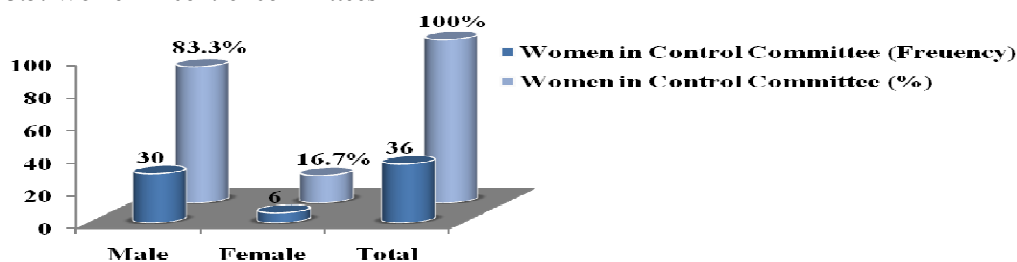


Source: Field survey data (2017)

Management Committee is a body elected by the general assembly for the purpose of overseeing the day-to-day operation of any cooperative societies. According to cooperative societies proclamation no.985/2016, Article 34(1), it written as “Any cooperative society shall have a management committee which are loyal and respectful and also can overcome their responsibility and accountable to the general assembly and whose members and manner of election to be determined in the byelaws of the cooperative society” and Article 34(7), “Where there is possible number of female at least 30% of any cooperative society management committee shall be held by female members”. As presented in the figure 3.4 above, 68.3% of the members in management committees of the selected twelve agricultural cooperatives were men and the remaining 31.7% of them were women members. Even though it satisfies the minimum requirement stated in proclamation No.985/2016, more than 80% of women in the management committees were cashiers.

– **Women in Control Committees**

Figure 3.5: Women in control committees

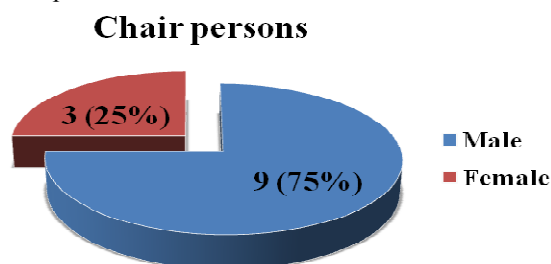


Source: Field survey data (2017)

Control committee is a committee elected by the General Assembly for the purpose of controlling the day-to-day operation of any cooperative societies including the activities of the management committee that shall not have less than three committee members which is accountable to the general assembly and the number and manner of election of which shall be specified by the by-laws of the society (Article 36[1] of cooperative societies Proclamation No.985/2016). As presented in the figure 3.5 above, the results show that 83.3% of the members in control committees of the selected twelve agricultural cooperatives were men and only 16.7% of them were women.

– **Women Elected as Chairpersons**

Figure 3.6: Women elected as chairpersons



Source: Field survey data (2017)

As presented in the figure 3.6 above, results of the survey data reveals that from the twelve agricultural cooperatives selected in this study, only 25% of the chairpersons were women and the remaining 75% of them were men.

○ **Women’s Access to Training in the Cooperatives**

Training as one of the functions of human resource management and as a principle of cooperatives, recognized and attracted great research attention by academic writers (Beardwell, Holden and Clayton, 2004). Training is the systematic way of developing skills, knowledge and attitudes demanded by an individual to perform tasks given on the job (Armstrong, 2006). The result indicates that only 18.1% of the respondents said that women have access to training in their agricultural cooperatives whereas a majority of 81.9% of the respondents said women do not have access to training.

○ **Women Access to Agriculture Extension Services**

Findings of the study reveal that only 29.1% of the respondents said that women have access to agriculture extension services whereas the remaining 70.9% of them do not have access to agriculture extension services. 100% of those who got extension services were given improved seeds and 75.86% of them attended field demonstration by the development agents.

○ **Women Access to Market**

Market is a place where goods are brought or sold which consists of all the potential customers sharing a particular need or want that might be willing and able to engage in exchange to satisfy that need or want. Respondents were asked to respond on the accessibility of market in their nearby locations. Results show that only 30.7% of the respondents agreed that women have access to market whereas the remaining 69.3% said women do not have access to market.

3.3.4. Results of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

For the purpose of conducting the focus group discussion as proposed by the researchers, 2 different groups of 16 participants (leaders of cooperatives and experts) were selected from the existing 12 agricultural cooperatives and cooperative desk office with each group containing 8 participants and conducted 2 different group discussions for 2 days. The information collected during FGD was directly recorded in the form of Minute as they were forwarded by the participants of the group so as to simplify it for the analysis. The responses and opinions of the participants who attended FGD were presented here under:

○ **Women's Control over Assets**

Access to and control over assets like land can increase women's access to a range of opportunities. The assets may serve as a place to live or earn a livelihood, as collateral for loans or investments to expand economic or social opportunity, and as a safety net against crises. Lack of assets is associated with greater poverty and economic vulnerability. Rights to own and control over land and other productive resources play a significant role in reducing gender inequality between both men and women.

But, in the study area, though women have access to own lands, the rights to control such lands were in the hands of the husbands for those who were married except for members who were single and widows. In addition, cultural norms and social arrangements often deny women especially divorced or widowed women the right to inherit assets. Among women participants, sole ownership of a house or land is rare except for singles. For land, sole ownership and control by men is higher compared with women. Therefore, women's property rights should be increased to have transformative effects on social norms and women's status within the household and the community.

○ **Weak Implementation of Laws**

There are many laws and policies ratified by the government for women to reduce gender related problems. The major gender barriers discriminating women from many activities within their communities are social norms, customary practices, the inaccessibility and weak capacity of institutions and women's lack of awareness of their rights. Due to negative perceptions developed by the communities along gender line, it found that both men and women already accepted a range of normative constraints on women's rights. So, regional and local governments in collaboration with other stakeholders should implement the existing laws to empower women in all aspects including their participation in cooperatives established in the district.

○ **Roles and Responsibilities**

In most households, men and women share labor inequitably. Some tasks are allocated predominantly or explicitly to women, others to men only, and some tasks are performed by both. The most obvious pattern in the gender division of labor is that women are mostly confined to routine domestic and caring tasks whereas men dominate in production of goods and services and/or wage labor where revenue can be earned. In this study, it identified that women assist their husbands in various agricultural activities such as soil preparation, weeding and harvesting. But, despite this active participation, their role in agricultural production is under-valued and they face many structural and cultural barriers to access financial credit, skills training and agricultural extension services.

○ **Cultural Barriers**

It is observed in the study area that culture takes its roots highly differentiated femininities and masculinities, and masculinity given priority above femininity. The discourse of femininity defined women as being contained within the family and marriage was a central ambition. The culture in the study area found in favor of male child than female child by the parents and the community. The researchers discovered that the traditional practices and other norms discriminate women throughout lifetime and a result of that bad culture woman seen inferior than men counterparts in the whole community including cooperative societies in the area.

○ **Household Decision Making Power**

Participation in household decision making is a common measure of women's empowerment. It was confirmed from the FGD that most of married women do not play a major role in household decision making. Women make full decision on cooking and they need to consult their husband in other issues including participation in the cooperatives they have established.

4. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusions

This is a survey research conducted on gender barriers to women's empowerment in agricultural cooperatives in Gog District of Gambella, Ethiopia with the objectives to assess the current status of women and to identify the forms of gender barriers against women's empowerment in agricultural cooperatives.

To address the objectives of the study, researchers used both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data collected from respondents through questionnaires guided by the data collectors and qualitative data was collected through focus group discussion with leaders of the selected agricultural cooperatives and experts of cooperatives in Gog district. Gog was selected purposively due to inadequate studies conducted on gender barriers limiting women's empowerment in agricultural cooperatives and 12 cooperatives that have both men and women members.

Then, to select the sample size from the selected 12 agricultural cooperatives, sample random sampling techniques used based on the probability proportionate to size. For the analysis of the data, simple descriptive statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used for quantitative data and narration and text were used for qualitative data.

The overall status of women is less compared to men members in all agricultural cooperatives established in

the district. The results show up and down in women's membership growth for the last twelve years. Majority of women denied access to financial institutions, access to credit due to lack of collateral and right to inherit family properties because of culture. Except for the year 2009, 2013 and 2017, the numbers of women joined agricultural cooperatives every year since 2006 were less than ten. Women represent 31.7%, 16.7% and 25% in the management committees, control committees and as chairpersons respectively. The women elected as chairpersons were from cooperative whose members were only women.

Therefore, the overall findings of this study on forms of gender barriers limiting women's empowerment in agricultural cooperatives organized in Gog district were mainly lack of control over resources including personal income, gender based domestic violence, division of labor, marriage and dowry system, poor decision making power at households over women's activities, lack of access to training, inaccessible market and low participation in the leadership of their specific cooperatives.

4.2. Recommendations

The overall study suggests endeavor efforts from development actors and decision-makers working on agricultural cooperative societies to implement strategies for women empowerment and responsive actions that may incorporate gender based barriers against women. Thus, the researchers suggest the following specific recommendations for bridging the gaps and addressing forms of gender based barriers to women empowerment in agricultural cooperative societies established in Gog district.

- ⊕ Awareness should be created through training at both household level and cooperative societies about the problems caused by the forms of gender barriers on women.
- ⊕ Women should be encouraged to be able to make their own decision on the activities they do in their cooperative works.
- ⊕ Women's role in doing different activities assigned to them along gender line need to be considered and given value within their society.
- ⊕ Parents should be given awareness about the impact of dowry paid in the lives of women when the decision making power shifted to men depends on the level of dowry received by them.
- ⊕ For women voice to be heard, they should represent at least 30% in the management committee of every specific cooperative as stated in article 34(7) of the cooperative society's proclamation no. 985/2016.
- ⊕ Women should be given special attention to get agricultural extension services in order to empower them in their agricultural cooperatives.
- ⊕ Local government together with women and children affairs office should facilitate and ease means of getting credit for women from the existing financial institutions in the district.

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