

Participation of Women in Rural Cooperatives: Evidence from Gewane and Fentale Districts of Afar Region, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The study was conducted in Fentale and Gewane districts of Afar, in north eastern Ethiopia with the objectives: to assess the extent of women's participation in rural cooperatives and to examine major factors influencing women's participation in rural cooperatives. Data for the study were derived from 10 purposively selected cooperatives. All women members were considered. The primary data necessary for the quantitative study were collected through personal interviews from 90 women drawn purposefully from 10 cooperatives by conducting formal survey using structured interview schedule. Qualitative data were collected through focus group discussion, observations, and informal discussion with key informants. Descriptive statistics with appropriate statistical tests, T test for significant and Karl Pearson's Correlation were used to analyse the data. The findings showed that women are conspicuously under-represented in decision making, implementing decisions, shouldering responsibility, attending general meeting, involvement in share purchasing and leadership. The survey result showed that the majority of the respondents were not aware of the rules, the by-laws, principles, values, rights and obligation of members and how income is distributed. The output of Pearson correlation analysis indicated that age, duration of membership, livestock ownership, total income, distance, awareness about cooperative, training access, position of women, shows a significant relationship with participation. Lack of awareness, culture, lack of access to information, work load in the house, lack of education, lack of capital, the negative attitude of the society towards women and mobility were the most important factors contributing to the inactive participation of women in cooperatives in the study area. Therefore, cooperatives should focus on creating awareness, educating women, increasing training access to women and educating the society to bring attitudinal change on gender issue.

Keywords: women, participation, cooperative.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Women represent 50% of the world population, and play a vital role in food production and food security. The world's experiences show that food security encompassed a broad range of issues. All these issues are central to women. Agricultural development is a complex process and a challenging one as well (Trinh T. and Ha T., 2009). Women account for 70% of agricultural workers, 80% of food producers, and 100% of those who process basic foodstuffs and they undertake from 60% to 90% of the marketing. It is often stated that women are responsible for more than half the world's food production. They are said to be "feeding the world". The role women play in agriculture and the rural society is fundamental to agricultural and rural development in sub-Saharan Africa (Fresco, 1998).

In Ethiopia agriculture is the mainstay of the economy accounting for about 40 percent of national GDP, 90 percent of exports, 85 percent of employment, and 90 percent of the poor (David J., 2008). Women are the backbone of the agricultural sector and the food production system (MOPED and UNICEF, 1994). Agriculture activities heavily relied on family labour and women played a key important role in farming and improving the quality of life in rural areas (World Bank, 2004 cited in Berhan, 2010). Out of the total subsistence agricultural production, they are responsible for about 50%. As some reports indicate women contribute around 65% of the labour-force in agriculture (TGE and UNICEF, 1993).

Although women's contribution to their households, food production and national economies is immense, it has not been translated in to better access to resources or decision-making powers. As a result, women remained to be the poorest of the poor constituting 70% of the global poor (Women affairs, 2004 cited in Berhan, 2010). In Ethiopia, women play a vital role in the community by taking care of all social activities. However, they do not enjoy the fruits of their labor and suffer from political, economical, social and cultural marginalization (FDRE, 2004). The participation of women in qualified jobs and related fields is at its lowest level.

Gender integration in cooperative development is also essential because active and equitable participation of members, both men and women, is a necessary condition for sustainable cooperative development. , cooperatives will benefit from the under-utilized half of the world's human resources by enhancing women's productive capabilities. The active involvement of women will make cooperatives

economically and politically strong. By involving more women in decision making and implementing within the cooperative movement, one will enhance the prospects of cooperatives, diversify activities and fortify the cooperative movement. It is significant that the involvement of more women in cooperatives will broaden the scope of cooperatives and improves their social role by empowering them to decision-making level (Desalew, 2009). A number of experiences have shown that initiatives taken by women in cooperatives have accelerated the progress and change of socio-economic situations both for women and the society at large (Daman P., 2003). Hence, this study tried to underline on extent of women participation and the influencing factors of their participation in rural cooperatives.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Women in Ethiopia operate about 65% of micro-enterprises and 26% of small-scale manufacturing enterprises in the country (Anita Spring and Bob G., 2004). They are actively involved in all aspects of their society's life. Women are both producers and procreators and they are also active participants in the social, political, and cultural activities of their communities. However the varied and important roles they play have not always been recognized. The discriminatory political, economic and social rules and regulations prevailing in Ethiopia have barred women from enjoying the fruits of development. Without equal opportunities, they have lagged behind men in all fields of self-advancement (FDRE, 2004).

Currently the government has placed a high priority on food security and food self-sufficiency. Cooperatives have gained prominence in Ethiopia's rural and agricultural development strategy, within the national macro-economic policy framework of Agricultural Development-Led Industrialization (ADLI) (Tesfaye, 2008). According to the Federal Cooperative Commission five-year plan (2005-2010) the aim is to provide cooperative services to 70% of the population and increasing women membership from its present level of 13 percent to 30 percent by 2010 (FCA, 2006). This cannot be attained without a concerted effort to enhance women participation and decision making.

At present time while the government is claiming that it is politically trying to improve women participation in the socio-economic activities of the society, the proportion of women member in the cooperative society is too small that is highly dominated by men. For instance, Coop AFRICA research¹⁴ revealed that in Ethiopia, only 18% of cooperative members are women (Eva M, 2010).

Modern cooperatives in Afar region as a whole had started when the Bureau of Cooperative Promotion was established in 2002. A lot of efforts have been made to develop modern cooperatives in the region after the establishment of the Bureau of Cooperative Promotion. And based on this a lot of member oriented cooperatives are organized in the region. However, no research has been conducted in women participation in agricultural cooperatives in Afar Region. On the basis of these realities and given the importance of cooperatives and their role set by the development policies and strategies of Ethiopia, this research was undertaken to address the following objectives:

- To see the extent of women's participation in rural cooperatives;
- To examine major factors influencing women's participation in rural cooperatives

2. Methodology

2.1. Sampling and Data Collection Techniques

Gewane and Fentale districts were selected out of 6 and a total of 10 cooperatives were selected purposively; all women members were included. Therefore, the study employed a total of 90 women respondents. Primary data were collected from women members of the selected cooperatives by using structured interview schedule, including all relevant variables for the study. Secondary data were gathered to support the information collected from primary sources. In addition, a sample size of 10 experts were selected from the two districts; 4 from pastoral development bureaus, 3 from cooperative promotion bureau and 3 women from women affair bureau for the purpose of conducting the Focus group discussion.

2.2. Methods of Data Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative analytical methods were used to realize the objectives of this study. SPSS version 17 was used for data analysis. Objectives were realized through simple descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, test of significance (T-test), percentages, figures and tables. Correlation analysis was also employed to identify the association of some independent variables with the dependent variable. Among the measures of correlation, Karl Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation (r) was applied to analyse the data. The degree of association or correlation between two variables X and Y is answered by the use of correlation analysis (Gomez and Gomez, 1984; Kothari, 2003).

$$r = \frac{\text{Cov}(X \text{ and } Y)}{\text{SD}(X) \text{SD}(Y)}$$

Where r = Correlation Coefficient

Cov (X, Y) = Covariance between variables of X and Y

SD(X) and SD(Y) = Standard Deviation of variables X and Y respectively

Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation (r) is also known as the Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The value of ' r ' lies between +1 and -1. Positive values of ' r ' indicate positive Correlation between the two variables (i.e., changes in both variables take place in the same direction), whereas negative values of ' r ' indicate negative correlation (i.e., changes in the two variables taking place in the opposite directions). A zero value of ' r ' indicates that there is no association between the two variables. When $r = (+) 1$, it indicates perfect positive correlation and when it is $(-) 1$, it indicates perfect negative correlation. The value of ' r ' nearer to +1 or -1 indicates high degree of correlation between the two variables (Kothari, 2003).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Extent of women's participation

Women's involvement in decision making and implementing decisions

Decision making refers to the involvement of women in generation of ideas, evaluation of options and making choice from among options. Decision making in the cooperative involves setting the objective of the cooperative and participation in short, medium and long term planning of the cooperative. In this study among the total women respondents only (8.9%) always participating, (36.7%) participating sometimes and (54.4%) never participate in decision making of the cooperative. This shows the majority of women were not participating in decision making regarding the affair of their cooperatives. The opinion of some respondents revealed that the reasons for the non-participation of women in decision making is that "those who are participated in decision making process in the cooperative are those who are shared responsibilities; and since most women have no position within the cooperative they are not involved in decision making process. The second reason is the underestimation of women's ideas and feelings because men counterparts perceive women ideas as not important even though they forward important ideas.

Implementing decision refers to the extent of physical and moral presence, involvement in physical work by the member in the cooperative activities. Only (8.9%) of the respondents participate always, (50%), and the rest (41.1%) never participate in implementing decisions of the group.

Women's participation in shouldering responsibilities

Shouldering responsibility refers to the processes involved such as voluntarism and capability potentiality considerations in sharing and accepting of responsibilities by the member in the cooperative. Only (10%) of the respondents strongly agree to share and accept responsibility with in the cooperative, (26.7%) and (25.6%) undecided to share and accept responsibility, (26.7%) of the respondents disagree to share and accept responsibility, whereas the remaining (11.1%) of the respondents strongly disagree to share and accept responsibility in the cooperative. The opinion of respondents during field survey indicated that the reasons for respondents to disagree or strongly disagree to share and accept responsibility in cooperatives include: women work load in the household, they perceived themselves as unable and weak to share and accept responsibility.

Leadership propensity of women in the cooperatives

Leadership propensity refers to the degree of ability of the member to influence and lead others in the group in deciding and implementing group activities. Out of the total of 90 women respondents in the study, only (3.3%) of them actively participated in leading group meetings and discussions, (23.3%) of the respondents participated sometimes, whereas the majority (73.3%) of the respondents did not participate in leading group discussions and meetings. In the same manner, (6.7%) of the respondents actively participated in influencing members in taking decisions, (14.4%) of the respondents sometimes guide and influence in taking decisions, and the rest majority of the respondents (78.9%) have never guided and influenced group members in taking decisions.

3.2. Position of women in the cooperatives

Position in this study refers to the type of responsibilities that women have in cooperative.

Management, control and credit committee

Every society shall have management committee which is accountable to the general assembly and whose member and manner of election to be determined in the bye-law of the society. The result shows only (4.4%) of the total women were a member of management committee. From the total 90 women members, only (5.6%) were members in the control committee; only (7.8%) were members of credit committee.

The opinion of experts during focus group discussion and the opinion of key informants during informal discussion revealed that being virtually absent from most meetings as a result of their reproductive roles, women stand little chance of influencing decisions, and even less of being elected to boards or other posts.

3.3. Relationship between Participation and factors affecting participation

The output of Pearson correlation analysis indicates that, out of 11 independent variables, 8 are associated with the dependent variable at different levels of significance. Educational status, duration of membership, awareness about cooperative, training access and position shows positive relationship with participation, although educational status is not statistically significant. The rest age, family size, membership with more than one cooperative, Total TLU, total income and distance shows negative relation with participation, even though , family size and membership with more than one cooperatives are not statistically significant. Statistical analysis

of Pearson correlation of field data shows that there is positive relationship between duration of membership and participation at 5% significant level. The positive and significant relationship exists between duration of membership and participation was that people who stayed a long period have developed more experience and was more aware of the cooperatives than those who join the cooperative at recent year. As duration of membership increases, members could have right perception with positive attitude towards cooperatives. Several studies state that duration of membership with cooperative has a consistent association with other indicators such as participation with cooperative management, nature and extent of utilization of services of cooperatives. It is observed that, there was significant correlation at 1% level of significance and positive relationship between awareness of cooperation and level of participation. This implies that as the awareness of the respondent's increases, their participation also increases. The probable reason might be that as women are aware of the principles, by-laws and rules and regulations regarding the cooperatives, their participation will increase.

Statistical analysis using Pearson correlation coefficient revealed that there was significant and positive relationship between participation and access of respondents to training at 1% level of significance. This implies the level of participation of the respondents' increases with increase in access to training. The probable reason might be those respondents with relatively higher access to training have more access to new ideas and in turn may expose them to new information and increases their participation.

There was significant and positive relationship between position of women and level of participation. The positive relationship between position and level of participation implies that as women have authority in the cooperatives their level of participation will increase, as they are responsible for a particular issue. The output of Pearson correlation revealed that there exist a significant and weak association between age of respondents and participation. The probable reason might be as age of women increases the probability of participation in the cooperative will decrease indicating that as the age of women increased, they could not participate in the programme effectively.

There is negative, significant and weak relationship between participation and livestock holding of the respondents. This might be due to the fact that, as livestock raising is the main economic activities of the people in the study area, so that when the household has more number of livestock women are more concentrated to the management of and caring their livestock instead of participating in the main activities of the cooperative.

There was a negative and significant relationship between income and participation. The probable reasons for the negative relationship exists between income and participation was that, since from the very nature of cooperative is that people who engage in cooperative are weak section of the society, they intend to form a cooperative kind of business by pooling their resources together so as to increase their income and improve their livelihoods. Therefore as income increases participation will decrease, as income decreases participation will increase, because, as respondents have relatively better income they tend to operate their own business than joining a cooperative kind of business.

The result revealed that, there is a negative and significant relationship between participation and distance of the cooperative office to respondents home. The relation was at 1% level of significant. The negative relationship between distance and participation could be as distance increases women participation will decrease. Indicating that as the cooperative service centre is far away from the respondents home the probability of women participation is low.

3.4. Constraints hindering women's participation in cooperatives

To identify list of constraints in this study, experts' suggestions and respondents concern or way of responding to indicate the constraints that inhibit women from participation in cooperative, during the pilot study were considered. Respondents were asked to put the list of constraints in rank order by assuming the first rank is considered as the most important constraint. The researchers identified constraints as most important, important and not important.

Lack of awareness about principles, values and the by-laws of cooperatives ranked as the first problem, culture, lack of access to information, work load in the house hold ranked from the 2nd to 4th problem, respectively. Lack of education and lack of capital score the same ranked 5th and 6th. The low perception of the society towards women and mobility ranked the 7th and 8th.

The issue was also discussed thoroughly with experts during focus group discussion which was held with the officers at different levels. They pointed out that lack of awareness about the values, principles, rules and regulation about the cooperative, work load, lack of education, cultural barriers, and little attention given to women participation in cooperatives, lack of capital and lack of access to information were the major factors which inhibit women from participating in cooperatives.

Opinion from experts of the cooperative promotion bureau during focus group discussion revealed that cooperatives are at infant stage in Afar Region so that the people in general and women in particular are not aware of the cooperative principles and values. Therefore, lack of awareness about cooperative is one major constraint which inhibits them from participating in cooperatives. The other problem is lack of capital. To start a cooperative type of business members should contribute a certain amount of capital as initial capital. Since

women in Afar Region lack access to major economic resources, they have no capital to pay for their membership.

3.5. Suggestions for improving women's participation

Suggestions which women respondents thought as helpful for the improvement of their participation in their cooperatives were sought at the time of collecting primary data from members. Among the 9 suggestions, respondents agreed that continuous education of women about the principle, values and by-laws about cooperatives in order to develop awareness is the most important suggestion for improving women's participation in their cooperatives in the study area, and it was given the 1st rank for its score. Followed by educating the society about the issue of gender and development, the government should interfere in increasing women participation especially in providing capital as most women lack the necessary initial capital to pay, and minimizing the work load of women by means of promoting division of work in the family ranking from 2nd to 4th, respectively. Education of women so as to develop their ability and to have confidence on their action and the cooperative promotion bureau initiates the cooperative societies to involve women members ranking from 5th to 6th; and women in leadership position in cooperative encourages other women to be a member and to be active participants and the women affair department and those who are working on women should empower those women who are members through capacity building scored the same and ranked 7th and 8th. Lastly, changing the ways of life of pastoral women from mobile nature of life to sedentary way of life was given the last rank.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

4.1. Conclusion

So far, there has not been conducted any research in Afar region on the participation of women in cooperatives. Therefore, this study was intended to assess the extent of women participation in cooperatives and to examine major factors influencing women participation in cooperatives and to suggest interventions and recommendations for enhancing the participation of women.

The constraints that inhibit women from participating in cooperatives were identified through ranking the score values of the constraints obtained from the respondents. Lack of awareness, culture, lack of access to information, work load in the house, lack of education, lack of capital, the negative attitude of the society towards women and mobility were the most important factors contributing to the inactive participation of women in cooperatives in the study area. Through awareness creation, training and educational programmes which are sensitive to women needs, cooperatives can help strengthen women's capacities and capabilities, resulting in their increased self-confidence and enabling them to participate fully in decision-making and assume leadership positions. Because women cannot assume leadership roles unless they have had access to education and training programmes. Experience has shown that women in leadership positions are more likely to address gender issues and safeguard the interests of women. As the cooperative organization incorporates so many women (yet few in management positions), it is important that more women are integrated into the system. Therefore cooperatives should target on continuous education, training and information to all members in general and women members in particular.

Active, equitable participation of members, both men and women, is a necessity for sustainable cooperative development. Active participation in the cooperative context means that members are involved in all the functions of cooperatives including planning, decision-making, implementation and financial and management control. Therefore, in order to enhance sustainable cooperative development, special consideration should be given to increasing women's participation in the cooperative movement at all levels.

4.2. Recommendations

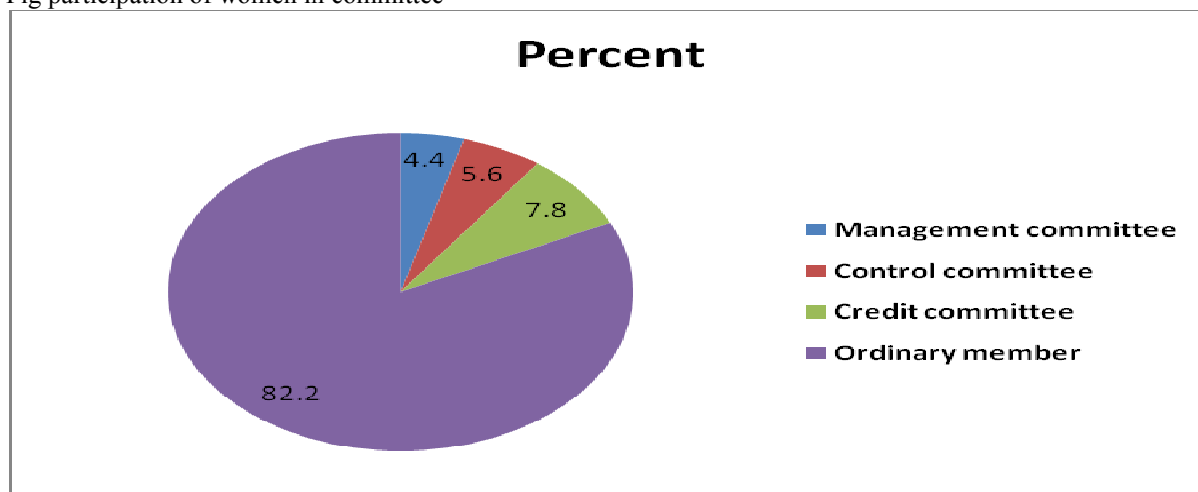
The result of the study revealed that cooperatives have a multiple contributions to women in the study area. However, still the majority of women in the study area are not members of the cooperative and only a few women are benefiting from the services of the cooperative organizations. Therefore, cooperative should work more on improving the services of the organization in terms of credit availability, input provision, marketing of products on time, etc. Moreover, cooperatives should strengthen and expand the involvement of more women in the cooperative sector in order to improve their livelihood.

As the major problem faced by women in the study area are multiple burden of responsibilities in the household, cooperatives should consider to design and implement training, family dialog, community conversation programs that bring attitudinal change in men so that they share the household responsibilities, since these are deep-rooted cultural issues that need more awareness and behavioural changes.

Cooperative promoters at all levels should enforce the cooperative societies to incorporate women members as a precondition for the functioning of the cooperative organization.

Cooperatives should review their policies and plans periodically to ensure that they are gender-sensitive. The further research: deeper and larger scale research should be undertaken at country level in order to drive rigorous conclusions and policy recommendations on women's participation in cooperative in general.

Fig participation of women in committee



Source: Computed from own survey data

Table 1: Relationship between Independent variables and dependent variable

No	Independent variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Significance (P) (2-tailed)	N
1	Age	-.328**	.002	90
2	Educational status	.081	.448	90
3	Family size	-.143	.178	90
4	Duration of membership	.261*	.013	90
5	Membership in more than one coop	-.129	.226	90
6	Total TLU	-.298**	.004	90
7	Total income	-.427**	.001	90
8	Distance	-.587**	.000	90
9	Awareness	.779*	.030	90
10	Training	.359**	.001	90
11	Position	.339**	.001	90

Source: Pearson correlation in SPSS

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 Major Factors perceived by respondents as constraints of women to participate in cooperatives (N = 90)

S/ n	Attributes	Relative importance of the attribute						Scores	Rank
		Most Important (3)		Important (2)		Not Important(1)			
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Lack of awareness about cooperatives.	82	91.1	8	8.9	0	0	262	1 st
2	Culture	80	88.9	10	11.1	0	0	260	2 nd
3	Lack of access to information	78	86.7	10	11.1	2	2.2	256	3 rd
4	Work load in the house hold	75	83.3	11	12.2	4	4.4	251	4 th
5	Lack of education	60	66.7	20	22.2	10	11.1	230	5 th
6	Lack of capital	60	66.7	20	22.2	10	11.1	230	6 th
7	The perception of the people towards women	50	55.5	15	16.7	25	27.8	202	7 th
8	Mobility	45	50	15	16.7	30	33.3	195	8 th

Table 3 Rank order of suggestions given for improving women participation in cooperatives (N = 90)

S/n	Attributes	Relative importance of the attribute						Score	Rank
		Most Important (3)		Important (2)		Not Important(1)			
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Continuous education of women about the principle, values and by-laws about cooperatives in order to develop awareness.	85	94.4	5	5.6	0	0	265	1 st
2	Educating the society about the issue of gender and development.	80	88.8	7	7.8	3	3.4	257	2 nd
3	The government should interfere in increasing women participation especially in providing capital as most women lack the necessary initial capital to pay.	78	86.6	7	7.8	5	5.6	253	3 rd
4	Minimizing the work load of women by means of division of work in the family.	75	83.3	11	12.2	4	4.4	251	4 th
5	Education of women so as to develop their ability and to have confidence on their action.	70	77.8	12	13.3	8	8.9	242	5 th
6	The Woreda cooperative promotion bureau initiates the cooperative societies to involve women members.	60	66.7	20	22.2	10	11.1	230	6 th
7	Women in leadership position in cooperative encourage other women to be a member and to be active participants.	55	61.1	27	30	8	8.9	227	7 th
8	Changing the ways of life of pastoral women from movable nature of life to sedentary way of life.	45	50	30	33.3	15	16.7	210	8 th

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