



Contributions Of Agricultural Co-Operative Societies To Food Production In South South Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to assess the contributions of agricultural co-operative societies to food production in the south-south Nigeria. The objectives of the study included; to find out the socio-economic characteristics of members of registered agricultural co-operative societies in south-south Nigeria, to ascertain the importance of agricultural cooperative societies in south-south Nigeria, and to identify the constraints faced by members of agricultural co-operative societies in accessing the service of cooperative societies in south-south Nigeria. The South-South Zone of Nigeria comprises Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, and Edo States. The data for the study was collected with a structured questionnaire. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 96 respondents involved in the study. Frequency and percentage were used as analytical tools aimed at addressing objectives (i) and (ii) while mean statistic was used for objective (iii). On socio-economic characteristics of the farmers involved in cooperative societies in south-south Nigeria based on gender, age, marital status, educational qualifications, family size, farm size, land tenureship, year of cooperative membership, the results revealed inter alia; women farmers were more involved in agricultural cooperatives than their male counterparts, most farmer cooperators were married and of 35-44 age range with no formal education; that most agricultural cooperators had average family size of 1-3 with more than 2.5 hectares of land for farming with 0-10 years of farming experience; that most farmer cooperators utilized inherited land for their farming activities and been members of co-operative society for 1-5year. The findings of the study also confirmed that agricultural cooperatives is invaluable to members by enhancing agricultural production, boasting food production, and information on supply agricultural innovations and production resources to member farmers. Accessing the services of agricultural cooperative societies by members in south south Nigeria is constrained by inadequate input among others. It was recommended among others that male farmers should be encouraged to join agricultural cooperatives in south south Nigeria.

Keywords: Agricultural cooperative Society, Food Production, Socio-economic characteristics

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing advocacy for achieving sustainable food production in Nigeria today. A lot of efforts has been directed at finding appropriate structure for organizing small scale farmers towards achieving sustainable food production (Oyido, 2007). Agricultural co-operative society has been identified as the appropriate vehicle in this regard; for harnessing and pooling the resources of small holder farmers together to optimize the benefit of large scale production (Ukeje, 2008).

Agricultural co-operative societies as pointed out by Omofesho (2008) is one most effective vehicle for mobilizing production resources for accelerated rural development. It is a fact that the small scale individual capacity demand of the peasants production cannot cope with technological and capital

demand of modernized agriculture. Even though the farming may be considered efficient within the static frame work of its motive of enterprise-self-sufficiency, the dynamic demands of modern times are such that drastic structural setting has to be subjected to drastic structural change. And the peasants should be educated such that they know that their interest is being fostered (Okolocha, 1993).

Agricultural co-operative societies have existed over the years to play pertinent roles of drastic structural change in agriculture towards sustainable food production and also for socio-economic upliftment of the farmers (Ugururedo, 2008). Uchendu (2008) observed that the original impetus for the organization of co-operatives in Nigeria came from agriculture or more precisely from the marketing of cash crops for exports. Since then cooperative development has taken different forms and dimensions. According to Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) (2001), emphasis in cooperative development is now on multipurpose agricultural marketing. They noted that 96% of agricultural co-operative societies in Nigeria are designed basically to serve the needs of agriculture. Even the four percent (4%) which constitute non-agricultural cooperative societies have great relevance for agricultural production, agricultural produce and by-products.

It is a truism that government efforts over the years could not guarantee adequate food and fiber for the citizenry. Presently, the country has increased its dependence on food imports. For example food imported from the United State in 2007 alone was about ₦2.2billion (Muhammad, 2008). This precarious situation has necessitated the introduction of National Programme on Food Security (NPFS), a special programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) on agricultural activities to increase food production in the country. Its activities are being carried out in the thirty six states of the country and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja (Onugu, 2012). In South-South Nigeria, a number of National Programme on food Security (NPFS) activities focused on crop farming, fishery, timber exploitation and processing of agricultural products. The component structure of NPFS in south-south is mainly the affairs of each state, Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) staff, and the beneficial community based farmers.

Perhaps one of the greatest problem confronting farmers today is the lop-sided and unbalanced development of their environment and how best to improve the living standard of the rural farmers. The gross imbalance and inequalities in the level of development between the rural and urban areas of Nigeria is enormous taking south-south geo-political zone as a case study. In spite of all the orchestrated policies and programmes of successive government in Nigeria. The problem of rural backwardness and under-development has remained unresolved. This is evident in persistence of agricultural stagnation, hunger, poverty, disease, unemployment, poor-housing, under-employment, and poor infrastructure. Most of our rural areas also suffer from inadequacy of social services, high birth rate, death rate, low life expectancy, malnutrition and ignorance, lack of productive technical workforce (International Labour Organization (ILO) 2010).

Agricultural co-operative societies have been playing vital roles in the economic development of Nigeria. Agricultural cooperative organizations impact better farm yield and inversely yield better living standard, better housing, better education for members and their families. Economic success of co-operative societies has been documented profusely in most cooperative studies (Akinyele, 2009).

In south-south Nigeria (Cross River, Akwa Ibom, River State, Beyelsa State, Delta State and Edo State, most farmers survive economically through membership of agricultural co-operative societies. Agricultural co-operative societies aid improvement in food production and invariably the level of living of farmers. Agricultural co-operative is also targeted at improvement of both size and qualities of food produce.

Statement of the problem

The agricultural co-operative movement among farmer are viewed to be instrumental to Agricultural transformation and boosting productivity in the sector. It has been widely acknowledged as making enormous contributions towards the growth and development of national economy. Adequate financing plays vital role in agricultural productivity. Low level of education, poor orientation, and lack of collateral constitutes critical barrier to securing loan from commercial banks by farmers. Furthermore, it is noted that the disbursement of farm credits by commercial banks is skewed against the small scale farmers.

Farmers are therefore discouraged from approaching banks for credit facilities to finance farm operations. For instance, about 92% of small scale farmers obtained their credit from non-institutional source (Umeh & Adebisi, 2008). Based on these facts, agricultural cooperative societies were formed with the primary objective of making farm credit available to farmers with reduced bottleneck. Agricultural co-operative societies play crucial roles in rural mobilization for agricultural development, provision of credit for small scale agricultural ventures, and provision of employment opportunities in the rural areas.

However, some pertinent variables seem to constraint the operation of successful agricultural cooperatives in Nigeria for the desired impact to be realized. This was the crux of this study; to ascertain the contributions of agricultural co-operative societies to food production in south south Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. To find out the socio-economic characteristics of members of registered agricultural co-operative societies in south-south Nigeria
2. To ascertain the importance of agricultural cooperative societies in south-south Nigeria
3. Identify the constraints faced by members of agricultural co-operative societies in accessing the service of cooperative societies in south-south Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria which comprises Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Edo and Delta States. The population of the study was made up of all members of registered agricultural co-operative in south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria. Multi-stage random sampling technique was adopted in the study. Four states, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, and Edo were randomly sampled for the study. Also four local government areas were randomly sampled from each of the sampled states giving a total of 16. Six members of registered agricultural co-operative societies were thereafter selected from each local government areas. This gave a total of 96 respondents used for the study. Frequency and percentage were used as analytical tools aimed at addressing objectives (i) and (ii) while mean statistic was used aimed at addressing objective iii. To identify the constraint faced by members of registered agricultural co-operative societies in accessing the service of co-operatives societies in the study area a list of possible constraints was provided for the respondents to rank on a 3-point scale of Serious Constraint = 3, Constraint = 2, and No Constraint At All = 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table I: Frequency and percentage distribution of socio-economic characteristics of the farmers of agricultural cooperative societies in the south-south Nigeria

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
A) Gender		
Male	46	47.9
Female	50	52.1
(B) Age of respondents		
25-34	28	29.2
35-44	35	36.5
45-54	21	21.1
55-60	12	12.5
(C) Marital status		
Single	33	34.4
Married	42	43.8
Divorced	10	10.42
Widowed	11	11.46
(D) Educational qualification		
No formal education	22	13.21
Adult education	24	20.8
Primary education	19	17.71
Secondary education	17	15.63
Tertiary education	17	15.63
(E) Family size		
1-3	34	35-42
4-6	27	28.13
7-9	20	20.83
10-12	10	10.42
13 and above	5	5.20
(F) Farm Land Size		
<2.5 hectare	45	46.9
2.5-4 hectare	35	36.5
5.0 hectare above	16	16.7
(G) Farm tenure ship		
Inheritance	42	43.8
Least holding/rent	6	6.25
Gift	6	6.25
Exchange	42	43.8
Others	0	0
(H)Year of cooperative membership		
1-5 years	44	45-83
6-10 year	44	45-83
10-15 years	8	8.3
20 years and above	0	0

Table I presents data on socio-economic characteristics of the farmers involved in cooperative societies in the south-south Nigeria based on gender, age, marital status, educational qualifications, family size, farm size, land tenureship, year of cooperative membership. On the basis of gender, the result revealed that 47.9% were male while 52.1% were female. This implied that in the study area, women farmers are more involved in agricultural cooperatives than their male counterparts. Data in Table 1 also revealed that 29.9% of respondents fell within the age of 25-34 years, 36.5% were of the 35-44 years category, and 21.9% were of 45-54 years and 12.5% to the range of 55-60 years of age. It implied that the respondent were in their middle ages which give them the ability to cope with labor requirement since farming requires energy. This finding is in harmony with Ahmed, (2016).which in a related study revealed that most of the farmers in the study area-were in the middle ages, as such younger people have more tendencies to participate more effectively in agricultural cooperatives than the older counterparts.

Table 1 also presents data on marital status of the respondents. The results indicated that 34.4% of the respondents were single, 43.8% married, 10.42% divorced, while 11.46% were widows. The result also shows that the married couples dominate the agricultural co-operative societies in the study area indicating that they often engage in farming in order to sustain their families and meet social order needs. This finding is in line with Givary (2013) who found out that majority of his respondents in a related study were married.

On educational level of the respondents, the findings indicated that 30.21% of the respondents, had no formal education, 20.8. % were educated through adult education programme, 17.7% had primary education, while 15.63% acquired up to secondary and territory education respectively. This implied that only an insignificant category of respondents were literate who can effectively communicate with people, keep record of transactions and most importantly adopt agricultural innovations most rapidly compared to a large majority of uneducated individuals existing in the study area. This finding is in line with Sani (2008).

The results also shows that 35.42% of the respondents had a family size of 1-3, 28.13% had a family size of 4-6, 10.42% had a family size of 10-12, while 5.20% had a family size of 13 and above. This implied that most respondents had a family size of 1-3 persons a house hold. The result in Table 1 also show respondents' farm size. The study revealed that some respondents had more than 2.5 hectares of land for farming; 36.5% had between 2.5-4.9 hectares of land while 16.7% had above 5.0 hectares of land for farming. However, most farmers, the result revealed had few hectares of land which they use mainly to cultivate food to feed their families and to earn income.

Data in Table 1 also show the farming experience of the respondents. A critical analysis revealed that 43.8% of the respondents had 0-10 years of farming experience, 42.71% had 11-20 years of experience, 42.71% had between 11-20 years of experience, while 13.54% had 21-30 year of experience. None of the respondent had experience beyond 30 years. This implied that most members of registered agricultural cooperative had 0-10 years of farming experience within the south-south zone. This group contributes significantly to food production in the geopolitical zone. The result of land tenureship practices of the respondents in the south-south zone of Nigeria is also revealed in Table 1. Analysis of the data revealed that 43.8% of the respondents utilized inherited land for their farming activities, 6.25% used leased/rented land, and 6.25% got their farm land as a gift while 43.8% got their farm land by exchange. This implied that most members of registered agricultural cooperative societies in the study area inherited land they use for farm activities from their ancestors. On the years of co-operative membership, the study revealed that 45.83% of the respondents had been members of co-operative society for 1-5year, 45.83% for 6-10years, and 8.3% for 10-15years. However, no members of co-operative society within the study area had been in co-operative for 20 years and above.

Table 2: Frequency and percentage distribution of importance of agricultural cooperative societies in the south-south Nigeria

	Frequency	Percentage(%)
(A) Benefits of membership		
Change in working method	7	7.3
Change in diet	15	15.63
Change in agricultural production	67	69.8
Change in income	7	7.3
(B) Enhancing agricultural production		
Increase food production	32	33.33
Access to loans and credit facilities	27	28.13
Marketing of farm produce	12	12.5
Provision of market for farm produce	13	13.54
Price stability and monitoring	5	5.21
Access to inputs at cheap rates	7	7.30
(C) Boosting of food production		
Yes	65	67.71
No	31	32.3
(D) Attitude towards farmers		
Agricultural co-operatives have good rapport with farmers	11	11.46
Agricultural co-operatives supply agricultural innovations and production resources price to farmers	23	23.96
Agricultural co-operatives provide farm information in suitable time to farmer	10	10.42
Some of the agricultural co-operative activities are exclusively channeled to executives members, their relatives and friends	9	9.38
Agricultural co-operatives exist only to help farmers get access to cheap government loan and subsidies	28	29.2
Agricultural co-operatives exist to promote rural development	15	15.63

Table 2 presents frequency and percentage distribution of importance of agricultural cooperative societies in the south-south Nigeria. On memberships' benefits, the result (See Table 2 (A)) shows that 7.3% of the respondents have been positively impacted as they experience change in income, 15.63% experienced change in diet, and 69.8% have experienced change in agricultural production while 7.3% experienced change in working methods. This implied that belonging to agricultural cooperative societies impacted positively on agricultural production in terms of enhanced agricultural productivity.

Analysis in Table 2(B) also reveal that 33.3% of the respondents had enjoyed increased food production, 28.13% benefited from access to loans and credit facilities, 12.5% enjoyed improved marketing of farm produce, 13.54% of respondents confirmed provision of market for their farm produce, 5.21% benefited through price stability and monitoring, while 7.30% had benefited through access to farm inputs at cheaper rates. Generally, co-operative society have a significant role of improving the economic level of

farmers in south-south Nigeria through optimized food production as well as serving as a medium for its members to access loans and credit facilities easily.

Agricultural cooperative societies' capability of boosting food production in the south-south Nigeria is shown in Table 2(C). It reveals that most respondents (67.7%) are of the view that the activities of agricultural cooperative societies are capable of boosting food productivity in south-south Nigeria. Data in Table 2 (D) shows the attitudinal disposition of agricultural co-operative societies towards farmer members. The findings indicated that farmers, agricultural cooperative societies supply agricultural innovations and production requirements in suitable price for farmers, provide agriculture information, in suitable time for farmers, and promote rural development.

Table 3: Mean ratings on constraints to accessing the services of agricultural cooperative societies in south south Nigeria

		Mean score	Remarks
1.	Problem in accessing loan	2.7	C
2.	Inaccessibility to fertilizer	2.5	C
3.	Inadequate provision of farm	2.1	C
4.	Poor extension services	1.6	NCA
5.	Problem with marketing of produce	1.7	NCA

Note: Serious Constraint (SC) 3, Constraint (C) 2, No Constraint At all (NCA) = 1.
N=96

Table 3 presents analysis on the constraints faced by farmers in accessing the services of cooperative societies in south south Nigeria. The constraints as indicated in the result reveals include inability to access loans, fertilizer, and other farm inputs (seeds). However, the analysis revealed that poor extension and marketing of produce is not a constraint to farmer cooperative members as they seem to consistently have access to services of agricultural cooperative societies.

CONCLUSION

Putting it succinctly, majority of agricultural cooperative members were female, with long years of farming experience and they also have relatively large household size. The agricultural cooperative performed invaluable roles in optimizing food production thereby enhancing food security for the growing population in south south Nigeria. Agricultural Cooperative supplies agricultural immigration and agricultural production requirements in suitable price and time for farmers. The constraints faced by farmers members of agricultural cooperatives in accessing the services of the cooperatives include among others the inaccessibility of loans, fertilizer and adequate farm inputs.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendation were made:

1. Male farmers in the south south Nigeria should be encouraged to join agricultural cooperative societies.
2. Agricultural co-operative societies operating in south south Nigeria should be liberal in approach rather than exclusively channeling their activities to executives members, their relatives and friends
3. Government should make soft loans, fertilizers, and other farm inputs accessible to members of the agricultural co-operative societies in the south south Nigeria

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