Gender-Based Barriers and Transformation Potentials to Women Participation in Coffee Cooperatives in Kiambu County

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Abstract

Gender transformational interventions in different sectors has potential to increase women's rights and foster inclusive growth. Based on this and considering that women's participation in coffee cooperatives in Kenya has historically remained low, it is necessary that any intervention in the sector is assessed to ascertain its transformational potential for the sub-sector. This study examined gender-based barriers and transformation potential to women participation in coffee cooperatives in Kiambu County. It's guided by Gender and Development theory and adopted descriptive design. A sample of 398 participants was selected using simple random and purposive sampling methods. Data collection involved questionnaires for cooperative members and in-depth interviews with managers, chairpersons and cooperative officers. Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively and qualitative data through thematic analysis. The findings revealed key barriers such as lack of recognition of women's contributions, limited access to training, land and financial resources. The Coffee bill, 2023 was found to have the lowest potential for gender transformation, indicating limited capacity to foster inclusivity. The study recommended revisions to the Coffee bill, 2023 to better promote gender-inclusive practices in the coffee sector.

Keywords: Coffee Cooperatives, Coffee Sector, Gender-Based Barriers, Gender Responsiveness, Women Participation.

Introduction

Equal representation of women in agricultural cooperatives is both a women's right and a necessity for long-term, inclusive growth (Woldu et al., 2015). Cooperatives which are inclusive, providing opportunities for women participation can assist women in overcoming gender specific limitations, improving their knowledge, leadership abilities, self-assurance, access to agricultural inputs, social networks and position in value (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2013). Besides, agricultural cooperatives can be a useful tool for transforming if interventions in agricultural sectors are well planned and implemented with the needs and interests of women farmers in mind, which entails tackling social and cultural conventions that prevented women from joining cooperatives and giving women members specialized support and training (Mensah et al., 2018).

While significant progress has been made in promoting gender responsiveness in agricultural cooperatives, challenges remain. Globally, women make up 43% of the agricultural labor force (FAO, 2023), yet they continue to face discrimination in terms of land and livestock ownership, decision-making power and access to financial resources. Different agencies, including FAO have taken steps to address these barriers, advocating for gender equality policies at the governmental level and empowering women with business and entrepreneurial skills at the individual level (FAO, 2023), but cultural and social barriers continue to hinder women's full participation in agricultural cooperatives, limiting women's access to resources and leadership roles (Korinek et al., 2021) in different parts of the world.

In Kenya, agricultural cooperatives play a vital role in the coffee sector, employing a significant portion of the population. However, women still face entry barriers to these cooperatives, with only about 20% of cooperative members being women (ILO, 2020). To address these challenges, the Kenyan government has introduced various measures to improve the coffee sector. These include; financial support, prompt payment, improved extension services and training aimed at fostering better farming practices (Coffee Intelligence, 2023). Moreover, these measures are aimed at eliminating middlemen so as to create a more transparent and equitable system that benefits both male and female farmers (The Elephant, 2023).

Despite the government interventions, studies conducted on women participation in agricultural cooperatives have showed that that gender biases and discriminatory practices hinder women's access to cooperative resources and decision-making power. Further, in analyzing the initiatives, studies are leaning towards gender responsive budgeting which alone could not lead to responsiveness. As a result, this study on gender-based barriers to women participation, gender responsiveness of initiatives and how they influenced women participation was conducted. The study sought to identify the gender-based barriers to women participation in coffee cooperatives and gender responsiveness of initiatives in the coffee sector in Kiambu County.

The study was anchored on the Gender and Development (GAD) theory, which shifts the focus from merely integrating women into existing frameworks to addressing the underlying power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality. GAD emphasizes the importance of transforming gender relations by challenging social norms and institutional practices that marginalize women (Moser, 1993; Kabeer, 1994). By applying the GAD framework, this study aimed to assess how initiatives in the coffee sector are addressing the specific needs of women and whether the initiatives are creating lasting changes in gender relations within cooperatives.

Materials and Methods

Study Context

The study was conducted in Kiambu County, Kenya, the leading coffee producer among the 47 counties (County Government of Kiambu, 2021). It has a density of 990/km2 with an estimated population of 2,417,735 (1,187,146 men, 1,230,454 women and 135 intersex) and 796,241 households (KNBS, 2019). It comprises 12 sub-counties and is positioned between longitudes 36° 31' and 37° 15' East and latitudes 0° 25' and 1° 20' south of the equator. The County experiences a moderate climate due to its proximity to the equator. The County experiences well-distributed rainfall, with short rains from October through December and heavy rains from March through May, averaging 1200 millimeters yearly. It has three main soil categories: volcanic footbridge soils, high-level upland soils and plateau soils (Council of Governors, 2018).

The choice of Kiambu County for the study was because of the unique geographic, policy and socioeconomic contexts in the County, which provide a rich setting for investigating how regional dynamics influenced gender roles, resource access and cooperative involvement. Additionally, Kiambu's proximity to Nairobi ensured a mix of rural (40%) and urban (60%) influences, impacting economic activities and social structures. Hence, the study strived to fill the research gap within this region, specifically focusing on gender dynamics, by providing insights that could inform policies and initiatives in Kiambu County.

Methods

The research adopted a descriptive research design that was employed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the variables of interest, combining both quantitative and qualitative data to capture the complexities of women's participation and gender responsive initiatives in coffee cooperatives (McCombes, 2023). Based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, a sample of 381 coffee members from seven coffee cooperatives was selected from Githunguri, Gatundu South and Gatundu North sub-counties, which are the major coffee-growing areas in Kiambu.

In-Depth Interviews were conducted with seven Managers and seven Chairpersons in the sampled coffee cooperatives. Further, key Informant Interviews with 3 Cooperative Officers were conducted. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, with results presented in tables, frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis and presented through narrative summaries to provide deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities for women in coffee cooperatives.

Results and Discussions

Demographic Information of the Respondents

The researcher sought to establish the demographic information of the respondents addressing gender, age, education, marital status and monthly income. In terms of the gender of respondents who were involved in the research, 54.3% were female while 45.7% were male. The response implies that the gender representation in this research was fair enough for analysis. In terms of age, 102(32.4%) fell in the age bracket of 18-35, 139(44.1%) fell in the age bracket of 36-53 years, 65(20.6%) were in the age bracket of above 54-71 years while 9(2.9%) fell in the age bracket of 71 years and above. Majority being aged 36-53

years and minority 54-71 years. The result implied that while coffee sector is known to be dominated by old farmers, youth were also embracing coffee farming.

On levels of education, 84(27%) had attended up to college/ university, 73(23%) attended other institutions of higher learning. On the other hand, 66(21%) participants in the study had attended up to primary level of education, while 92(29%) had attended up to secondary level of education. Majority had attended up to secondary level while minority attended up to primary school level. The results implied that most of the coffee cooperative members had fairly good level of education, hence had adequate knowledge and understanding about coffee cooperatives.

On marital status, 41(13.0%) are divorced, 176(55.9%) are married, 59(18.7%) were single and 39(12.4%) are widowed. Majority were married while minority were widowed. On monthly household income, 61(19.4%) participants earned between 0 and 9,999, while 62(19.7%) earned between 10,000 and 19,999, 75 (23.8%) earn between 20,000 and 29,999, 62(19.7%) earn between 30,000 and 39,999, 26(8.3%) earn between 40,000 and 49,999 and 29(9.2%) earn above 50,000. Majority earned between 20,000 and 29,999 while the minority earned between 40,000 and 49,999. The results implied a mixture on the monthly household income, showing that most members earned low to moderate income which could hinder the operation of the family.

Gender-Based Barriers to Women Participation in Coffee Cooperatives

The focus of the study was respondents' perception of gender-barriers to women participation in coffee cooperatives. The study sought to determine whether respondents perceived access to financial resources and credit, accessing training programs, meeting time in cooperatives, under-representation in leadership positions, lack of recognition of women contributions to be barriers to women participation in coffee cooperatives.

Table 1: Perception on Gender-Based Barriers to Women Participation in Coffee Cooperatives

Item	% Yes	% No	% Don't Know
Access to financial resources and credit facilities	205(65.1 %)	89(28.3 %)	21(6.7 %)
Limited access to land	209(66.3 %)	77(24.4 %)	29(9.2 %)
Obstacles in accessing training programs	219(69.5 %)	64(20.3 %)	32(10.2 %)
Time for holding meetings in the coffee cooperative	189(60.0 %)	104(33.0 %)	22(7.0 %)
Underrepresentation in leadership positions diminishes voice and influence of women	196(62.2 %)	96(30.5 %)	23(7.3 %)
Lack of recognition of women contributions in cooperatives	233(74.0 %)	63(20.0 %)	19(6.0 %)
Unequal distribution of labor responsibilities	196(62.2 %)	106(33.7 %)	13(4.1 %)

As seen in Table 1, for all the gender-based factors analyzed, more than half of the respondents indicated they affected women participation in coffee cooperatives. The factor on which the highest proportion of respondents indicated affected women participation was lack of recognition of women contributions in cooperatives. Out of 315 respondents, 233 (74.0%) indicated that a lack of recognition for their contributions to the coffee cooperative affected their willingness to engage in cooperative activities, suggesting that most members felt their efforts were undervalued. Conversely, 63 (20.0%) respondents

reported that the lack of recognition did not impact their willingness to engage, implying they were either satisfied with the recognition they received or motivated by factors beyond acknowledgment. Additionally, 19 (6.0%) respondents expressed uncertainty, indicating variability on perceptions or a lack of clarity on the issue.

In an IDIs, respondents consistently made statements that pointed to the importance of recognition and reward programs for fostering active engagement as captured in an IDI with Manager who stated;

Despite the contributions by women to the coffee cooperatives mostly in the farming activities of cherries, their efforts are not seen, and this discourages them from participating in cooperative activities, especially since women are not involved in decision-making process in the coffee cooperatives.

This finding indicated recognition to be an important factor for women participation as it was consistent with a study by Bilfield et al., (2020) which showed that women played a hidden role in the coffee industry as they participated more in the harvest and its aftermath, such as coffee's washing, de-pulping and drying yet these roles were not acknowledged in the coffee organization's decision-making process. Also, women were not afforded much room or respect as they were forced to perform the most labor-intensive tasks around the house without pay or appreciation.

Analysis revealed obstacles in accessing training programs to be the second most important barrier to women participation in coffee cooperatives. Out of 315 respondents, 219 (69.5%) respondents indicated obstacles in accessing training programs hindered their involvement in the coffee cooperative. In contrast, 64 (20.3%) respondents reported that training access obstacles did not hinder their participation, implying that they either had sufficient access to training or did not see it as a critical factor. Additionally, 32 (10.2%) respondents were uncertain about the impact of training access barriers, reflecting a lack of awareness or variability in how training opportunities influenced their participation.

In the In-Depth interviews, interviewees frequently highlighted the importance of training for their effective participation in cooperatives. It was captured in an IDI with the Chairman of Management Board who stated;

The training programs are available in the coffee cooperatives and motivational programs have been implemented, but it's hard for women to take advantage of the training opportunities because of the time set for the trainings and the distance to the coffee cooperative.

This showed the need for more accessible, inclusive training programs that address the specific challenges women face, such as location, timing and competing responsibilities. This finding was consistent with a study by Lebailly (n.d.) as it noted that access to training and capacity building was crucial for effective cooperative participation as trained members showed higher levels of engagement.

Limited access to land was found to be the third key barrier to women participation in coffee cooperatives. A total of 209 (66.3%) respondents, out of 315, indicated that limited access to land negatively affected their participation in the coffee cooperative, underscoring the critical role land ownership or access plays in cooperative involvement. This finding highlighted the challenges many members faced regarding land access, which hindered their full participation. On the other hand, 77 (24.4%) respondents reported that limited land access did not influence their participation, suggesting either sufficient access to land or the presence of other more significant factors. Lastly, 29 (9.2%) respondents were uncertain about the impact

of land access on their participation, reflecting a lack of awareness or variability in how land issues were perceived.

In the In-Depth Interviews and Key Informant Interviews, many interviewees pointed to land access as a major barrier despite efforts to improve the situation. It was captured in an KII with County Cooperative Officer who stated;

I find that most women who don't have access to land are limited in coffee farming hence you find them joining or rejoining the coffee cooperative when they are widowed as they have full control of land. Also, women are involved in farming activities and that counts as having access to land despite it being family land.

These insights reinforced the quantitative findings, demonstrating that land access remained a barrier to women's participation in coffee cooperatives. This finding was consistent with a study by Bekele (2016); Rokhani et al., (2021) which found that land tenure had a major impact on farmers' involvement in farmers associations and overall agricultural productivity. Thus, a greater likelihood that a farmer would be involved in a farm organization when they had land tenure security.

Time for holding meetings in the coffee cooperative was found to be the least important factor in the participation of women in coffee cooperatives. Out of 315 respondents, a majority, 189 (60.0%), indicated that the timing of meetings in the coffee cooperative often made it impossible for them to attend due to domestic chores. This finding underscored the need for more flexible or convenient meeting times that would accommodate the domestic responsibilities of cooperative members, particularly women. In contrast, 104 (33.0%) respondents reported that meeting times did not interfere with their participation, suggesting they were able to manage household duties while attending scheduled meetings or did not view timing as a significant issue. Additionally, 22 (7.0%) respondents expressed uncertainty about the impact of meeting timing on their ability to participate, indicating variability in how domestic responsibilities affected their engagement or a lack of awareness of the issue. These showed the importance of flexible meeting times to increase participation rates, particularly for women who face the challenge of juggling domestic responsibilities with cooperative engagement. These findings were consistent with a study by Lyon et al., (2017) which showed that domestic chores often fell disproportionately on women, limiting their ability to attend meetings or engage in cooperative tasks.

Gender Transformation Value of Initiatives in Coffee Sector in Kiambu County

The study examined four key initiatives in coffee sectoron gender transformation of the sector in Kenya. The first initiative; Directive on Payment of Farmers mandates timely payments upon harvest delivery to improve financial stability for farmers. The second initiative; the Coffee bill, 2023, was designed to regulate the coffee sector and promote farmers' interests. The Single Licensing Policy on the other hand is aimed at simplifying the registration process for coffee industry participants. Lastly, the Registration of Farmers' Unions aimed at fostering collective bargaining power for coffee farmers, enhancing market access and empowering farmers within the sector.

To determine gender transformation values of the initiatives, respondents were asked to indicate whether the implementation of the different initiatives would contribute to changes in cultural values/norms that negatively impact on women participation; contribute to changes in power relations between men and

women; and would enhance participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in the coffee sector, indicating either yes, no or don't know.

Table 2: Respondent Perception of Gender Transformation Potential of Initiatives in Coffee Sector

Gender Transformation potential of Directive on Payment of Farmers	**Yes (%)**	**No (%)**	**Don't Know (%)**
Implementation of the directive for payment to farmers upon arrival of the harvest at coffee cooperative contributed to changes in cultural values/norms that negatively impact on women participation in coffee sector	124(70.9)	45(25.7)	6(3.4)
Implementation of the directive for payment to farmers upon arrival of the harvest at coffee cooperative contributed to changes in power relations between men and women in coffee farming households	81(46.3)	82(46.9)	12(6.9)
Implementation of the directive for payment to farmers upon arrival of the harvest at coffee cooperative enhanced participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in the coffee sector?	158(90.3)	10(5.7)	7(4.0)
Gender transformation Potential of Coffee bill, 2023 on Gender issues in Coffee Sector	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
Coffee bill, 2023 currently in parliament will contribute to changes in cultural values/norms that impact on women participation in coffee sector	68(49.6)	62(45.3)	7(5.1)
Coffee bill, 2023 currently in parliament will contribute to changes in power relations between men and women in coffee farming households	81(59.1)	9(6.6)	47(34.3)
Coffee bill, 2023 currently in parliament will enhance participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in coffee sector	104(75.9)	26(19.0)	7(5.1)
Gender transformation Potential of Single Licensing Policy	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
Implementation of single licensing in the coffee cooperatives will contribute to changes in cultural values/norms that negatively impact on women participation in coffee sector	121(78.6)	23(14.9)	10(6.5)
Implementation of single licensing in the coffee cooperative will contribute to changes in power relations between men and women in coffee farming households	121(78.6)	29(18.8)	4(2.6)
Implementation of single licensing in the coffee will enhance participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in coffee sector	125(81.2)	18(11.7)	11(7.1)
Registration of Farmers' Union	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
Registration of farmers' union s will contribute to changes in cultural values/norms that negatively impact on women participation in coffee sector	150(84.7)	15(8.5)	12(6.8)
Registration of farmers' union s will contribute to changes in power relations between men and women in coffee farming households	101(57.1)	61(34.5)	15(8.5)
Registration of farmer's unions will enhance participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in coffee sector	143(80.8)	19(10.7)	15(8.5)

As shown in table 2, the initiative which had the highest proportion of respondents indicating it could contribute to changes in cultural values/norms that negatively impacts on women participation was registration of farmers' unions. A total of 150(84.7) respondents indicated the initiative would contribute to changes in norms. On the other hand, the initiative which had the lowest proportion of respondents indicating it could contribute to changes in norms that negatively impact women participation was the coffee bill, 2023 (49.6%) 62(45.3). It is, however, not clear why respondents would perceive registration of farmers' union to change the cultural norms that negatively impact on women participation in the coffee cooperatives. Qualitative data from the IDIs and KIIs echoed these findings, with the interviewees emphasizing the changes in cultural values/norms. It was captured in an KII with County Cooperative Officer who stated.

I believe that registering farmers' unions can create a platform for women to voice their concerns. If women can organize and represent themselves, it can shift their perceptions about their roles in cooperatives. And with a shift of the perception of their roles, they can tackle traditional gender roles and norms.

On perception of initiatives to contribute to changes in power relations between men and women in coffee farming households, Directive for Payment of Farmers 81 (46.3%); Coffee bill, 2023- 81(59.1%); Single Licensing Policy-121 (78.6%); Registration of Farmers' Union 101(57.1%). The initiative which the highest proportion of respondents indicated to contribute to changes in power relations between men and women in coffee farming households was single licensing policy. The initiative, which had the lowest proportion of respondents was the directive for payment of farmers indicating lowest contribution of the initiative.

Qualitative data from the IDIs and KIIs echoed these findings, with the interviewees emphasizing the changes in power. It was captured in an IDI with Chairman of Management Board who stated;

I believe with the adoption of single licensing policy such as milling, bulking and processing, women can focus on their expert areas in the coffee cooperatives hence negotiate better deals and contribute to household income, changing how power is distributed at their households.

On perception of initiatives to enhance participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in coffee sector, Directive for Payment of Farmers 158 (90.3%); Coffee bill, 2023- 104(75.9%); Single Licensing Policy-125(81.2%); Registration of Farmers' Unions 143(80.8%). The initiative which the highest proportion of respondents indicated to enhance participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in coffee sector was directive for payment of farmers. The initiative, which had the lowest proportion of respondents was the Coffee bill, 2023 indicating lowest awareness on the initiative.

Qualitative data from the IDIs and KIIs echoed these findings, with the interviewees emphasizing the participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in coffee sector. It was captured in an IDI with Manager who stated;

I find the directive for payment of farmers upon delivery of coffee empowering as most financial constraints can be avoided and participation of women increased in the coffee cooperatives. Our coffee cooperative so far has tried to adhere to the initiative by giving advances to the members in about one weeks' time.

The findings showed that: - Registration of Farmers' Unions was leading in contributing to changes in cultural values/norms that negatively impact on women participation., Single Licensing Policy leading in to contribute to changes in power relations between men and women in coffee farming households; and Directive for Payment of Farmers leading on enhancing participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in coffee sector highlighted a mixture of optimism and skepticism regarding these initiatives. While there is a strong belief in their potential to effect change, especially regarding the Registration of Farmers' Unions and the Directive for Payment of Farmers, there are also concerns about awareness and understanding of the initiatives, particularly the Coffee bill, 2023 and its implications for cultural norms and enhancing participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in coffee sector.

The study undertook a comparison of respondents' perception on the potential of the initiatives in contributing to transformation in the coffee cooperative sector. The results are summarized in table 3.

Table 3: Perception of Initiatives in Contributing to Different Aspects of Gender Transformation in Coffee Sector

Statements	**Payment directive**	**Coffee bill, 2023**	**Single Licensing**	**Registration of Farmers'**
Potential of initiative contributing to changes in cultural values/norms that impact on women participation in coffee sector	124(70.9)	68(49.6)	121(78.6)	150(84.7)
Potential of initiative contributing to changes in power relations between men and women in coffee farming households	81(46.3)	81(59.1)	121(78.6)	101(57.1)
Potential of initiative enhancing participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in the coffee sector	158(90.3)	104(75.9)	125(81.2)	143(80.8)

As shown in table 3, Overall, the Coffee bill, 2023 was found to have the lowest contributed to changes in cultural values/norms that negatively impact on women. Analysis revealed that less than half of the respondents 49.6% indicated that Coffee bill, 2023 would contribute to changes in cultural values/norms that negatively impact on women. Further, of the three initiatives considered, Coffee bill, 2023 had lower proportion of respondents indicating the initiative would enhance participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in the coffee cooperatives. The 75.9% respondents who indicated that the Coffee bill, 2023 would enhance participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in the coffee cooperatives was lower that of Payment directive (90.3), Single Licensing (81.2) and registration of farmer's union ((80.8). This was interpreted to imply that the bill was perceived to contribute least to gender transformation that would open space for women participation in coffee cooperatives in Kiambu County. This finding is consistent with a study by Kariuki and Karanja (2019) that found that while laws promoting women's participation were in place, cultural norms and limited dissemination at the grassroots level hampered their effectiveness. It emphasized that legal frameworks alone were insufficient to transform gender relations unless they were supported by concerted efforts to raise awareness and challenge societal norms.

Additionally, the Directive for Payment of Farmers initiative had the second lowest proportion of respondents indicating that the directive for payment to farmers upon arrival of the harvest at coffee cooperative would contribute to changes in power relations between men and women in coffee sector. Analysis revealed that more than half of the respondents 70.9% indicated that policy would contribute to changes in cultural values/norms that negatively impact on women. On the directive it showed that least proportion of 46.3% perceived the power changes in coffee sector whereas the highest proportion of 90.3% showed that the initiative enhanced participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in the coffee cooperatives.

This was interpreted to imply that the directive was perceived to contribute second least to gender transformation that would open space for women participation in coffee cooperatives in Kiambu County. This finding is consistent with a study by Trejo-Pech et al., (2023) which showed that sometimes farmers chose not to join cooperatives since they were unable to fully compensate them during harvest and coffee collection seasons. Hence, although the directive addresses the timing of payments to farmers, it does not significantly shift power relations but plays a critical role in promoting participation and inclusion in coffee cooperatives in Kiambu County. It was thought that when cooperatives were unable to pay farmers on time, farmers were more likely to experience cash flow problems and require outside funding in order to meet their basic needs.

The registration of farmers' union had the highest proportion of respondents indicating that the policy would contribute to changes in power relations between men and women in coffee farming. Analysis revealed that more than half of the respondents (84.7%) indicated that policy would contribute to changes in cultural values/norms that negatively impact on women. On the registration it had the second lowest proportion of 57.1% on power changes and also second least proportion of 80.8% on enhancing participation and representation of women and men in all their diversity in the coffee cooperatives. This was interpreted to imply that the policy was perceived to contribute the highest to gender transformation that would open space for women participation in coffee cooperatives in Kiambu County. These findings were consistent with a study by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperatives (2020), which showed concern for the registration of farmers' unions as they helped farmers overcome limitations, they might face individually by providing a united front for negotiations and market access. The research highlighted the role of registration in opening up spaces for women's participation in coffee cooperatives in Kiambu County, aligned with the ministry's observations that effective governance and unity among cooperatives are essential for long-term success.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study identified two key findings that underscored the complexities of women's participation in coffee cooperatives in Kiambu County. First, significant barriers that hindered women's engagement, particularly the lack of recognition for their contributions, limited access to training programs tailored to their needs and unequal access to land and financial resources. These obstacles reinforced traditional gender roles and created an environment where women's involvement is marginalized, highlighting the urgent need for cooperatives to implement more inclusive practices that acknowledge and empower women's roles within the sector.

Second, the study revealed that the Coffee bill, 2023 has the lowest proportion of perceived effectiveness among the various initiatives assessed. Despite its potential to promote gender diversity and participation, there remains a notable lack of awareness and understanding of the Coffee bill, 2023 among stakeholders. This gap in knowledge suggested that, without targeted efforts to educate and engage the community, the Coffee bill, 2023 could fall short in fostering the necessary cultural and structural changes to enhance women's participation in coffee cooperatives. Consequently, improving awareness and understanding of this legislation is crucial to unlocking its potential benefits and facilitating gender transformation within the coffee sector.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends implementation of targeted interventions that address the identified barriers limiting women's engagement. This should include creating training programs that are tailored to women's specific needs, ensuring accessibility in terms of timing and location and providing support for women to access land and financial resources. Review of cooperative bi-laws is needed to transform coffee cooperative structures to promote gender inclusivity in their governance organs and management practices. Also, there is a critical need to revise the Coffee bill, 2023 to include gender transformation provisions, to position it as a vital tool for facilitating gender transformation and enhancing women's participation in coffee cooperatives.

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