

Organizational Strategies for Addressing Barriers to Women's Participation in Agricultural Cooperatives

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Abstract

Most of the time, women's active participation is structural and stems from household and community sociocultural norms. Both the law and culture acknowledge males as the nominal owners of household assets in the vast majority of cases. Women consequently do not have equal access to money and benefits. Due to this lack of access, women's confidence is further undermined, which makes it rare for them to hold important positions in market-based agricultural and mixed cooperatives. The study adopted mixed method research design and targeted 45 registered dairy and coffee cooperative with a membership of 114,267 members in Kiambu County. Simple random sampling was used to sample 398 female members who participated in the study. Data was collected using questionnaires and key informant interview guides. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. The findings indicated that Level of education and age have a significant influence on women participation with both variables having a p value of 0.000. The findings also indicate that organizational policy strategies significantly affect women participation in agricultural cooperatives at $p=0.000$ and $r=0.33$. The study recommends that agricultural cooperatives should institute policies that favor women participation such as coopting some women members.

Keywords: Organization Policies, Barriers, Women's Participation, Agricultural Cooperatives

Introduction

The International Labor Organization (ILO) reports that women will make up 39.2% of the workforce and 28.2% of management in 2023 (UN Women, 2023). According to the data, women's share in management has increased extremely slowly over the past 20 years, from 25.3% in 2000 to 28.2% in 2023 (UN Women, 2023). Although women are underrepresented at all levels of leadership, this is particularly noticeable at the senior level (Moodly & Toni, 2017). It will take a while to attain gender parity in agricultural cooperative leadership if current trends continue (Kuzhabekova, 2021). However, since "gender parity in leadership is not only a matter of fairness but also a crucial requirement in the context of the changing higher education landscape," efforts and goals should go beyond simply ensuring gender parity (Idahosa, 2019). The field of higher education must recognize the significance of increasing the number of women in leadership roles Kassahun and Zeleke, (2021) the enormous impact that their advancement in leadership roles has on the field and society as a whole (Li and Kam2021), and the various agricultural and economic advantages that come with attending a university. Therefore, the notion of inclusion alone should not be the sole driving force behind attempts to promote gender equity in leadership. The role of women in leadership must be the main focus.

Women's involvement in and contribution to leadership roles in higher education are adversely affected by a number of variables. Among the main obstacles to women's participation in senior leadership roles across agricultural organizations are socio-cultural expectations (Odhiambo,2011), institutional policies and practices, lack of networking opportunities(Gandhi and Sen,2021); limited access to mentorship opportunities, unhelpful policies, race, work-family balance, lack of confidence, among other factors (OECD, 2020). Due to the significant influence that economic systems have on maintaining structural inequalities and solidifying patriarchal institutions, women's economic empowerment is essential to all impact areas. Lack of equal rights and access to markets and economic resources, for instance, limits women's production and keeps them in intergenerational, multifaceted poverty, resulting in disparities in income and well-being between the sexes (ILOSTAT, 2020). Women's economic empowerment, as a lens, focuses on how to create, distribute, and manage economic value and create the conditions for women to realize their rights through economic participation, including decent work, entrepreneurship, paid and unpaid care, and domestic work (Ramohai, 2019) The idea is that very little can be accomplished without financial means. Whether women are living in humanitarian, crisis, or peaceful environments, are represented as leaders in public institutions, or are enduring abuse and violence, this is pertinent to all facets of their existence.

Women have numerous obstacles in obtaining financial resources, education, training, and productive resources, which results in their disproportionate presence in low-skilled, low-paying, and insecure occupations, especially in the informal economy, which is characterized by long hours, hazardous working conditions, and little access to social protection (Semela, Bekele, and Abraham, 2019). These restrictions on women's and girls' education cost countries between \$15 and \$30 trillion in lifetime productivity and earnings; 118.5 million girls worldwide are not in school, and women make up approximately two-thirds of all people who are illiterate (ILOSTAT, 2020). Accessing and utilizing assets such as land, property, and financial services like credit and savings plans are also extremely difficult for women. In 190 nations, women only possess 77% of men's legal rights (ILOSTAT, 2020). In half of the countries that report, women's land rights have little legal protection (34 out of 68) (Kuagbedzi, Dhlamini, and Njenga, 2022).

Women make up less than 15% of agricultural landowners worldwide, though this varies greatly from nation to nation. After being at 9% since 2011, the gender gap in bank account ownership decreased to 6% in 2021 (Kuagbedzi, Dhlamini, and Njenga, 2022).

About 80% of Kenya's population is employed in small-holder agriculture, which is the main driver of the country's economy. Through collective negotiating power, farmer organizations are essential in maximizing the potential of economically disadvantaged farmers. Women farmers are essential to the supply of agricultural labor, ensuring food and nutritional security as well as the economic growth of their communities and homes. In addition, a sizable percentage of cooperative members are female farmers. Nevertheless, a number of sociocultural barriers impede their ability to contribute to and benefit from agriculture as well as farmer organizations. Because of their inability to perform the duties involved, women frequently have limited opportunity to engage in cooperative governance and management. To address this issue in the agricultural sector, development advocates have gradually undertaken a variety of initiatives, such as capacity building. The study's goal is to identify institutional measures for removing obstacles that prevent women from joining agricultural cooperatives.

During the Covid-19 period, families with low economic levels experienced significant economic demands, making the role of a mother crucial in alleviating the burden and promoting the family's prosperity. Through the Agricultural Cooperative, it is anticipated that women will gain more empowerment, expand their business opportunities, and receive financial support, access training facilities, and other beneficial resources that can enhance their overall well-being (Devanty, 2017).

There are some changes in the activities of agricultural cooperatives in order to adapt to the situation during the epidemic. Only by maintaining members' responsibility and high expectations can they cooperate with each other and remain successful during the epidemic. To achieve this, good collaborative governance is needed, including joint planning agreed upon by members, smooth performance of activities, and clear organization and control carried out transparently and in accordance with regulations. Growth and development during the pandemic

Previous research has been done on women's participation in various aspects of society. Aregawi et al (2013) found that women possess qualities of effective leadership, including intelligence, courage, initiative and confidence. Okioga (2013) notes that there has been only insignificant advancement in representation of women in administration organizations. For example, women make up 23% of board members (Board Diversity Report, KIM). This shows that the proportion of female managers is quite little. Nevertheless, it is important to note that women are also struggling to take leadership seats in parastatal organizations. A recent study found that very few female managers set new standards for achievement and essentially serve as role models for other female managers (Chawla & Pandit, 2018). Felix et al. (2016), notes the absence of appropriate professional and conceptual skills regarding social roles has had a significant impact in undermining the aspirations of women leaders. For example, it is noteworthy that only 25% of ministerial leadership (Job-P-U group) are women (Roudine, 2011).

Despite women's low participation due to organizational policy, financial informational and institutional culture barriers, agricultural cooperatives have started to embrace mechanisms of dealing with low women's involvement in activities such as membership, attendance at meetings, supply of agricultural produce, and leadership participation among others. This study intended to determine whether the strategies being

implemented by agricultural cooperatives are effective in bridging the gap in women's participation in agricultural cooperatives since several interventions are being implemented.

Research Methodology

The study adopted mixed method research design and targeted 45 registered dairy and coffee cooperative with a membership of 114,267 members in Kiambu County. A total of 6 KIIs were used 3 from each category. There were also 6 FGDs. Simple random sampling was used to sample 398 female members who participated in the study. Data was collected using questionnaires and key informant interview guides. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis.

Findings

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 below indicates the demographic characteristics that affect the respondent's participation in agricultural cooperatives. From the results education level and age had a significant influence on participation with p values 0.000 and 0.000 as shown below.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics

Characteristic	Pooled (n=285)	Duration of Membership			χ^2 Statistic	P-value (<0.05)
		1-2years (n=46)	3-4years (n=17)	Over 4 years(n=222)		
<i>Education level</i>						
Certificate	86 (30.2)	0 (0.0)	5 (29.4)	81(36.4)	35.462	.000
College diploma	113 (39.6)	21 (46.7)	7 (23.5)	85(38.3)		
Undergraduate	77 (27.0)	25 (54.3)	5 (29.4)	47(21.2)		
Postgraduate	9 (3.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	9(4.1)		
<i>Age</i>						
21-30 years	11 (3.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	11(5.0)	31.174	.000
31-40 years	72 (25.3)	21(45.7)	5 (29.4)	46(20.7)		
41-50 years	124 (43.5)	25 (54.3)	9 (52.9)	90(40.5)		
Above 50 years	78(27.3)	0 (0.0)	3 (17.6)	75(33.8)		

Duration of Respondents in Co-Operative Society

The respondents' length of membership period is shown in figure 1. The results shows that 46 (16.1%) of female respondents reported that their membership was between 1 and 2 years, and 17 (6.0%) replied that their cooperative membership was between 3 and 4 years. The remaining, which was the majority 222(77.9%) respondents, responded that their membership in the farmers' cooperative was over 4 years.

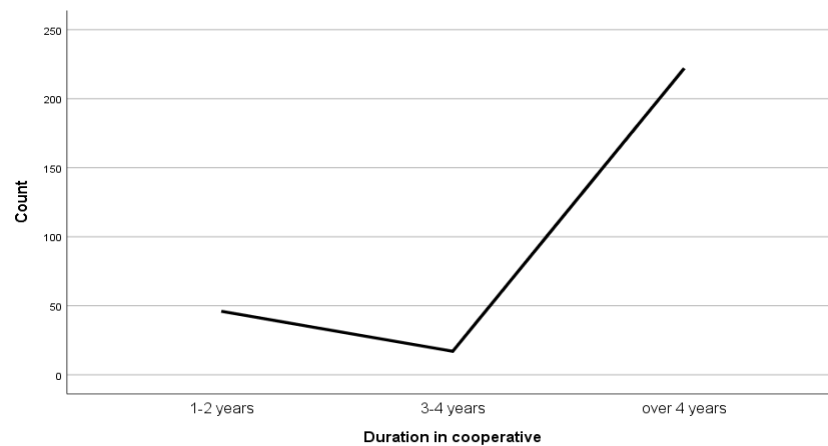


Figure 1: Membership duration in the co-operative society

Organization Policies Strategies and Women Participation

Table 2 below shows responses where respondents were inquired on the organizational policies strategies to address issues of women participation in cooperative societies. Encouragement of women to participate in leadership positions by vying was one of the strategies put in place. Most respondents agreed that that has been put in place with a mean of 3.8175, standard deviation of 0.893. This shows that a majority of the respondents agreed that their organization had an effective team network that support organizational operations. It was also found out gender mainstreaming programs were conducted regularly in most cooperative societies with a mean of 4.178, standard deviation of 0.5687. Gender mainstreaming programs are conducted regularly in our cooperative society. However, most respondents were undecided on then statement that there is inclusivity in decision making process as represented by a mean of 3.2491 and a standard deviation of 1.41336. On the statement that there is operationalization of human resource and gender policies to enhance gender equity in our cooperative society, majority agreed with a mean of 3.6035 and standard deviation of 0.8684

One of the key informants noted that there were that restricted women participation. One manager responded, *"We do no limit anyone from joining even the youth and women can join as long as they have coffee production activities"*. However, despite having these strategies to help women participate in cooperatives decision making organ, it was noted that women were not ready to take up leadership positions in the cooperatives thereby reducing women participation in decision making process. The respondents were asked on what can be done to increase the number of women participations in leadership and one of the respondents from a coffee growers cooperatives answered *"Going forward in terms of gender we will focus on developing gender responsive policies that promote equity, increase the trainings for members and staff on gender sensitivity and encourage women to actively participate in the decision-making process not only in the co-operative but also in their homes. Another key informant had this to say Co-operatives that need to make changes can start by having gender transformative approaches that mainstream and integrate women into the organizational procedures. We have an effective team network to support our overall operations since we must all co-operate in order to meet our goals and ensure that we all benefit from these operations, (KII Coffee Cooperative Society)"*

Table 2: Organizational Policies Strategies

Organization strategy	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Women are encouraged to vie for leadership positions in our cooperatives	285	3.8175	.89307
Gender mainstreaming programs are conducted regularly in our cooperative society	285	4.1789	.56877
Our cooperative society enhances the building of social networks	285	3.5404	.95088
There is operationalization of human resources and gender policies to enhance gender equity in our cooperative society	285	3.6035	.86845
Inclusivity in decision making is a key	285	3.2491	1.41336

Correlation analysis was also conducted on organizational policies and women participation. The results unconcealed that, organizational policy strategies significantly affect women participation in agricultural cooperatives at $p=0.000$ and $r=0.331$ as shown in the table below.

Table 3: Organizational Policies Strategies Results

		Organizational Policies Strategies	Women Participation
Organizational policies strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	285	
Women participation	Pearson Correlation	.331**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	285	285
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Regression analysis was conducted on the variables. The results revealed that a unit change in organizational policies strategies could cause women participation by a factor of 0.372.

Discussions

In terms of education levels, the mean value for respondents' educational attainment is high. The higher mean values of participants under high participation category imply that women's participation increases along with the progress in education level. The education level of the respondents was found to be correlated positively and significantly at less than 1% probability level. This result consistent with the findings of Coleman and Mwangi (2012) which found that education (measured by years of schooling) significantly affects women's participation in producer organizations. This result also agrees with the findings of (Birtukan and Yishak, 2017) which stated that, women's participation in cooperatives was positively associated with education level at 1% significance level. The number of year's women's stay in cooperative membership was found to be correlated positively and significantly at 5% probability level. This result supported by the finding of Maysoon (2015) which stated that as women farmers advance in years of farming experience, their participation in the adaptation of soil and water conservation practices also increase. The results of the study are also in line with the findings of Derib and Nega (2014) who found that there is a positive and significant relationship existing between duration of membership and women

participation since people who stayed a long period have developed more experience and was more aware of the cooperatives than those who joined the cooperative at recent year.

This study revealed that most respondents regarded the organizational policies in agricultural cooperatives in Kiambu County as a solution barrier to women participation. This was moderately significant ($p=0.000$, $r=0.331$). Women are encouraged to vie for leadership positions in our cooperatives which encouraged them to join since they can participate in decision making. This made them feel that their interest would be taken into account. Gender mainstreaming programs were conducted regularly in the cooperative societies. The findings from the study concurs Uwayezu and Mugiraneza (2011) which noted that the enactment of new land policies and related regulations had a positive impact on the protection and enforcement of the land rights of female widows and orphans. Similarly, the study findings concur with Mishra and Sam (2016) which found out that land ownership policies ultimately affect society. Studies undertaken by Safari Shali (2010) and Flick (2009) showed that the managerial factors have a direct impact on the level of participation of the agricultural cooperatives' members; this finding is consistent with the findings of the present study on organizational policies.

Conclusions

Having agricultural land and being a farmer were the most essential criteria to become a member of an agricultural cooperative society. Developing and enforcing gender-responsive policies, ensuring transparent and fair election processes, and continuously educating all members on the importance of gender equity can help achieve this goal

Women members need better positions like the management board and administrative committee in the cooperative, which is relevant to women's standing in the cooperative's administration and control. Moreover, women should be encouraged to vie for more leadership roles most of them have expressed no confidence in leadership something the cooperatives should put more emphasis on. However, promoting women's participation in bureaucracy is crucial for achieving gender equality, good governance, and inclusive decision-making. When women are represented in decision-making roles, there is a greater diversity of perspectives and experiences, leading to more inclusive policies and improved governance. Additionally, increasing women's participation in the public sector can lead to greater economic empowerment for women, contributing to overall economic development.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the cooperative societies to have routine policies in place to ensure to make it easier for women to participate in decision making. Women should be encouraged to vie for more leadership roles most of them have expressed no confidence in leadership something the cooperatives should put more emphasis on.

The study findings showed that cooperatives do not play a significant role in supplying agricultural produce. The study therefore recommends that cooperative societies to review networks to ensure that their members access the supply of such commodities. They should identify steady suppliers at a cheaper price.

The study findings revealed that cooperative meetings are scheduled but they coincide with personal schedules, therefore there is also a need to consult with members which time is appropriate for them to

attend meetings. Information did not reach many members through social gatherings and therefore the study recommends the use of churches, schools and social media to advertise.

It also recommends the use of vernacular language stations as they are used in remote areas. There is a need to increase the use of bulk short messages (SMS) to make it easier to pass information at the same time. It was noted that a few instances of this mode have been used.

The study showed that there were no standards for participation cooperatives are provided for example dormant members are allowed vote in some cooperatives. The study recommends adherence to such rules. It also recommends that audited books of accounts be accessible to members for scrutiny, this will ensure there is transparency. Therefore, the study recommends regular updates of policies and additional of more policies to guide the operations such as lunch policy.

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