

# IMPACT OF COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES ON AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN UGHELLI-NORTH AND UGHELLI-SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF DELTA STATE

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## **Abstract**

*The study examined the impact of cooperative societies on agricultural development in Ughelli-North and Ughelli-South Local Government Areas of Delta State. Four (4) research questions were developed in consonance with the objectives of the study and two null hypotheses were also formulated and tested. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. A well structured questionnaire was administered to one hundred and twenty (120) respondents, comprising of sixty (60) cooperative society members from Ughelli-North Local Government Area and sixty (60) cooperative society members from Ughelli-South Local Government Area of Delta State. The data collected were analyzed using mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD), while t-test statistical analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between farmers' participation in cooperative societies and the benefits derived by farmers in cooperative societies; and there is no significant relationship between the problems militating against the participation of farmers in cooperative societies and the impact of cooperative societies on agricultural development. Based on these findings, it was recommended that farmers should be encouraged to join and actively participate in cooperative societies as it will enable them to boost agricultural development in the society. Cooperative societies should help to improve the standard of living of their members by eliminating middle-men, so that farmers can enjoy the profit in agriculture; among others.*

**Keywords:** Impact, Cooperative Societies, Agriculture, Agricultural Development.

One of the major challenges facing agricultural development in Nigeria is that of developing appropriate organization and institution to mobilize and induce members of the rural sector to a greater productive effort (ICA, 2010). This brought about the

coming together of rural farmers to find ways to solve the problems, thus the emergence of agricultural cooperative societies in Nigeria. According to Tene (2014), a cooperative society is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs.

There is no consistency to the exact origin of the cooperative movement, however, many scholars believed that the Rockdale Pioneers of 1834 started the organization of cooperative societies in England as a panacea to the inconveniences caused to workers as a result of the exploitation of workers by the then capitalist (Gertler, 2001; Gibson 2005; and Arua, 2004). Even though cooperative societies appeared in the previous century, Rockdale society is seen as the first modern cooperative society and the cooperative principles were developed (Gibson, 2005 and Levi, 2005).

Onuoha (2002) in his study of cooperative history in Nigeria stated that there are traditional and modern cooperative societies. The modern cooperative societies started in the country as a result of the Nigerian cooperative society law enacted in 1935 following the report submitted by C. F. Strickland in 1934 to the then British colonial administration on the possibility of introducing cooperatives into Nigeria. The guiding principle was self help. But the boundaries have been overshadowed by cooperative farmers in developed countries and they have made significant contribution to their various economies GDP. Agricultural cooperatives have been formed for production of food and cash crops. Of course, cooperatives like any other enterprise will need funds to finance their operations. Whether or not innovations in cooperatives can be undertaken and financed, will largely depend on the capability of the leadership and management to mobilize members' resources (Ikpefan, 2006).

Harris and Stefanson (2005) stated that the cardinal objectives of introducing agricultural cooperatives were to increase crop production and credit facilities to cultivators. They have been deeply involved in activities that have impacted on the livelihood of members in particular and for the upliftment of agricultural production in general. Cooperative as a business organization is owned and operated by a group of individuals for mutual benefits.

Before the oil boom, agriculture and its various cooperative facets have done Nigeria a lot of good by providing the foreign exchange and the money needed by the nation to provide the infrastructure and social needs of the people. It is unfortunate that the hen that laid the golden egg of yester-years is now neglected (Ikpefan, 2006).

Cooperative societies in Nigeria like their counterparts all over the world are formed to meet people's needs. Cooperatives are considered as a useful mechanism to manage risks for members in agriculture. Through cooperatives, farmers could pool their limited resources together to improve agricultural output and this will enhance socio-economic activities in the rural areas (Ebonyi and Jimoh, 2002).

Omosho (2007) said that cooperative societies often ploughed back resources in terms of dividend on share capital and distributed proportionally to members as patronage bonus. These voluntary social organizations are found in

communities pursuing common interest but differ in size and degree of interaction among members. Thompson (2002) said that in these societies members have had the ability to influence ideas and actions of the government through a common bargaining power.

Arua (2004) viewed cooperatives as an important tool for improving the living conditions of farmers. Levis (2005), asserted that cooperative societies employs more than 100 million men and women nation-wide in Nigeria. Cooperative societies provide locally needed services, employment and input to farmers, cooperatives also provide opportunities to farmers to organize themselves into groups for the purpose of providing services which will facilitate output of members. According to Nweze (2002), cooperative societies serve as avenues for input distribution.

Royer (2005) and Ihambo (2009) had the belief in the principle that agricultural cooperatives were completely favourable with private individuals including multinational companies in spite of various challenges such as price fluctuations. In this regard, most community and agricultural development agencies have sought the support of these organizations as effective means of impacting new ideas, techniques, harnessing their sources towards improving agricultural development programmes in Nigeria which could be traced to poor organizational structure and implementation at the grass-roots level (Omotosho, 2007).

Hermida (2008) reported that cooperatives provide functional education to members in the areas of production, processing and marketing of agricultural produce. Adefela (2011) stated that these agricultural cooperatives do engage in the production, processing, marketing and distribution of agricultural products. Bhuyan (2007) stressed that rural cooperatives played an important role in mobilizing and distributing credit to farmers. He further stressed that cooperatives provide members with a wide range of services such as credit, health, recreational and housing facilities. The benefits of agricultural cooperative societies are many and varied.

### **Benefits of Agricultural Cooperative Societies**

Adefela (2011) stated the following as media through which farmers can benefit from cooperative societies;

- Cooperative societies counter the exploitative tendencies of middlemen in agricultural marketing operation: Cooperative societies in Nigeria and indeed, in most other developing countries are well-known in the areas of marketing of agricultural commodities. Middlemen, both as marketing agents in the marketing system and as businessmen, aim at maximizing profits and hence do at times take advantage of the poor infrastructural development in areas as well as other problems, of farmers to exploit them. Cooperative produce marketing societies have however, to a large extent helped to counter this exploitative tendencies of the middlemen. The cooperatives perform most of the marketing functions to the benefit of their members.

- Acquisition of production and consumption loans and mobilization of funds: It was argued that agricultural credit is important in the breaking of the poverty cycle of

farmers, but that farmers face numerous problems in their attempts to obtain loans. Cooperative societies are important in obtaining both production and consumption credit for their members. As loans are obtained collectively, payment also becomes a collective responsibility. As far as the lenders are concerned, the cooperative societies are thus a sort of insurance against default since the members know themselves and can hence bring pressure to bear on defaulting members to payback.

Also thrift and credit cooperative societies mobilize funds for productive use by their members. Members are required to pay a very small fraction of their income at regular intervals and are allowed to borrow money which could be considerably more than their share contributions at low interest rates. This method of fund mobilization has proved very beneficial to small scale farmers.

- Education in modern agricultural practice: agricultural producer cooperatives can be very useful in the dissemination of knowledge of modern agricultural practices. Extension agents find it easy to contact cooperative members and the practices can also be learnt by cooperative members from others. Dissemination of knowledge of the use of agricultural practices as well as other information through cooperative societies is therefore very effective and inexpensive.
- Provision of agricultural inputs and machinery: farmers, especially small scale farmers always find it difficult to obtain agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, insecticides, as well as machinery and tools. If they, however, form themselves into agricultural cooperatives and hence have a collective responsibility, governments and other suppliers of the inputs can supply inputs to them as cooperative societies, sometimes on credit basis.
- Provision of essential manufactured commodities to farmers: essential manufactured commodities such as soap, milk, sugar, cloth and others are normally sold at exorbitant prices to farmers and their families by village shopkeepers. Village consumers' cooperatives can organize to sell these commodities at lower cost to their members.
- Economics of scale: Agricultural cooperatives in Nigeria and in many other developing countries are yet to get to a stage of cooperative farms and hence the economics of scale advantage may not apply very well to them. One can, however still think of economics of scale in the bulk purchase of inputs by producer cooperatives as well as in the granting of credit to them. Handling costs and cost of credit supply are thereby reduced. Agricultural cooperative societies have many impacts on the agricultural development of many nations.

### **Impacts of Cooperative Societies on Agricultural Development**

Adefela (2011) identified the following as the impacts of cooperative societies on agricultural development:

- They have higher bargaining power in marketing their farm produce than small-scale individual farmers.

- They participate in production and also engage in extensive farming and other businesses.
- All the members have equal rights, and the pride of ownership makes them work hard for the success of the society.
- They help to stabilize trade by their bulk buying and selling in small quantities at reduced prices, to help members and the needy in the society.
- They help to improve the standard of living of members by eliminating middlemen so that farmers can enjoy the profit in agriculture.
- They prevent hoarding, inflation and deflation. However, cooperative societies in Nigeria today, are bedeviled with myriad of problems.

### **Problems of Agricultural Cooperative Societies**

Cooperative societies in the world over face certain basic problems which seem more acute in respect of developing and especially African countries. It is the intensity of the problems and the degree to which they have been solved that determine the success or otherwise of a cooperative society, union or movement.

The most important reasons for cooperative failure in Nigeria according to Borgens (2001) include; shortage of trained managers, lack of understanding of the principles and approaches of cooperatives and inability of cooperative members to cope with the modern methods and tools of production.

Bature (2003) in her scholarly contribution identifies the following as the problems facing agricultural cooperatives in Nigeria to include lack of credit facilities, lack of technological know-how, lack of basic infrastructures and lack of securities. Onje (2003) added that the problem of dishonesty among cooperative leaders is another factor retarding the growth of cooperative societies in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Cooperative societies have been regarded as one of the major ways for empowering the economically weak members of the society. With this recognition and the determination of government to transform agricultural production in the society and also raise the standard of living in the rural areas, many agricultural cooperative societies have been formed all over the country.

Despite the efforts or contributions made by the cooperative societies towards agricultural development in Nigeria, these efforts have not been evenly known. The question now is “what are the impacts of cooperative societies on agricultural development?”. It is on the quest to answer the above question that the researcher examined the impact of cooperative societies on agricultural development in Ughelli-North and Ughelli-South Local Government Areas of Delta State. The question is further articulated as research questions below:

### **Research Questions**

- What are farmers’ extents of participation in cooperative societies?

- What are the benefits derived by farmers by being members of various cooperative societies?
- What are the impacts of cooperative societies on agricultural development?
- What are the major problems militating against the participation of farmers in cooperative societies?

### Research Hypotheses

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between farmers' participation in cooperative societies and the benefit derived by farmers in cooperative societies.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is significant relationship between the problem militating against the participation of farmers in cooperative societies and the impact of cooperative societies on agricultural development.

### Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was used for this study. The population of the study consists of all the members of agricultural cooperative societies in Ughelli-North and Ughelli-South Local Government Areas of Delta State. A sample size of one hundred and twenty respondents comprising of sixty (60) co-operative society members from Ughelli-North Local Government Area, and sixty (60) co-operative society members from Ughelli-South Local Government Area of Delta State were purposively selected from a population of three hundred and fifty (350) registered members of cooperative societies. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire, patterned after the 4-point likert-type scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D), and Strongly Disagreed (SD). Three experts in the Department of Vocational Education (Agricultural Science unit), Delta State University, Abraka, were asked to validate the instrument. The instrument was subjected to reliability test through the test re-test method and a coefficient of 0.89 was obtained. Data was analyzed using means ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviations (SD) method with a criterion mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) of 2.5 for acceptance and rejection; while t-test statistical analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

### Results and Discussion

**Research Question One:** What are the farmers' extents of participation in cooperative societies?

**Table 1: Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) Ratings of Farmers' Extents of Participation in Cooperative Societies**

S/N	Items	N	Mean( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Remark
1.	Cooperative societies is open to all farmers	120	3.33	0.61	Accepted

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.2.	Most farmers are not interested in cooperative societies	120	3.39	0.63	Accepted
3.	Farmers in the urban areas are fully involved in cooperative societies than those in the rural areas	120	3.10	0.47	Accepted
4.	Farmers view cooperative societies as a burdensome association	120	2.03	0.14	Rejected
5.	Most farmers in the rural areas do not participate in cooperative societies	120	2.97	0.30	Accepted

The data presented in table 1 above indicates a positive response and accepted mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for items 1, 2, 3, and 5, while a negative mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score and rejected response from item 4. This implies that farmers agreed to the fact that cooperative societies is open to all farmers, most farmers are not interested in cooperative societies, farmers in the urban areas are fully involved in cooperative societies than those in the rural areas, and most farmers in the rural areas do not participate in cooperative societies. The negative response from item 4 indicates that farmers do not view cooperative societies as a burdensome association.

**Research Question Two:** What are the benefits derived by farmers by being members of various cooperative societies?

**Table 2: Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) Ratings of Benefits Derived by Farmers by Being Members of Various Cooperative Societies**

S/N	Items	N	Mean( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Remark
1.	Access to financial loan and credit	120	3.28	0.58	Accepted
2.	Easy contact with extension agent	120	3.08	0.48	Accepted
3.	Organizing educational programs for farmers	120	3.08	0.48	Accepted
4.	Government subsidizes farming inputs to agricultural cooperative societies	120	3.22	0.52	Accepted
5.	Access to large expanses of land for cultivation	120	3.13	0.51	Accepted

Table 2 above shows a positive response and accepted mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for items 1 to 5. This indicates that farmers benefit from all the items stated above by being a member of a cooperative society.

**Research Question Three:** What are the impacts of cooperative societies on agricultural development?

**Table 3: Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) Ratings of the Impact of Cooperative Societies on Agricultural Development**

S/N	Items	N	Mean( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Remark
1.	Cooperative societies ensure easy marketing of agricultural products	120	3.47	0.53	Accepted
2.	Increase in literacy level of farmers through training	120	3.53	0.74	Accepted
3.	Provision of funds required for agricultural production	120	3.52	0.72	Accepted
4.	Attraction of government attention to agricultural production	120	3.34	0.45	Accepted
5.	Cooperative societies promote easy production, processing and distribution of agricultural products.	120	3.10	0.33	Accepted

The data presented in table 3 above indicates a positive response and accepted mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for items 1 to 5, indicating that cooperative societies impact agricultural development in all the various ways stated above.

**Research Question Four:** What are the major problems militating against the participation of farmers in cooperative societies?

**Table 4: Mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) Ratings of Major Problems Militating against the Participation of Farmer in Cooperative Societies**

S/N	Items	N	Mean( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Remark
1.	Lack of awareness among farmers	120	2.17	0.21	Rejected
2.	Fear of fraud from cooperative societies	120	2.19	0.24	Rejected
3.	Ignorance to the importance of cooperative societies.	120	3.10	0.56	Accepted
4.	Inability of farmers to comply with financial contributions in cooperative societies	120	2.79	0.31	Accepted
5.	Lack of education among farmers	120	3.06	0.42	Accepted



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Table 4 above shows a positive response and accepted mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for items 3, 4, and 5, while a negative mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score and rejected response from item 1 and 2. This implies that ignorance to the importance of cooperative societies, inability of farmers to comply with contributions in cooperative societies and lack of education among farmers are some of the problems militating against the participation of farmers in cooperative societies. While the negative response indicates that lack of awareness among farmers and fear of fraud from cooperative societies are not the problems militating the participation of farmers in cooperative societies.

**Testing of Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis One (Ho<sub>1</sub>):** There is no significant relationship between farmers' participation in cooperative societies and the benefits derived by farmers in cooperative societies.

**Table 5: t-test Analysis of Farmers' Participation in Cooperative Societies and the Benefits Derived by Farmers in Cooperative Societies**

Respondents	N	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	Df	t-calc	t-crit	Remark
Farmers participation	62	3.60	0.60	118	5.62	3.08	Rejected
Benefits derived	58	3.39	0.43				
Total	120						

Table 5 above shows that the null hypothesis was rejected because the t-calculated value (5.62) is greater than the t-critical value (3.08). Thus, a significant relationship existed in farmers' participation and benefits derived from cooperative societies. This implies that, farmers' participation in cooperative societies will determine the benefits they will derive from joining cooperative societies.

**Hypothesis Two (Ho<sub>2</sub>):** There is significant relationship between the problem militating against the participation of farmers in cooperative societies and the impact of cooperative societies on agricultural development

**Table 6: t-test Analysis of the Problems Militating against the Participation of Farmers in Cooperative Societies and the Impact of cooperative Societies on Agricultural Development**

Respondents	N	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD	df	t-calc	t-crit	Remark
Problems	54	3.13	0.62	118	3.08	3.62	Accepted
Impact	66	3.73	0.74				
Total	120						

Table 6 above shows that the null hypothesis was accepted because the t-calculated value (3.08) is lesser than the t-critical value (3.62). Thus, a significant relationship does not exist between the problems militating farmers' participation in cooperative societies and impact of cooperative societies on agricultural development. This implies that, the problems militating against the participation of farmers in cooperative societies does not determine the impact of cooperative societies on agricultural development.

### **Discussion of Results**

Findings from table 1 indicated a positive response for items 1, 2, 3, and 5. This implies that farmers actively participate in cooperative societies. This finding is in line with the statement of Ebonyi and Jimoh (2002), that farmers pool their limited resources together to improve agricultural output and this will enhance socio-economic activities in the rural areas through agricultural cooperative societies.

Table 2 above shows a positive response for items 1 to 5. This indicates that farmers benefit from all the items stated above by being a member of a cooperative society. The findings were in agreement with the views of Hermida (2008), who reported that cooperative societies provides functional education to members in the areas of production, processing and marketing of agricultural produce; Levis (2005), who asserted that cooperative societies employ more than 100 million men and women worldwide; and Bhuyan (2007), stressing that cooperative societies play an important role in mobilizing and distributing credit to farmers, provide members with a wide range of service such as credit, health, recreational and housing facilities.

The findings from table 3 shows that the respondents agreed that the following were the impact of cooperative societies on agricultural development. They include; cooperative societies aid easy marketing of agricultural products, increase in literacy level of farmers through training, provision of funds required for agricultural production, attraction of government attention to agriculture, cooperative societies aid easy production, processing and distribution of agricultural products. The findings is in agreement with the view of Nweze (2002) that cooperative societies serve as avenue for input distribution such as food crops, fertilizers, agro-chemicals, credits, seeds and seedlings.

The findings from table 4 revealed that the respondents agreed to the following as the major problems militating against the participation of farmers in cooperative societies; they include: ignorance, inability of farmers to comply with financial contributions in cooperative societies, lack of education among farmers. The findings is in agreement with the view Onje (2003) identifying some of the problems facing cooperative societies to shortage of skilled personnel, inadequate financing, excessive government control, lack of trust among member and dishonesty among cooperative leaders is another factor retarding the growth of cooperative societies.

### **Conclusion**

The major problem hindering agricultural development in the society is lack of finance. Most farmers have little or no access to bank loan facilities; and even when they have, they lack collaterals needed to obtain such loans, making agricultural cooperative societies the best option for them. It has been discovered over the years that cooperative societies have made it possible and easier for farmers to access loans for carrying-out agricultural activities. Thus, cooperative societies have positively influenced agricultural development in Nigeria in general, and in Ughelli-North and Ughelli-South Local Government Areas of Delta state in particular. And as such, cooperative societies should be encouraged and never be neglected, as it will bring about positive change in the agricultural development and the economy of the society. It is therefore necessary for various governmental and non-governmental agencies to look into the problems that militates cooperative societies.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion from this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Farmers should be encouraged to join and actively participate in co-operative societies as it will enable them to boost agricultural development in the society
2. Co-operative societies should help to improve the standard of living of their members by eliminating middle-men, so that farmers can enjoy the profit in agriculture
3. Cooperative societies should provide a formal education for its members by providing training facilities and opportunities to their members
4. Cooperative societies should be able to provide storage facilities and marketing outlets for their members.
5. Government and non-governmental agencies should assist cooperative societies with low interest loans spread over a reasonable period of time for repayment.

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