

Influence Of Farmers Association In Enhancing The Income Of Rural Farmers In Ikere Local Governemnt Area Of Ekiti State

O. F. Ogiamien¹, E. E. Umebali² (Ph.D) & O. E. Agbasi² (Ph.D)

Department of Finance (Cooperative Economics and Management Option)
Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.¹

Department of Cooperative Economics and Management
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria²

Abstract: *The study examined the influence of Farmers Association in enhancing the income of rural farmer in Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State. The study made use of primary data, which were extracted through questionnaires distributed to 170 rural farmer members in the study area. Descriptive statistics were used to analyses and discuss the data, while inferential statistics such as paired sample T-test were employed to test the formulated hypothesis. The study found among others that income of members were dependent on their socio-economic profile such as years of farming experience, access to land, family size, age and marital status. The result of the study shows that there exist a positive relationship between the activities of farmer associations and the income of its members in Ikere Local Government as shown from the paired sample T-test which was employed to test the hypothesis at 5% level of significance. The study recommends among others that Government at all levels should formulate workable policies that would make credit facilities and extension services to be at the reach of farmers associations with less stringent conditions, farmers association should provide education to members and potential members; with the aim of sensitizing them on the benefits of participating in farmers association and that farmer association should work on providing functioning and practical activities in their areas of operation that will have impact on not just their members alone but also in the promotion of the wellbeing of the entire community.*

Keywords: Farmers Association, Rural Farmers, Income, Cooperative Marketing.

Introduction

Farmer associations also referred to as Farmers cooperatives are globally known as self help organizations that play a significant role in improving the livelihood of their members and community especially in the rural areas. The International Cooperative Alliance (2016) noted that cooperative movement has its roots in the eighteenth century in Europe, when a group of weavers called the “Fenwick Weavers’ Society” created collective contracts in Scotland in 1761 in order to get collective purchases of yarns and clothes with a price discount. Cooperative societies bring the resources of people together in economic and social forms. It is democratic in operation, as all members of the cooperative organization are as well owners and user of their business. .

The United States Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (2000) assert that Farmers Cooperative Society is owned by farmers to collectively sell their products and promote amongst others the welfare of their members. It allows the farmer to accomplish collectively functions they could not achieve on their own, thereby enabling the farmers to capture more of the returns that would otherwise go to others acting individually. Farmer’s cooperative association is targeted at improving the income of farmer members through; correcting failure in the market occasioned by low prices or lack of buyers, spread risk and costs, gain market negotiating power against bulk buyers, creates processing in large volumes to efficiently operate a plant and also have enough to meet the demand of buyer. Uplifting the income of the poor in the rural communities is vital to reducing the rising urban population, which is occasioned by rural migration in search of jobs and other basic infrastructural amenities which are lacking in the rural areas. Cooperative organizations, especially those in the agricultural sector are known to have fully demonstrated the potentials and resources towards the satisfaction of the wellbeing of their members. Mhembwe (2017), noted that cooperatives can enhances the livelihood of their members and rural communities by offering self employment to their members whose participation in economic activities makes it possible for them to be sure of a decent income, they also create indirect employment to others through the spillover effects of their activities to non-members who generate income through transactions and opportunities created by cooperatives.

Statement of the Problem

The rural farmers are enmeshed in subsistent agricultural production, which could barely generate enough income for them that can help boost their economic status and improved their livelihood. They are faced with a lot challenges, especially as it concerns their farm produce which experience diminishing return owing to; lack of access to credit, poor land management, seasonal farming, lack of storage facilities, high rate of perishability of farm produce, prices fluctuations, poor market information, transportation problems, low

technology utilization and use of traditional methods of production amongst others. The situation is like a vicious circle without any hope of a change in sight, and this tend to worsen the income generating capacity of the rural farmers, as they become more powerless against market forces and cannot obtain economics of scale standing individually.

The conditions of these rural farmers are close to or even below the economic viability. Due to their farm size, lack of influence on the market, lack of means to acquire the desired resources to increase productivity in expanding and modernizing farming methods, lack of improved seedlings and adequate market for their produce. The rural farmers lack the resources to make these facilities available, thereby making them to continually experience; low yield and productivity, low savings and low investment which finally results in dwindling income for the farmers (Ojiagu and Onugu, 2015).

Farmers cooperative can play a vital role in this regard, because as a unique form of business organization, it is focused at meeting the needs of its members by providing them with services that can help them optimize their production and help them achieve price stability in a sustainable manner. Price stability in rural Africa is a big challenge to subsistent farmers, it has impacted negatively in no small measure on their income as a result of the dominance of rain feed agriculture which account for great fluctuation in prices largely between areas, within season and between seasons, frequent harvest failures, limited storage facilities, limited integration of market due to bad roads amongst others (Royal Tropical Institute and International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, 2008).

A lot of the rural farmers do not just aim at producing for their own subsistent use, but also with the mindset to sell some of their farm produce in order to have income as reward for their farm labour, which will enable them to buy other economic goods or pay for services that will help enhance their standard of living. In the light of this, farmers cooperative is a viable avenue for the rural farmers to enhance their farm income, through collective action which will enable them to strengthen their bargaining power and participate in profitable value chains, as well as exploit economics of scale to transact business with big buyer of their outputs or suppliers of the input needed in their farming business, it also offer to farmers many advantages from the ability to realize higher prices in markets that will raise farm income, which otherwise would have be impossible to attain acting alone, boost members access to affordable credit for higher productivity and expansion of farm business. This paper seeks to empirically investigate the influence of Farmers Association in enhancing the income of rural farmers in Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this paper is to appraise the influence of farmers association in enhancing the income of rural farmers in Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State. The specific objectives are to:

- i. determine the socioeconomic characteristics of members of Farmers Association in the study area.
- ii. establish the nexus between farmers association and the income of rural farmers in the study area.
- iii. assess the effect of cooperative marketing activities on the farm size and productivity of rural farmers.

Research Hypothesis

H₀₁. Farmers Associations have not significantly enhanced the income of rural members in Ikere Local Government Area.

Review of Related Literature

Cooperative Societies and Rural Income Enhancement

The rural area is usually characterised by absence of competitive market and public investment in physical and social infrastructure. It is where the poor are predominately found and they earn their living and income mainly from agriculture, which remain their primary source of income and employment. Kumar, Wankhedek, & Gena (2015) reported farmers association or cooperative as another livelihood option for the provision of basic community services and needs whose main role is to improve income generation, well being, food security and sustainable use of natural resources in rural communities. In the words of Adinya (2008) improving the income of the rural poor is necessary and urgent in order to ensure that the poor households have a stable livelihood which will substantially increase their income and wellbeing, promote the growth of the rural economic and ensure social and political stability, because a hungry and idle people is an invitation to chaos which will breed; crime, violence and social disorder. Cooperatives, especially along the agricultural sector, are important tools in improving the conditions of living of farmers.

Bhuyan (2007) assert that Cooperatives are significant in employment creation and in the mobilization of resources for income enhancement. Cooperatives are known to employ over 100 million people globally. In Nigeria, Cooperative provides locally needed services, employment and inputs to farmers. They also create opportunities for farmers to organise themselves into groups for the purpose of providing services that will facilitate members productive capacity. Hermida (2008) noted that Farmers Cooperatives are active agents of change and empowerment by providing their members with education/training in the area of production, processing and marketing of their produce. Farmers association also help in boosting the income earning capacity in the rural areas, especially for their members and

other dwellers in their host communities, thereby helping to reduce migration from rural to urban areas and generate employment through increased agricultural productivity. Levi (2002) stressed that farmers cooperative have a noticeable impact on the totality of rural economies, especially in terms of availability and access to infrastructural/social amenities that enhances the living conditions of not just their members alone but that of the rural people in the aspect of; employment generation, rural market development, rural income enhancement and improvement of access to social services.

Income is very crucial in meeting our basic needs in a sustainable manner. Income is only possible by engaging in an economic activity or rendering a desired service, because it is what drives the individual and the global economy and creates the demand for goods and service. It's represents the revenue a business earns from selling its goods and services or the money an individual receives in compensation for his or her labour, service or investment.

Income therefore, can be viewed from business, accounting and economist perspectives. From the business perspective it is the amount received from your customers for the goods or services that you have sold to them. It includes any amount received for expenses or materials you invoiced to your customers. From the perspective of an accountant, it is the profit a company retains after paying off all relevant expenses from sales revenue earned. To the economist, income refers to the amount of money, property and other transfer of value received over a set period of time in exchange for services or products.

Review of Empirical Studies on Cooperatives and Income Enhancement

Hung, Huong & Quoc (2020), observed that Farmers' associations play an important role in helping members increase their access to supports of information, capital, and technology; which bring benefits to members; and also promote production, enhance productivity, and increase their farm income. Their findings show that the farmers, who are members of farmers' association, are more helpful in the ability to access better market services and better prices for their produce, and are more likely to earn a higher average income than those are non-members.

Agbo, Rousseliere & Salanie (2014), noted that over 50% of global agricultural output is marketed through cooperatives in Finland, Italy and the Netherlands. The rationale is that with marketing cooperatives smallholder farmers can get better or secure price by overcoming the activities of the oligopolistic Investor-Owned Firms (IOFs), have a much better position for price negotiation, have access to markets that they cannot access individually and it can also enable farmers to overcome the uncertainty about agricultural market price for their produce thus ensuring sustainable income for the smallholder farmers.

Fasakin and Popoola (2019), stressed that cooperative marketing activities greatly had a positive effect on the income of farmer members. Empirical evidence from the study area showed that the annual farm income of members was greatly uplifted as result of being a member of cooperative. They further emphasized that cooperatives should provide a wide ranges of services such as credit, access to land and storage facilities which would further boost their members' income.

Omoregbee and Ighoro (2012), reported that members of farmers cooperative earned higher farm income annually than farmers who are not members. of any type of cooperative. The study further reveals that farmers' co-operative multipurpose society members earned the highest mean net farm income annually and also have more membership. Agricultural marketing cooperative have the potentials to economically empower their members, through undertaking certain diversified activities that can increase income of farmers, especially in the rural areas.

Nkechi and Uchenna (2015) noted that membership of cooperative is a platform for rural smallholder farmer to enhance their farm income and achieve a better standard of living. The study recommended that government is advised to formulate policies that will incorporate information from the local level that can support planning, implementation and evaluation of programmes that can enhance farmers' income and that cooperatives should intensify the education of members to gain more benefits, and that government, non-governmental organizations and international development agencies should show interest in supervising and providing development support to Farmers Cooperative Societies, especially in the rural areas.

Wanyama, Develtere and Pollet (2008), evidence from this study shows that cooperative remains a major income for rural dwellers. Specifically it noted that about 4 million farmers in Egypt would have seen their income further diminished had they not been members of agricultural marketing cooperatives, in Kenya about 924,000 farmers earn an income as a result of being members in agricultural cooperatives, while about 900,000 people in the agricultural sector in Ethiopia generate part or all of their income through their cooperatives. It's also affirmed that about 4,476 temporary workers in Rwanda are engaged on a yearly basis, this affirms the impact of agricultural cooperative on income enhancement and generation.

Verhofstadt and Maertens (2014), reveals that the membership of agricultural marketing cooperatives impacted positively on the income of smallholder rural farmers. It noted that though cooperative membership generally increases farm income and productivity, the effects was largest for larger farms (land-rich farmers) and low among land-poor households because the impact on their incomes is too low, due to lack of access to credit and farm lands.

Materials and Methods

The study area is Ekiti State. The State was created on October 1, 1996 in the Southwest region of Nigeria. The State has three geo-political zones and sixteen Local Government Areas. Ikere L.G.A is serving as the study area for this investigation.

The research design adopted for this study is the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consist of all registered members of Farmers Association in Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State. There are 67 active farmers' cooperatives, with membership strength of 895 members in Ikere L.G.A (Ekiti State Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Cooperatives). To determine the number of cooperators to be used for this study, the researcher employed a random sampling technique to select 200 active members of farmers cooperative societies in Ikere L.G.A across the board. Hence, the selected 200 respondents were the target sample size for the study.

Structured questionnaire was used for collection of data. The questionnaire consisted of two parts (A and B), part A covered the background of the respondents, that is the socio economic profile of farmers who are members of farmers association, while part B covered research questions that relates to the specific objectives, bordering on farmers association and income enhancement for rural farmer members. Analysis of data was accomplished using descriptive statistics to describe the socio-economic characteristics of members through the use of frequencies counts, percentages and weighted mean and Inferential statistics using Spearman's Correlation were used to analyze the connection between variables in the objectives that were formulated for the study and the hypothesis for the study was tested using paired sample T- test.

Model Specification

The functional specification of the model is of the form:

$$Y = f(X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4, \dots, X_8) \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

The model will be explicitly written as follows;

Y = Income of Rural Farmers

X₁ = Age

X₂ = Gender

X₃ = Marital Status

X₄ = Farming Experience

X₅ = Formal Education

X₆ = Access to Land

X₇ = Family Size

X₈ = Cooperative Marketing

The dependent variable represented by the income of rural farmers is used to explain the total influence of farmers association in the enhancement of members' farm income. It is assumed that age, gender, marital status, farming experience, formal education, access to land, family size and cooperative marketing will have a positive effect on the income of rural farmers.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, the data collected were analyzed and presented in tables according to the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents; perception of respondents on the activities of farmers cooperative and the income of rural farmer members in Ikere L.G.A of Ekiti State, effect of cooperative marketing on farm size and productivity of rural members in Ikere L.G.A of Ekiti State. The relationships between the variables were examined using Spearman's Correlation and the test of hypothesis using T-test. Notably, this study is based on retrieved 170 copies of questionnaire administered to the selected respondents on the field which represents 85% returned and valid questionnaire.

Report of Questionnaire

Accordingly, 200 copies of questionnaire were administered while 170 copies were retrieved, while 30 were not returned. Therefore, 170 copies became the valid number of responses in the study.

Socio-economic Characteristics Data of Respondents

The socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents were presented according to their age, gender, educational qualification, marital status, land acquisition, type of farming, farming experience and family/household size. The observed socio-economic characteristics of respondents are presented below (table 1):

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents Socio-Economic Characteristics

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age:		
18-30 years	12	7.1
31-40 years	30	17.6
41-50 years	68	40
51-60 years	60	35.3
61 and above	0	0
Total	170	100
Gender:		
Male	105	61.8
Female	65	38.2
Total	170	100.0
Marital Status:		
Married	150	88.2
Single	0	0
Widow	20	11.8
Widower	0	0
Divorced	0	0
Total	170	100.0
Farming Experience:		
Less than 10 years	30	17.6
10 years and above	140	82.4
Total	170	100.0
Educational Qualification:		
No Formal education	5	2.9
Primary education	9	5.3
Secondary education	107	62.9
Technical education	30	17.6
University education	19	11.3
Total	170	100.0
Land Acquisition:		
Rented	14	8.3
Freehold	130	76.5
Leased	26	15.2
Total	170	100.0
Family size:		
1-3	20	11.7
4-6	125	73.5
7-9	7	4.3
10 and above	18	10.5
Total	170	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2024

The distribution of respondents according to age revealed that majority of the respondents were between the age group of 41-50 (i.e.40%) followed by the age groups of 51-60 and 31-40 years of age with (35.3%) and (17.6%) respectively, this was followed by the age group of 18-30 which has 7.1%. This shows that more adults than youths are involved in farmer's association. Table 2 also revealed that 61.8% of the respondents' were of male gender while 38.2% of the respondents were of female gender. This implies

that there is more male gender than the female gender in farmers associations. The analysis of respondents according to their marital status revealed that 150 of the respondents were married constituting 88.2%, while the remaining 20 (14.8%) were widow. This showed that majority of the respondents are married and are more prone to joining farmers association to enhance their income and improve productivity and standard of living.

As regards years of farming experience, the analysis above showed that majority of the respondents had farming experience of over 10 years representing 82.4% while 17.6 have less than 10 years farming experience which revealed that majority of the respondents had been into farming business for over 10 years. The distribution according to educational qualification revealed that the respondents have acquired one level of education or the other ranging from no formal education (2.9%) to primary education (5.3%), secondary (62.9%), technical (17.6%) and university (11.3%), this showed that majority of the respondents were literate to an extent. The distribution of respondents according to the land acquisition showed that 76.5% of the respondents which formed the majority of them had freehold land for their farming activities and others either get it as rented (8.3%) and leased (15.2%). This is an indication that though majority of the farmers carry out their farming on freehold land, most of these land are fragmented as against larger size (hectares) of land which is required for productive farming activities. Finally, the distribution of respondents according to the family size shows that 11.7% and 73.5% of the respondents have family sizes of 1-3 and 4-6 respectively, while 4.3% have a family size of 7-9 and 10.5% of the respondents have a family size of 10 and above. Based on the analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of respondents, it can be inferred that majority of the respondents shared the same socio-economic profile in terms of their background, farming experience, land acquisition, family size and farming practices.

Presentation of Core Issues of Investigation

Table 2: perception of members on income enhancement by Farmers Association

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1.	Being a member of farmers association has significantly contributed to improved total farm income.	3.8658	0.5964	Agree
2.	Credit and loans accesses receive by members at favourable interest rate and without collateral have enhanced the productivity of farmers.	3.8695	0.5749	Agree
3.	Farmers association have helped rural famers to eliminate speculations about produce marketability which have lead to the reduction in wastage of farm produce and a result increase farm income.	3.9965	0.9532	Agree
4.	Marketing activities of farmers cooperative have helped you to enhance your income generating capacities by enabling you to expand farm size.	4.0861	0.9748	Agree
5.	Reduced processing cost for farm produce has helped to generate more profit due to the training and extension services from farmer's association.	4.8528	0.7647	Agree
Grand mean		4.1341	0.7728	Agree

Source: Field Study 2024

Based on the 5-point scale used in the research tool, the decision on either to agree or to disagree was based on the average coding value of 3.0. Hence mean response greater than 3.0 implies that the respondents agree to the statement and value less than 3.0 is an indication of disagreement of respondents with the statement. From the analysis above, all the respondents agreed that the income of members was enhanced by farmers association with a grand mean of 4.1341 which indicated that the respondents agreed on the five items listed above, implying that there is agreement among respondents that income of members significantly improved as a result of the activities of farmers association.

Table 3: Marketing activities of farmers association on farm size and productivity of rural members in Ekiti State

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1.	There has been expansion in farm size and increased productivity due to marketing activities of farmers association.	4.7153	0.7364	Agree
2.	Due to cooperative marketing, members have been able to eliminate speculations about the marketability of their farm produce due to reliable link from farmer cooperative.	4.7364	0.7263	Agree
3.	My income from farm business has received a significant boost through cooperative marketing which have increased my farm productivity.	3.8263	0.9721	Agree
4.	You received financial/advisory support services from farmers association that have helped in boosting your farm productivity and income.	3.9274	0.8926	Agree
5.	Marketing activities by farmer association have facilitated the availability of transportation, fertilizers and storage facilities which have increased farm revenue.	3.8253	0.8253	Agree
Grand mean		4.4206	0.8305	Agree

Source: Field Study 2024

Based on the 5-point scale used in the research tool, the decision on either to agree or to disagree was based on the average coding value of 3.0. Mean response greater than 3.0 implies that the respondents agree to the statement and value less than 3.0 is an indication of disagreement of respondents with the statement. From the analysis above, the grand mean of 4.4206 was achieved which indicated that the respondents unanimously agreed on the five points agenda that Cooperative Marketing activities of farmers association have a significant effect on farm size and productivity of rural members in Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State.

Table 4 Spearman's Correlation Matrix

			Income of rural farmers	Farmers Association
Spearman's rho	Income of rural members	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.826**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	270	270
	Farmers Association	Correlation Coefficient	.826**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	270	270

Source: Researcher's computation using SPSS version 23, 2024

The matrix in table 5 shows the analysis of the relationship between Farmers Association functions and income of rural farmer members. Farmers association shows a positive coefficient value of 0.826. The implication of this is that there is a significant positive relationship between farmers association and income of rural farmer members in Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State.

1. 7. 4 Tests of Hypotheses

Test of Hypothesis

H₀₁: Farmers Associations have not significantly enhanced the income of rural members in Ikere Local Government Area.

Table 5 Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Std Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Farmers Associations have not significantly enhanced the income of rural members in Ikere Local Government Area.	.37462	1.7364	.17324	1.7340	4.7254	22.8126	269	0.000

Source: Researcher's computation using SPSS version 23, 2024

Interpretation

Paired T-test, is considered appropriate for testing the mean difference between paired observations. The paired sample test seals up the relationship between Farmers Association and income of its rural members in Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State as indicated by the t-value = 22.8126 and probability value = 0.000 as shown in table 5 above. This implies that Farmers Association in Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State has significantly enhanced the income of its rural farmer members.

Decision Rule: Accept the null hypothesis if the p-value is greater than 0.05, otherwise, reject.

Decision: Since the p-value is 0.000 which is less than the critical value 0.05, this study upholds that there exists a significant positive relationship between Farmers Association in Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State and the enhancement of the income of its rural farmer members at 5% level of significance.

Summary and Conclusion

This study examined the influence of Farmers Association in enhancing the income of rural farmer members in Ikere Local Government Local Area of Ekiti State. The study made use of spearman correlation analysis and pair t-test to determine the extent to which the activities of Farmers Association have influenced the income of rural farmers' members in the Study area. Empirical evidence from the study showed that significant positive relationship exists between the variables. Precisely, the test of hypothesis indicated by the t-value = 22.8126 and probability value = 0.000 as shown in table 6. The study supports and validates the empirical studies of Hung, Huong & Quoc (2020) and Fasakin & Popoola (2019) to establish that Farmers Associations in Ikere LGA of Ekiti State have significantly enhanced the income of its rural members at 5% level of significance. We therefore make recommendations as follows:

Recommendations

i. Government, policymakers and relevant agencies should formulate workable policies that would make credit facilities and extension services available and accessible with less stringent conditions to rural farmers, with the aim of encouraging and sustaining sound and profitable farming business that will further boost the income of the rural farmers and also the economy of the rural areas. The more income smallholder farmers make from their farming business, the more their purchasing power, wellbeing and investment in the rural economy will increase.

ii Farmers association should provide more education to members and potential members, with the aim of sensitizing them on the benefits of participating in cooperative activities. This will help in making them to be conscious of the cooperative effect and its importance to the realisation of their social and economic aspirations.

iii. Farmers association should come up with more practicable activities and not just hypothetical ones in their areas of operation that will have more benefits on not just their members alone but also on the promotion of the entire welfare of the community, where they operate which will also have effect on the economy and promote the cooperative movement, by providing up-skill training focused at enriching the members with the objective of the association, tailored to meet the socio-economic characteristics.

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