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## **Determinants of women participation in primary agricultural cooperative societies of Dendi district, Ethiopia**

**D Lalithaa Rani and Deribi Bekele Yadeta**

### **Abstract**

Women constitute half of the world's population, they do two third of the world's work, they earn one tenth of the world's income and they own one hundredth of the world's property including land. As in most parts of the world, women in Ethiopia have less access to land, education and financial income than men do. Hence, their active involvement in all socio-economic development activities is vital. Therefore, this paper investigated factors that determine women participation in primary cooperative societies and also assess their accessibility to basic resources in cooperative societies. The methodology of this study was an integration of quantitative and qualitative methods based on data collected from cooperative societies in the study areas. Data were collected from 146 household respondents by employing systematic random sampling technique from sampled four primary agricultural cooperatives and also collected from purposively selected respondents by FGD and KI interview. The results indicated that, majority of the respondents reported that the system of male dominance in society and socio-cultural hindrance considered as major obstacles for their participation in agricultural cooperatives. Besides the survey result also indicated that there was significant difference between member participants and non member participants in most of the determinant factors. Therefore, superiority should be given to these factors while strategy and policy aimed to implement for women participation in primary cooperatives by concerned bodies.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic, management position, and socio- cultural

### **1. Introduction**

In Ethiopia, women account for 60-80% of food production, thus agricultural output could potentially be increased by 15-40 percent just by providing women with assets equal to those of men. Investing in rural women has the potential to accelerate growth as they represent a significant share of the workforce, manage resources carefully, and invest in children [3]. Rural women in Ethiopia represent a tremendous productive resource in the agricultural sector. They are major contributors to the agricultural workforce, either as family members or in their own right as women heading households. There have been recent policy initiatives to strengthen the position of women in the agricultural sector. In 2005, the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty, 2005/06 to 2009/10 (PASDEP) was launched to safeguard rights such as access to land, credit, and other productive resources, and to protect women from other deprivations, such as longer working days, violence and discrimination, and, in the same year, the Federal Rural Land Administration Proclamation took strides to secure women's landholding rights [5].

However, despite these recent initiatives, a mixture of economic constraints, cultural norms and practices continue to limit women's contribution to household food security and, to a lesser extent, inhibit the commercialization of the sector. Gender roles and relationships influence the division of work, the use of resources, and the sharing of the benefits of production between women and men. In particular, the introduction of new technologies and practices, underpinned by improved service provision, often disregards the gendered-consequences of market-oriented growth and many benefits by pass women.

Ethiopian rural women face enormous challenges including lack of education, access to resources such as land, time, capital, and financial services. Economic empowerment is one of the empowerment components that can effectively deal with the complex challenges of rural women [4].

As women are generally the poorest of the poor eliminating social, cultural, political and economic discrimination against women is a prerequisite of eradicating poverty in the context of sustainable development (ICPD, 1994). Women, especially in developing countries like Ethiopia, are confronted by formidable constraints that block their active participation in cooperatives. First and foremost among these constraints is the traditional role of women in society and the prevalent misconception that women's reproductive and domestic responsibilities constitute their main role. This places women at the margins of the cooperative business world. It restricts their choice of economic occupations and opportunities and is the root cause of their heavy work burden and time constraint. Carrying out income-earning activities in addition to their nonpaid work as mothers and home-makers often leaves little time or energy to attend meetings or carry out other additional tasks [7].

Women's lack of access to resources is also a major stumbling block which affects their participation in existing cooperatives and setting up of new ones. Without independent assets it is also difficult for women to invest in their own right in cooperatives. In many countries women lack access to land, credit or production inputs; their level of education is lower than men's and their business experience and knowledge of cooperatives is very often limited. Because they are unable to participate in cooperatives, they are excluded from the benefits that cooperatives and their support structures often provide to their members such as credit, education and training, production inputs, technology and marketing outlets. In other words, because they are disadvantaged at the outset, it is all the more difficult for them to change their predicament as they do not have access to resources. Today the low level of participation by women is a challenge faced by many cooperatives, a problem that is worse in agricultural cooperatives compared to other types of cooperatives.

### 1.1 Research Objectives

1. To assess the accessibility of women to basic resources in cooperative societies
2. To explore factors that limit women participation in management of cooperative societies

### 1.2 Research Questions

- 1 Do women have access to basic resources in agricultural cooperative societies?
- 2 What are the problems challenged by women in getting the service benefits from agricultural cooperative societies?

## 2. Literature Review

The cooperative movement in Ethiopia is not a long period as compared to other sub-Saharan countries. As a result there is shortage of literature, which focuses on the challenges of women participation in agricultural cooperatives. However, there are some literatures available on website, which concentrate on issues of gender and cooperatives and the following topics are reviewed

### 2.1 Interaction between the socio-cultural environment and human individuals

The socio-cultural environment affects human individuals. Many researchers have shown that cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express and transform the human person. In fact, this is a central theme of the social sciences, particularly of sociology, anthropology, and social and cultural psychology.

It will then be difficult to understand a human individual if the process of understanding does not include any attempt to understand his/her socio-cultural and physical environment, as well as his/her specific situational contexts. In the same vein, a human person shapes his/her socio-cultural environment by the meaning that s/he, together with other individuals in his/her community or society, gives to the different elements of the social environment, and his/her way of interacting with them. The socio-cultural environment becomes an integral part of the human person, and the person an integral part of the socio-cultural environment through socialization [6].

**2.2 Gender Socialization:** Socialization is the "process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that make them more or less able members of their society and gender is socially constructed or culturally determined characteristics of women and men, and to the kind of relations that women and men, according to societal norms, should have. Gender socialization is the process whereby women and men learn the "proper" ways a woman or a man should think, feel and behave, based on their assumption of their gender roles. Gender roles are the activities ascribed to women and men on the basis of perceived differences. Division of labor is a term used in gender literature to mean the roles and tasks assigned to women and men by the society on the basis of perceived gender characteristics and attributes, instead of abilities and skills [4].

### 2.3 Effects of the Patriarchal Culture on Women

A dilemma confronted by women is their being encouraged to achieve provided their level of achievement did not conflict with parental and male-peer expectations about their adult roles as spouse and parent. These expectations were revealed in various ways, such as advising women to conceal their intellectual competence in the company of male peers or parental encouragement to pursue goals such as marriage. The intellectually competent woman was regarded with some hostility or at least ambivalence, especially in contexts involving open competition and comparison with men [6].

Because women are confined to their homes and to types of work that are associated with their traditional roles in their houses, the capacities honed in them become very limited. On the other hand, women who have transcended this situation and have proven themselves to be skilled in the works associated with men as well are generally ridiculed, and not recognized.

Gender integration in cooperative development is also essential because active and equitable participation of members, both men and women, is a necessary condition for sustainable cooperative development. Active participation from cooperative context means that members are involved in all the functions of cooperative including planning, decision making, and implementation and financial and management control. However, women in most agricultural cooperatives lag behind and excluded from full participation

in decision making, access to management, education, employment etc.

#### 2.4 The challenges of Women participation in agricultural cooperative

Agricultural cooperatives, in present times, everywhere have come under dark clouds due to heavy competitions and pressures of open market economy systems. They are now expected to meet the challenges which they had never anticipated before. Their business methods remain traditional and they expect government support in the form of protection and subsidies. These are no longer available and will not be available in the near future. In several countries, agricultural cooperatives have either folded up or are under massive reorganization. To overcome these and other related problems, agricultural cooperative organizations, being a social development agency should play an active role in advocating for gender equality since women have been active and central role in development works. However, in terms of the ratio of membership of women in agricultural cooperatives, the percentage is rather low, but they have a strong influence on them through the heads of the household. Certain obvious barriers restrict their direct and formal entry in agricultural cooperatives<sup>[3]</sup>.

The experiences of farm extension workers, field advisors and rural farm women in Africa Region, including Ethiopia, shows the following are the general challenges faced:

- High illiteracy rates and poor living conditions among rural women;
- Lack of leadership and inadequate participation in the organizational and economic affairs of their agricultural cooperatives;
- Absence of property inheritance rights, restriction on acquiring membership of agricultural cooperatives consequently being deprived of farm credit inadequate health care services in rural areas;
- Inadequate water supply for household and farm operations;
- Lack of appropriate agricultural technology aimed at reducing the physical burden of farm women;
- Inadequate access to credit and agricultural inputs and other services;
- Lack of female farm extension workers;
- Lack of marketing facilities and opportunities;
- Traditional, religious, social and cultural obstacles;
- Less participation in decision-making – even within the household.

#### 3. Research Method and Data Analysis

The study was involved both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The primary data was collected by using structured and semi-structured survey questionnaires method and the secondary data was collected from the documents of concerned offices. Focused Group Discussion (FGD) and key informants discussions were conducted using checklists with the management committee of the cooperative, selected group members of the cooperative and staffs of the district cooperative offices. Systematic random sampling technique was the way of member selection to fill survey questions. Key informants were professional management staffs, district cooperative promotion office staffs and board of directors of each cooperative.

Once raw data were collected, quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis were employed. Descriptive

statistical tools such as frequency tables, percentages, graph, mean and standard deviation were used to describe the data. To test the difference among the member participant and non-participants on a certain variable, both t-test and chi-square statistical tools were used at confidence interval of 95%. Then based on the information obtained from data analysis, generalizations about the population were made. To analysis the data, SPSS (version 16) software was used. The data gathered through key informant interview and focus group discussion was incorporated in the finding to supplement and support the result obtained from survey questions.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

In this chapter, the findings from the descriptive and qualitative analysis of sample house hold responses with the various demographic characteristics, participation of women in different management positions, accessibility to basic resources and agricultural service benefits were presented.

##### 4.1 Demographic characteristics

**4.1.1 Sex:** It shows that the total sample households were female only. Among the total sample households 56 of them participated in general assembly meeting at least 3-5 times in last 5 years and election of management committee and the remaining 90 did not participate continuously, which accounts 38.4% and 61.6% respectively.

**4.1.2 Age:** As it depicted, from the total sample respondents, 6 of them were in the, age group of 18-28, 42 of them, between age 29 and 38, 45 of them between, 39 and 49, 45 of them between 49 and 58 and the remaining 8 of them were above 59 years. From those nonmember participants, 4 of them were aged between 18-28, 26 were between 28-38, 29 were between 39-49, 23 were between 49-58 and the remaining 8 were aged above 59 which accounts 4.5%, 28.9%, 32.2%, 25.6% and 8.8% respectively. The test of significance revealed that, there is statistical significant difference between member participants and member non participants in relation to their age. As the age increases, their participation in agricultural cooperative societies decreases. This indication is in line with the findings of M. Fituma, (2009) which indicated that as age of the women increases their participation in cooperatives is less.

**4.1.3 Family size:** women are more responsible in caring their children than men, as a result women stand for dual purposes; the first and the most one is reproductive and the second one is productive which might influence them much. As it is understood from FGDs among member's participants and nonmember participants and key informants, women are mainly affected in covering both the works and this also hinders their participation. As it can be seen from table 4.1, 6.1% of sample households, have children less than 4, 49.3% of them were having between 4-7, 30.8% of them have between 8-11 and the remaining have above 12 children. T-test revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between MPs and MNPs.

**4.1.4 Educational level:** It was indicated that the educational level of sample households. Among the total sample households, 64.4% of them were illiterate or have not attended formal education. 12.3% of them can read and write, 19.2% of them have joined elementary school education (i.e 1-6) and 4.1% have attended grade 7-10. Again from the table

4.1 it can be seen that 67.9% of member participants were illiterate, where as 62.2% of member non participants were illiterate, 17.9% of member participants can read and write and 20% of member non participants can read and write. 12.5% of participants have joined elementary school; where as 12.3% of non-participants have got the same. Regarding grade 7-10, 1.7% of member participants attended but it is 5.5% for nonmember participants. Still, T-test reveals that there is statistically significant difference between MPs and MNPs. This finding is consistent with the finding of Suleiman (2004) which indicated that member participants are significantly more educated than nonmember participants.

#### 4.2 Participation of women members in management of their cooperative societies

As depicted in the table, 61.6% of the total respondents were not participating in annual general assembly meeting. This shows that majority of the women have no awareness to exercise their right to participate in general assembly meeting. The key informants from Asgori have clarified the attitude towards women's participation in cooperatives as stated below. "It is impossible for husband and wife to be involved in cooperatives at the same time. There should be sharing of responsibilities between them. Otherwise who is going to take care of the issues in side our houses if we say that both husband and wife should participate equally? Practically it is difficult."

As it shown that almost all respondents (99.3%), (99.3%) and (98.6%) were not participating as members in management committee, annual planning and in decision making respectively. The reason for low participation in agricultural cooperatives according to the key informants is summarized as follows: The reason can be related to wrong attitude of men towards women which may be stemmed from cultural and religious beliefs and norms of the community. Culturally women are not encouraged to have contact with men and to participate in public issues. Especially if the woman is married, her husband will not allow her to involve in different

Election process is one part of cooperative management; every cooperative member should participate in election process in order to elect the right person as representative to achieve the organizational objectives, and to address the common problems of members by looking after the affairs of cooperatives. As we can see that, 98.2% of the active member participants were participating in election process of the management committees and only 1.1% of the non member participants were involved in election process. A chi-square test ( $\chi^2=129.546$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) indicates a significant difference between member participants and member non participants. It was shown that majority of the member participants (98.2%) were exercising their management power and 1.8% were not. Whereas in case of non member participants, 14.4% exercise their power and 85.5% have not. A chi-square test ( $\chi^2=82.444$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) indicates a significant difference between member participants and non member participants.

As indicated that the area of their power exercising were attending meeting, financing the cooperatives, sharing responsibilities and at least more than two areas from the listed; 33.7%, 8.7%, 13% and 44.6% respectively. The result indicates that the major area of power exercising for women is attending the meeting which is not mean participation in decision making. The figure below illustrates (bar chart-4.1).

As the bar chart indicated, social factor is the major problem that hinders women participation in cooperatives followed by at least more than two different factors, personal problem and cultural factors respectively. As the table below also depict, factors that hinder participation Vs women member participation in election process of management committee shows significant association. A chi-square test ( $\chi^2=137.720$ ,  $df=1$   $p<0.05$ ) indicates a significant difference between member participants and nonmember participants.

#### 4.3 Accessibility of women to basic resources

As shown in the table 4.9, only 31.5% of women participants had access to land ownership and all respondents of women were not accessible to phone facility and other technologies which can affect their participation in cooperatives. With to live stock, majority of the respondents had no oxen and other livestock which accounts 76.7%, others had 19.9%, 3.4% less than five and 5-10 livestock in number respectively. This is not surprising that women in rural areas are known for their very low access to different essential resources. This result goes hand in hand with the findings of Chadha *et al.*, (2003) and Bishop-Sambook, (2004) that indicated that men enjoy the use of a relatively wide range of resources and they control nearly all-household resources in which women do not benefit from their efforts.

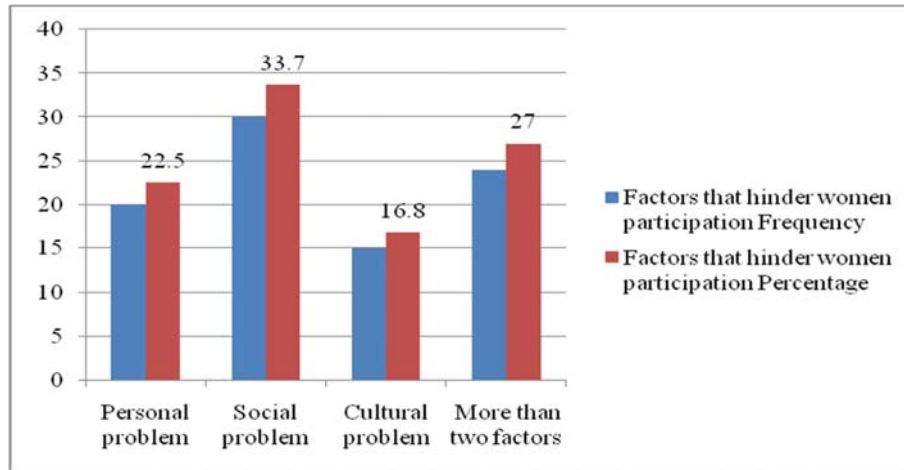
As shown in the above table (table 4.9), the annual income of the majority (76%) of the respondents were in the range of 1000-5000 birr which is below minimum poverty level standard (\$100US) which shows women are still the poor of the poorest and lag behind in any activity of their cooperative. The occupations of the majority (91.1%) of respondents were fully agriculture while 8.1% were engaged in both agriculture and other activities to generate income. This shows that most of the women members are engaged in very subsistence agricultural activities so that they are not economically sound which can affect their participation in cooperatives.

#### 4.4 Factors that hinder participation of women in Cooperative

As the bar chart indicated, social factor is the major problem that hinders women participation in cooperatives followed by at least more than two different factors, personal problem and cultural factors respectively. As the table below also depict, factors that hinder participation Vs women member participation in election process of management committee shows significant association. A chi-square test ( $\chi^2=137.720$ ,  $df=1$   $p<0.05$ ) indicates a significant difference between member participants and non member participants.

From the group discussion it was indicated that men have mostly participated in assembly meeting. The difference in participation between women and men were due to social and cultural problems and negative attitude of the community towards women.

The results of the study by Kongolo M. and Bamgose (2004) also indicated problem areas hindering women active participation in the development process of their respective communities. Many problem areas were identified and mentioned, from which six were the most outstanding, namely: a lack of information; lack of resources; lack of government assistance; lack of education and skills; consideration and belief in cultural values, and the influence of discrimination practices



**Fig 1:** Frequency distribution by factors that hinder women in cooperatives

## 5. Conclusions

Women in Ethiopia encounter several problems that are multifaceted. Hence, their active involvement in all socio-economic development activities is vital. It would not be out of place to accept the socio-economic standard of women as an indicator of development of the country because; women constitute half of the population. A cooperative has considered as a means of empowering resource poor rural women who have no access to management of their cooperative, basic resource and different service benefits.

This study basically attempted to assess the determinants of women participation in agricultural cooperative societies of the study area. Based on the survey findings nearly respondents reported that they were not at important management positions of their cooperative. Furthermore, as observed from the result of survey, the majority of the respondents reported that they had not access to any basic resources and agricultural service benefits from their cooperative societies. Moreover, the survey result also indicated that there is significant difference between member participants and nonmember participants in most of the determinant factors.

On the basis of the main findings the burden of responsibilities in the house hold, cooperatives should consider to design and implement training, family dialog, community conversation programs that bring attitudinal change in men so that they share the house hold responsibilities, since these are deep-rooted cultural issues that need more awareness and behavioral change. Besides, efforts should be made to empower and capacitate women through various programs that improve their participation in cooperatives and build their confidence of borrowing sufficient amount of money and intensifying their input utilization and other important business diversifications. Furthermore, Special attention also should be given for women's participation in the management of cooperative especially in decision making at different levels of the organization. There is a need to form market facility for women and linkage to avoid getting an opportunity of markets. This can help enhancing their capacity to express their common interests and advocate for improved policy environment and it can also increase their bargaining power, access of information, experience sharing and market coordination. Moreover, there is a need to facilitate linkage between different cooperatives like agricultural producers, consumers, SACCO, and other cooperatives and private

sectors to avoid price fluctuation in the market and create market outlet for women.

Finally, there should be also a research on the cultural taboos and other challenging factors that hinder women participation and benefits for the seeking of cooperatives by them. Appropriate regulations should be identified to eliminate these cultural taboos and practices and government has to monitor how women are benefiting at grass root level from cooperatives.

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