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Farmer Mobilization through Agricultural Cooperatives and Farmers Welfare in Western Uganda: A Case of ACPCU Ltd

Boaz Namanya¹, Dr. Robert Mugabe², Miton Nuwabimpa³

¹AssistantLectuer, Kabale University ^{2,3}Lectuer, Bishop Stuart University

ABSTRACT: This study was initiated to investigate roles (services) of agricultural cooperatives towards farmer's welfare in Western Uganda. The general objective of the study was to assess the role of agricultural cooperatives towards promoting farmer's welfare in Western Uganda. Out of the target population, the sample size was 196 respondents, purposive and simple random sampling were utilized to select respondents. The study employed cross sectional research design that used qualitative and quantitative methods in data collection. Questionnaires were used to obtain data from farmers and interview guide was used to get data from key informants. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The key findings of the study indicated that there was a significant effect of farmer mobilization through group formation, resources access in terms of inputs that has resulted into increased outputs which has led to increased incomes and thus improved farmers' welfare. From the study, it was recommended that cooperatives should enhance the members benefits in order motivate them to remain as members but also attract non-members to join the cooperatives if their welfare is to be improved. Sustainably through agriculture as a business activity.

KEY WORDS: Farmer mobilization; Farmers welfare; group formation.

INTRODUCTION

Farmer groups are important areas through which farmers can access market and credit information as well as other important agricultural information like new agriculture technologies. They also form important avenues for mobilizing farmers around the required objective especially in delivery of services and formulation of policies that support agriculture development. In countries such as Tanzania and Ghana, farmer groups are at the Centre of the poverty reduction strategy, extension delivery and crop marketing (Uliwa and Fischer, 2004; Salifu et al., 2010). Mobilizing producers into groups and establishment of contractual arrangements between farmers and traders is an important entry point to link farmers with traders hence a market assurance to farmers (HODECT, 2010).

Kumar et al. (2015) define a cooperative as," an organization of group of people with collective responsibilities and thoughts for the development of needy, especially under privileged". It can be further defined as, an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise(FAO et al., 2012). The above definitions are detailed but not tailored to agriculture. Therefore, this study adopted a definition by Agriculture for Impact Agricultural Cooperatives, (n.d.) which defines agricultural cooperative as "a formal form of farmer collective action for the marketing and processing of farm products and or for the purchase and production of farm inputs".

According to Kumar, Wankhede, & Gena (2015) Cooperatives have inherent advantages in tackling the problems of poverty alleviation, food security and employment generation. They further argue that the cooperative model has immense potential to deliver goods and services in areas where both the public and private sector have failed (*UNDPUG2016—Cooperatives Report*, 2016). This model has pointed out a basic minimum package of coordinated services for any transformation to happen. The package includes; financial services, extension services, marketing and value addition services all which are best delivered through a cooperative strategy (*Nrace_fo_business_model_uganda_final.Pdf*, n.d.). This is often guaranteed by pooling resources like land and produce under a joint management to ensure leverage interventions.

Across literature, welfare had not been defined in its entirety, different scholars defined it as programs undertaken to help the needy (Hayes, 2019) and this is because the word is seldom used alone (Greve, 2008). Hudson & Kuhner (2011) emphasize that welfare should be two different dimensions that is productive and protective dimensions of welfare. Although there is no agreement of the

1 *Corresponding Author: Boaz Namanya

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constructs in either dimensions Shavel (2005) & Powell and Barrientos (2004) *agree that* it addresses issues of education and training and labour relations, employment and income aspects.

Therefore, this study referred to welfare as subjective utility derived from the functioning's an individual undertakes which are themselves a product of available resources to an individual and the capabilities he/she possessed (Robeyns, 2016). The study's benchmark was the inability of household consumption expenditure per adult below US\$1.9 per day or US\$57 per 30-day calendar month, required to meet the cost of basic needs (World Bank, 2015).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Agricultural cooperatives are vital in mobilizing farmers to trade collectively with an intention of enjoying economies of scale in farm input acquisition as well as selling the agricultural outputs aiming at improving the welfare of farmers. Because of the intended benefits of agricultural cooperatives, many farmers have been mobilized to be members and this has seen an increase of agricultural cooperatives especially in western Uganda (Ahimbisibwe, 2018). Despite this increase in number of agricultural cooperatives, farmers have remained poor (Nanyanzi, 2019). According to UBOS Report (2018), 24% of households in western Uganda are poor compared to the 21.4% national average. This study therefore assumes that mobilization of farmers through agricultural cooperatives improves the welfare of farmers if done effectively and efficiently. Based on this assumption, the study aimed at finding out the effect of farmer mobilization on the welfare of farmers in south western part of Uganda.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct an empirical study to find out how farmer mobilization through agricultural cooperatives influences farmers' welfare in south western Uganda. The objective of the study was to assess the effect of famer mobilization and its effect on cooperative members' welfare

Importance and Justification of the Study

The outcome of this study is of significant value to policy makers and administrators at government level as it may enable them revisit and revise the policies that can make agricultural cooperatives more efficient in improving the cooperative members' welfare. Effective strategies used by cooperatives may be identified and recommendations made to government on how to improve practice. Although a lot of studies have been done on household welfare in many countries, there is scarce literature on how agricultural cooperatives influence the members' welfare in Ugandan context which motivated the researcher to undertake this study.

Group formation, Resources access and farmers welfare

Kaganzi et al. (2009) indicated that farmer groups through collective action help meet basic market requirements for minimum quantities, quality, and frequency of supply which they cannot achieve as individuals.

Farmer organizations enhance equality as women are well represented as members, although not much in leadership levels in apex farmer associations (Latynskiy & Berger, 2016). The contribution of membership to the Small-Holder Farmer Group facilitates essential information on a number of agricultural inputs and available markets (Mwesigwa, 2018). Contrastingly, group membership has detrimental effects on adoption of agricultural technologies especially inorganic fertilizers (Mwaura, 2014). Although these scholars contrast each other, there isn't a direct link to welfare but rather an indirect bearing on the utility derived from increased productivity of their agricultural undertakings (Robeyns, 2016).

Majority of the rural population is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, increasing agricultural production through active involvement of the poor and weaker sections of the society by forming farmer groups is the most appropriate solution(Kumar et al., 2015a). Developing smallholder farmers Agricultural cooperatives are widely considered as vital tools that can help smallholder farmers to overcome the constraints that hinder them from taking advantage of their business as it empowers economically, enhancing their collective bargaining power and thereby reducing the market challenges(Woldu et al., 2013).

According to Geoffrey et al (2012.), there is relationship between group mobilization and access to credit for agriculture which boasts welfare gains. Apex associations have helped farmers to access markets for both inputs and outputs through economies of scale (Latynskiy & Berger, 2016). This is similar to the study in Zimbabwe on the reasons as why cooperative societies are formed more common causes were to empower marginalized members (18%), to address market failures (18%), as a defense against adverse

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socio-economic conditions (16%), to access cheap transport and storage facilities (12%) and to purchase bulk inputs at lower prices (12%) (Mhembwe & Dube, 2017).

Farmer groups have been formed to facilitate access to better agricultural technologies (Gibson et al. 2008); to improve access to better earning markets for produce (Aliguma, et al. 2007); facilitate produce transport to markets (Mwaura, et. al., 2012); for financial security and household investments (Mutoro, 1997); access credit where groups members acts as collateral for each other (Loevinsohn, et al. 1994); to invest in agricultural value addition and milk processing plants (Mbowa et. al. 2012According to (Ampaire, Magala & Lwasa, 2013). Producer associations are formed when many farmer groups merge to form a bigger association. A producer association enhances collective bargaining power and gives a bigger voice to farmers. Agricultural cooperatives create a model of self-help community development that support men and women, small agricultural producers and marginalized groups to become informally gainfully employed (Green and Haines, 2002; Flora et al., 2004; Zeuli and Radel, 2005). The government of Uganda is therefore, promoting the establishment of several farmer associations in the country to help bridge the marketing gap faced by smallholder after the collapse of many co-operative societies in the early 1990s. It is important to note however, that there is scanty literature on the extent to which farmer mobilization through cooperatives influence farmers welfare in the Ugandan context, thus the need to undertake this study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of the agricultural cooperatives and how they influence farmers' welfare, cross sectional research design was used, where quantitative research approach for data collection and analysis was used.

Study population

The study population constituted members of ACPCU Ltd as primary respondents. These are individual members of cooperative societies which form ACPCU Ltd as a cooperative union. These are all coffee farmers in all the six districts that is; Sheema, Mitooma, Buhweju, Bushenyi, Ntugamo and Rubirizi. ACPCU field officers and district production officers, and the district commercial officers formed the key informants of the study.

Sample size Determination

Quantitatively, the researcher used a standard scientific Morgan and Krejice (1970) table of sample size determination to choose a representative sample from the population in order to generalize findings. The very nature of qualitative component required the researcher view of reality. This unlike the quantitative methodologies where the sample sizes are predetermined, in this study the sample size was determined by purposively majorly on key informants.

Research Instruments

The study used structured questionnaire to obtain quantitative information from farmer members of cooperative societies as primary respondents in order to answer the research questions. This method was used because its coverage is wide and many respondents can be reached at the same (Amin, 2005). The researcher developed structured closed ended questions formed on the study variables to be put to primary respondents with a five Likert scale option ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The instrument was tested for its validity and reliability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Farmer Mobilization

Quantitatively, all the participants (100%) agreed that there is a group belonging of farmers in a cooperative. This analysis shows that cooperatives play a vital role in mobilizing farmers in the area to act as a one functional unit to reap the benefits of the services cooperatives offer. On whether decisions are undertaken collectively, majority of the participants (95.4%) agreed that there is collective decisions which are taken through participatory approach. However, the study found out that few members (4.6%) were not in agreement that decision making process involves the views of all members. These could be members that are regarding themselves inferior when debates are going on and therefore not bothered whether they participate in debates or not.

The most effective tool of group farmer mobilization is group formation with in a bigger cooperative society. These groups help in tackling micro challenges. Therefore, the researcher asked if these cooperative societies had mobilized farmers to help them overcome such barriers, the findings indicate that majority (91.7%) were in agreement that, indeed cooperatives had helped in

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formation of minor groups while 5.1% disagreed and 3.1% of the respondents were neutral. These were mostly farmer savings and lending groups that met weekly. This finding shows that cooperatives have indeed helped to mobilize farmers into group formation that helps in resource mobilization

Majority (53.1%) of the farmers were in agreement that there were collective projects owned by groups within the cooperative or the cooperative itself. (37.1%) of respondents were not sure while 9.8% disagreed with this statement. The 46.9% of the respondents who were either not sure or disagreed with the statement may be were not bothered or most likely the projects are there but were not generating an income for the group. However, the findings indicate that there is a strong link between group formation and income generating projects.

The researcher was interested in finding out the nature of income generating projects operated by groups in communities, a review of secondary data indicated that different groups owned different kinds of group projects. These included Hulling Machines, bee keeping, Savings and Lending Schemes (SLS), Tents and chairs for hire, houses for rent, schools and other famers owned either boda-bodas, or taxis that brought in money on either weekly or daily basis.

It was established that although a number of cooperative societies owned their own income generating projects, most of them were not profitable due to poor management.

Majority (74.2%) of the respondents were in agreement that cooperatives led to access to finance and indeed had received any form of finance form their cooperatives. (18.6%) were not sure while only (7.2%) disagreed. From the findings it is clear that there was more than one form of financial products extended to farmers by cooperatives or else why would almost 19% of farmers not be sure. The researcher therefore needed to establish what kind of financing these cooperative societies render to their farmers? A review of secondary data indicated that farmers were given crop financing through their cooperatives, Crop advance, school fees loans though their SLS and most importantly, the smaller groups were a source of social capital (guarantors) for financing.

The findings indicate that indeed cooperative societies increased the access to resources and financing although the interest rates were still very high and unaffordable for majority of the farmers. This could probably be the reason that despite the long time these cooperatives have existed for, access to these resources has remained low staggering slightly above 50%.

Simple majority (56.7%) were in agreement that Cooperatives avail farmers with storage facilities, 41.2% were in disagreement and 2.1% were undecided. This means that the storage facilities received are not enough or sold to farmers expensively

Testing Hypothesis: Farmer mobilization and farmers' welfare in western Uganda.

Ho: Farmer mobilization has no significant effect on farmers' welfare in western Uganda.

Ha: Farmer mobilization has a significant effect on farmers' welfare in western Uganda.

The level of significance is 1%

The statistical test used was spearman's rank correlation

To establish the effect of farmer mobilization on farmer's welfare, the researcher ran a correlation. Spearman correlation was ran and the findings are illustrated in the Table 1.

Table 1: Showing Correlations between farmer mobilization and Farmers welfare

	-		Farmer mobilization	farmers welfare
Spearman's rho	Farmer mobilization	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.250**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		Ν	194	194
	farmers welfare	Correlation Coefficient	.250**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		Ν	194	194

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

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Table1 shows that there is a weak but significant correlation between farmer mobilization and farmers welfare (r=0.250; p<0.05). This implies that Farmer mobilization has a significant effect on welfare of farmers in Western Uganda. Therefore, it can be concluded that we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis and conclude that Farmer mobilization has a contribution on Farmers welfare.

DISCUSSION

The study indicates that Cooperatives were involved in mobilizing farmers to form smaller groups that helped them to access the financial resources from the society. The study offers support to Nanyanzi(2019), who said that farmer cooperative societies play critical role in providing safety nets for farmers, members can borrow soft loans from their groups and use their produce as security to secure funds to solve short term pressures such as paying school fees. This is also offers support to Geoffrey et al (2012.), who indicated that there is relationship between group mobilization and access to credit for agriculture which boasts welfare gains.

The study indicates that belonging to a cooperative reduced the risks of farmers facing financial sets, loan affordability and increased the chances of starting group income generating projects. This was in disagreement with Nanyanzi (2019) who indicated that farmers were likely to be poor compared to other occupations. No wonder majority of farmers in cooperatives reported increased ease with which they paid school fees for their children.

The finding of the study indicated that group membership had a positive influence on access to resources, inputs consequently increasing production. This was in disagreement with Mwesigwa (2018)& Mwaura, (2014) who said that group membership has detrimental effects on adoption of agricultural technologies especially inorganic fertilizers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion and implication of the study

The study sought to establish the effect of farmer mobilization on welfare of farmers in Western Uganda. Mobilization of farmers increased access to resource and access to income generating projects and this was established that by and large mobilization was done through farmer meetings.

Cooperatives do great work in the mobilization of farmers and formation of cluster groups in which farmer's access cooperative services like the starting of group income generating projects. The most common projects are Hulling Machines, bee keeping, Savings and Lending Schemes (SLS), Tents and chairs for hire, houses for rent, schools and other famers own either boda-bodas, or taxis that bring t in money on either weekly or daily basis. The findings indicate that there is a strong link between group formation and income generating projects. The major outcome of the study is that farmer mobilization is significant in supporting farmers to improve their welfare.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that management should be strengthened so that the projects can be profitable to members, because it was established that although a number of cooperative societies owned their own income generating projects, but most of them were not profitable due to poor management.

The researcher recommends that cooperatives should reduce interest rates charged in order to ensure cheap and easy accessibility of financial resources. The findings indicate that indeed cooperative societies increased the access to resources and financing although the interest rates were still very high and unaffordable for majority of the farmers. This could probably be the reason that despite the long time these cooperatives have existed for, access to these resources has remained low staggering slightly above 50%.

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