

Involvement of Agro-Based Cooperatives in Agricultural Marketing and Development in Enugu State, Nigeria: A Qualitative Analysis

ABSTRACT- *In view of isolated small scale farmers still dominating the Nigerian agricultural sector, the import of this study is on the need to employ agro-based cooperatives in mobilising rural farmers for effective marketing of their products since they lack the capacity to effectively market these products individually. This will invariably spur them towards increased production hence promoting agricultural development. Hence the study analysed the involvement of agro-based cooperatives in agricultural marketing and development in Nigeria. It specifically examined the reason behind the formation of these cooperatives, assessed their involvement in agro processing and marketing. It further identified the various constraints to their active participation in agro-marketing. The paper adopted a qualitative research design. Thus structured interview and focus group discussions were employed in collecting qualitative data from selected agricultural cooperatives in Aninri LGA of Enugu State, Nigeria. The qualitative data collected were analysed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that most agro-based cooperatives in Nigeria were yet to evolve from the level of solely seeking assistance to a purpose driven business oriented enterprise. It also found out that most of these cooperatives are multipurpose in nature with very few performing marketing functions for their members. It identified farmers' apathy towards cooperative marketing, poor appreciation by rural farmers of the economic benefits of cooperative marketing, absence of a felt need to run a business oriented venture among rural farmers as factors militating against the active involvement of these cooperatives in agro processing and marketing. The paper suggests the need for the transformation of agricultural cooperatives in Nigeria into market competitive ventures characterised by active involvement in agro marketing, extensive education of rural farmers on the economic benefits of cooperative marketing, introduction of economic policies and measures that will create an enabling environment for these cooperatives to effectively engage in marketing activities.*

Keywords -Agro-Based Cooperatives, Agricultural Marketing, Agricultural Development, Cooperative Marketing, Small Scale Farmers

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies by Obasi and Agu (2000), Oluwatayo et. al. (2008), Omotesho et al. (2010) noted that in most developing economies such as Nigeria, small scale rural farmers form the bedrock of agricultural production accounting for over 90% of agricultural production. However, they stressed that they are faced with various marketing challenges such as inadequate storage, lack of processing and transportation facilities, high rate of produce deterioration, inadequate marketing information and facilities, lack of credit facilities (Awoyinka, 2009; Eze et al., 2010). These factors have continued to hinder these small scale farmers who remain the major players in agricultural production in developing economies like Nigeria from efficient marketing of their agricultural

products hence affecting agricultural development. This is in line with study by [Idachaba \(2004\)](#) which argued that marketing constitute the major problem in Nigeria's agricultural development. He stressed that marketing problems as experienced by these rural farmers result in their low profit margin and returns invariably discouraging them from increased production. To ensure increased agricultural production which will invariably foster agricultural development, these farmers must have an assured market for their products. Profit maximisation through efficient marketing of their products will invariably motivate them towards increased production thus fostering the growth of the agricultural sector.

In this vein, studies by [ICA \(2010\)](#), [Ibitoye \(2011\)](#) also pointed out that lack of appropriate organizations which will organise these rural farmers in efficient agricultural marketing as one of the major problems of agricultural development in Nigeria. Thus [Yamusa & Adefila \(2014\)](#) in their study suggest that in countries like Nigeria where small scale farmers form the bedrock of agricultural production, agro-based co-operatives should be employed to efficiently organise these small scale farmers to pool resources and transact business in a cost effective manner so as to ensure a more efficient marketing of their products. This implies that through effective joint marketing, these small scale farmers will achieve profit maximisation which will invariably spur them towards increased production hence promoting agricultural development.

Studies by [Hedge \(2013\)](#), [Prakash \(2009\)](#) observed that agricultural cooperatives in emerging economies like India have continued to play a major role in the development of their country's agricultural sector through its marketing function. [Yamusa and Adefila \(2014\)](#) noted that in Nigeria, successive governments and donor Agencies have over the years established various agricultural cooperative based projects such as Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs), River Basin and Rural Development Authority (RBRDA), Agricultural cooperative projects like Fadama I, II and III project. This is in recognition of the need to organise these small scale farmers under agricultural cooperatives so as to ensure the development of the country's agricultural sector.

Presently there is an upsurge in the number of agricultural cooperatives in Nigeria. However, most of these agricultural cooperatives are neither engaged in the marketing of agricultural products nor other marketing related functions such as agro-processing, storage, distribution, grading, etc., ([Ilebani, 2010](#)). The question that now arise is why are agricultural cooperatives in a country like Nigeria whose agricultural sector is still being dominated by small scale farmers not actively engaged in the marketing of agricultural products hence its poor contribution to the development of the country's agricultural sector? This forms the crux of this study which involves a critical assessment of the involvement of these cooperatives in agricultural marketing as well as factors militating against its active participation in agro-marketing.

Research Objectives

This study was designed primarily to assess the involvement of agricultural cooperatives in agricultural marketing and development in Nigeria. Specifically the study sought to:

1. Find out the reasons behind the formation of these agro based cooperatives.
2. Determine the farmers' expected benefits from these agro-based cooperatives.
3. Ascertain whether these cooperatives are involved in the marketing of their agricultural products.
4. Identify the hindrances to the active involvement of these agro-based cooperatives in agro – marketing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Agricultural Marketing: Its Significance to Agricultural Development

Nnabuko (2004), Perreault and McCarthy (2000) describe marketing as the performance of activities that seek to accomplish an organization's objectives by anticipating customer needs and directing a flow of need-satisfying goods and services from producer to customer. They affirm that the primary role of marketing involves adding form, place, time and possession utilities to maximise consumer satisfaction. Thus Asogwa and Okwoche (2012), Gana et al. (2011), Igben and Eyo (2002), describe agricultural marketing as involving all business activities that ensure the movement of agricultural commodities from the point of production to the point of consumption. flow of goods and services from the area of agricultural production to the point of consumption.

According to Asogwa and Okwoche (2012), agricultural marketing starts from the decision on what to produce and ends with the actual consumption of these agricultural products by the final consumer. Thus, the central point in all these descriptions, is that it involves all activities such as harvesting, sorting, processing, storage, transportation, etc., carried out to ensure the farm produce gets to the final consumer where, when and how it is needed. These descriptions further emphasize that agricultural marketing ends with payments to the farmers by the consumer for the acquisition of their product. This means that agricultural marketing ensures that farmers receive expected remuneration for their farm produce which invariably encourage them to embark on more production thereby promoting agricultural development. This invariably implies that agricultural marketing is necessary for agricultural development as it spurs farmers towards increased production.

In a similar vein, Adeleye (2008) added that marketable surplus which is partly due to transformation of agriculture from subsistence level into a commercial venture have necessitated the need for marketing in agriculture thereby throwing agricultural marketing to the lime light. The study argues that to ensure increased production, farmers must be assured of profit from their agricultural products as this serves as a motivation for them to produce more. Hence, agricultural marketing therefore becomes very critical in addressing the issue of how these farmers can get their products to consumers at a profit. Efficient agricultural marketing therefore ensures that farm products get to the final consumer in a manner that ensures consumer satisfaction and profit

realisation. This makes agricultural marketing critical to agricultural development since it helps to ensure that increased production is sustained.

Role of Agricultural Marketing Co-operatives in Agricultural Development

Studies by Mai-Lafia and Obaka (2011) pointed out that agricultural marketing cooperatives are involved with the joint marketing of agricultural products through the provision of value adding activities such as processing, sorting, grading, packaging, etc., necessary to transform agricultural produce in the form required by consumers. Omotesho et al. (2010) explained that most of these marketing efforts such as processing, grading, packaging, storage, etc., cannot be efficiently carried out by these individual small scale farmers, hence the need for them to form cooperatives to jointly carry out these functions to enjoy economies of scale and profit maximisation. Works by Adefila (2012), Chambo (2009) also noted that agricultural marketing cooperatives help motivate small scale farmers to make entry into markets which they would not have ventured into as individual farmers, providing them with assured market for their produce, better production decisions and better prices for their agricultural produce. In line with this, these studies suggested the need for agricultural marketing cooperatives to be adopted in mobilising small scale farmers in developing economies like Nigeria for effective marketing of their agricultural products to boost agricultural development. Thus one can rightly argue that agricultural marketing cooperative is critical to agricultural development in Nigeria since small scale farmers still dominate its agricultural production.

Moving on, FAO (2002) as cited in Onugu and Abdulahi (2011) stressed that most agricultural cooperatives are not familiar with the dynamics of market competition hence are prone to lose their market share or become completely eliminated in the face of stiff competition. Thus they suggest that for these agricultural cooperatives to thrive successfully in the midst of stiff competition which is always the case, they must first understand the dynamics of market oriented economies and plan its operations in line with that understanding. They further noted that this understanding should gear them towards restructuring into a market oriented business venture that can adapt to the prevailing market environment and ensure profit maximisation. They also highlighted the need to put in place an enabling environment that will enable these cooperatives to operate successfully through government's provision of necessary infrastructures, open market regulations and enacting of favourable cooperative policies and laws.

Review of Agricultural Cooperatives in Nigeria

In recognition of the need to organise these farmers under cooperative organizations for easy co-ordination and realisation of mapped out objectives, studies by Oluwatayo et al. (2008), Yamusa and Adefila (2014) observed that over the years, most small scale farmers that dominate the Nigerian agricultural sector are organized as cooperatives under various government and non-governmental projects aimed at assisting these farmers to boost their production. These include government projects such as Agricultural development projects (ADPs), River Basin and Rural Development Authority (RBRDA), etc., as well as donor agencies assisted projects such as Fadama I, II, and III, etc. However, studies by Adeleye (2008), Ibitoye (2011), Mai-Lafia and Obaka

(2011) observed that over the years, obtaining funds and various types of assistance from either government or non-governmental agencies have remained the sole aim for the formation of most agricultural cooperatives in Nigeria. These aids include access to credit facilities, irrigation facilities, training, necessary facilities/equipment, training on improved production techniques, farm inputs, etc.

Study by Hedge (2013) pointed out that most cooperatives in emerging economies like India also started with the sole aim of obtaining funds from government and non-governmental agencies. However, the study stressed that over the years, these agro based cooperatives in India evolved from merely seeking of funds to a purpose driven business oriented ventures with defined marketing objectives. Reviewing the success of agro-based cooperatives in India, Prakash (2009) noted that obtaining assistance from agencies remains the main focus of most agricultural cooperatives at its beginning phase. However, the study argued that to remain successful in its role of promoting agricultural development, it is expected that these cooperatives transit from mere seeking of funds and assistance to a market oriented business venture with defined goal of profit maximisation. It observed that in the case of cooperatives in India, it evolved to its present phase which is characterised by active participation in the processing and marketing of agricultural products. It started with the first phase characterised by the goal of obtaining funds and later evolved to the second stage of extensive education of farmers on the rudiments of cooperative organisation as well as its various economic benefits. This second stage was characterized by active extension programmes aimed at educating these farmers on the need to run a purpose driven business venture. It finally evolved to its present phase which is characterized by its active involvement in agro processing, input distribution and cooperative marketing. This phase became possible as a result of the intensive education of farmers that helped most of them realise the need to take advantage of cooperatives in the processing and marketing of their product. Thus this active involvement of these cooperatives in agricultural processing and marketing brought about a major development in India's agricultural sector as it resulted in increased productivity of these farmers.

However, the above scenario cannot be said of agro based cooperatives in Nigeria, Adeleye (2008) noted that agricultural cooperative development in Nigeria have remained at the phase of which the sole aim of its formation remains the accessing of funds/support from agencies. This he attributes to the non-realisation of the economic benefits of cooperative marketing as well as lack of interest in setting up a business oriented cooperative among the rural farmers. This is in line with studies by Agbonlahor et al. (2012), Agbo (2009) which noted that most cooperative members in Nigeria indicated that their major reason for joining cooperatives was to access credit facilities and other farm- inputs thus affirming that access to funds remains the major economic benefit farmers expect from agro based cooperatives in Nigeria. Studies by Omotesho et al. (2010), Omoregbee and Okojie (2012) also observed that over the years, there has been an increase in the formation of agro based cooperatives evident in the increasing number of registered agro based cooperatives in the various states in Nigeria. However they observed that most of these cooperatives were formed with the sole aim of obtaining funds with most of them disappearing on obtaining the expected funds.

Ilebani (2010) also observed that most agro based cooperatives in Nigeria are multipurpose in nature and focus only on basic functions such as group farming, provision of credits, fertilizers and necessary farm inputs, with very few involved in the processing and marketing of agricultural products. However, he noted that some of these agricultural cooperatives involved in agro-marketing usually fail as a result of various factors such as inefficiency in the management of its business operations, disloyalty of members, perishable nature of farm products, inadequate storage facilities and lack of suitable market outlets.

Challenges of Agricultural Cooperatives in the Marketing of Agricultural Products in Nigeria

Chambo (2009) in his review of agro- based cooperatives in Nigeria identified the inability of traditional agricultural cooperatives to transform into market competitive ventures as one of the challenges of agriculture cooperatives in Nigeria. He noted that these agricultural cooperatives are still driven by quest for fund/assistance instead of the need to expand the size of equity capital and return on investment. Ilebani (2010) in his study noted that the risk of deteriorating produce and lack of proper storage facilities constitute barriers to the greater involvement of cooperatives in marketing of farm produce in Nigeria. This is in line with Adeleye (2008) who observed that the increased production by farmers have continued to result in their frustration due to lack of storage and processing facilities. They classified the major constraints of agricultural cooperative societies in the marketing of agricultural produce in Nigeria into technical and non-technical constraints. The technical constraints include problems of lack of storage, transport facilities, inadequate farm equipment, lack of suitable technology, etc., while the non-technical constraints include lack of trust, high interest rates on loans, etc.

Omotesho et al. (2010) also observed that lack of felt need to set up a business oriented venture which is essential for the survival of any marketing activities among cooperative members as one of the challenges of marketing of agricultural products by agricultural cooperatives in Nigeria. They also identified the deliberate gang up of very large businesses in a bid to frustrate these cooperatives and protect their own business as another challenge of agricultural cooperatives in the marketing of agricultural products in Nigeria. In the same vein, West (2008) in his study indicated that apathy towards cooperative marketing among farmers has led to their marketing their products individually. This is in line with Adeleye (2008) who also acknowledged farmers' apathy towards group activities, fear of being cheated, mistrust, etc., as challenges of agricultural cooperatives in the marketing of agricultural products in Nigeria. He observed that most agricultural cooperative members in Nigeria do not sell their produce through their cooperative societies but prefer selling to private licensed buying agents who make immediate payment on delivery.

In a similar view, studies by Adeleye (2008), West (2008) also acknowledged that most farmers are usually discouraged from marketing their products through their cooperatives due to fraudulent and dishonest practices identified in these cooperatives. This is in accordance with works by Ibitoye (2011), Onje (2003) which identified the problem of dishonesty among cooperative leaders as one

of the crucial factors hindering the marketing of agricultural products by agro based cooperatives in Nigeria. They further added that the low participation of cooperatives in marketing of agricultural product is also as a result of group dynamics of cooperative groups. This involves group decision making which can delay decisions leaving members disillusioned with the cooperative marketing arrangement. Studies by Adeleye (2008), Chikaire (2011) also identified poor understanding of the principle and operations of cooperative marketing, inadequate infrastructural facilities, unfavourable economic policies, administrative bottlenecks and poor management as hindrances to the active participation of cooperatives in the marketing of agricultural products in Nigeria.

3. METHOD

This paper adopted a qualitative research design aimed at assessing the involvement of agro-based cooperatives in Nigeria in agricultural marketing as well as factors militating against its active participation in agro-marketing. The study was conducted in five communities within Aninri LGA of Enugu State, Nigeria. These communities were purposively selected because of the high concentration of rice farmers' cooperatives in these communities. These include Nenwe, Oduma, Ndeaboh, Mpu and Opanku communities of Aninri LGA. Four agricultural cooperatives were selected from each of these communities using purposive sampling technique, the choice of this sample was based on the records of USAID assisted cooperative project. Hence a total of twenty agricultural Cooperatives were selected for the study. Five members inclusive of its leader were selected from each of these twenty (20) selected cooperative societies using convenience sampling method. In all, the sample involved a convenient selection of 100 cooperative members–respondents.

Qualitative data were collected from the selected cooperative members using focus group discussions. Interviews were also administered to the leaders of each of these cooperatives and the extension agent attached to these cooperatives (see Appendix 1). Ten focus-group discussions were carried out for the study each involving ten cooperative members. At the end of each focus group discussions, the researcher met for structured interview with the leaders of the cooperative and the extension agent attached to these cooperatives to probe more on the comments made by their members. The qualitative data gathered from these selected agricultural cooperatives were analysed using narrative (Thematic) analysis while adopting a deductive approach. This involved a four-step approach which include identifying the research questions and formulating interview questions that aligns, collect the narratives for each research questions, identify recurring themes or answers and deduce the answers for each research questions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative data gathered were summarised, grouped and analysed based on the research objectives.

Objective 1: Reasons for the formation of these Agricultural Cooperatives:

These selected cooperatives explained that they are rice farmers organised as cooperatives for the purpose of USAID assisted project. The project involved the training of rice farmers on improved

technology to boost rice production. This is in line with Adeleye (2008) who noted that obtaining funds or assistance from either government or non-governmental agencies remains the sole aim for the formation of most agricultural cooperatives in Nigeria. This is attributed to the non-realisation of the economic benefits of agricultural cooperatives as well as the lack of interest in setting up a business oriented profitable cooperative among these farmers.

Objective 2: Members' expected benefits/Interest:

Most of the respondents agree that joining the cooperatives have boosted their rice production through the use of the improved technology. However as a result of their major interest of obtaining funds from these cooperatives, they expressed their displeasure at their inability to secure expected funds. This reveals Nigerian farmers continued preference of accessing credit over all other economic benefits of cooperatives such as improved technology, agro- marketing, etc. This is in line with study by Agbonlahor et al. (2012) which indicated that obtaining funds/credit facilities was the major expectation of most Nigerian farmers from agro based cooperatives. This further reveals the lack of profit driven business orientation among rural farmers, it is believed that a business oriented farmer will greatly value any new farming technology that is capable of boosting his production.

Objective 3: Involvement of the cooperative in the marketing of their agricultural products:

The cooperatives stated that they were not involved in the marketing of their agricultural products. They explained that they patronised licensed private rice processors who buy their rice harvest to process and subsequently market to the public. This is in accordance with study by Adeleye (2008) which found out that most agricultural cooperative members do not sell their produce through their cooperative societies but prefer selling to private licensed buying agents who make immediate payment on delivery.

Objective 4: Hindrances to the active involvement of these agro-based cooperatives in agro – marketing:

According to opinions sampled from these respondents, the following were factors that hindered cooperatives from marketing of their agricultural products:

- Farmers' apathy towards joint processing and marketing of their produce through the cooperatives. This they attribute to past experiences which revealed underlying personal interest by their leaders, fraudulent and dishonest practices identified in these cooperatives. This has resulted in lack of trust and suspicion among the cooperative members. Thus they indicated that presently they prefer to patronise licensed private rice processors who buy their rice harvest to process and subsequently market to the public. This is supported by Adeleye (2008), Ibitoye (2011), Onje (2003), West (2008) which stated that dishonesty among cooperative leaders, fear of being cheated and mistrust among cooperative members were factors hindering the involvement of agro based cooperatives in the marketing of agricultural products in Nigeria.
- Absence of a felt need to run a business oriented venture among cooperative members. They stressed that most of these farmers only joined these cooperatives with the main purpose of collecting credit facilities after which they disappear. This is in line with

Omotesho et al. (2010) which pointed out that the absence of felt need to run a business oriented venture among rural farmers as one of the challenges of agricultural cooperative marketing in Nigeria.

- Lack of processing, storage facilities as well as enabling infrastructures like electricity, roads discouraged these farmers from embarking on joint processing and marketing of their agricultural produce. This is supported by Ilebani (2010) which found out that the risk of deteriorating produce and lack of proper storage facilities are barriers to the greater involvement of agricultural cooperatives in marketing of agricultural products in Nigeria.
- Prevailing poverty and culture of greed among rural farmers leading to their short run orientation.
- Lack of orientation on the economic benefits of cooperative marketing.
- Lack of support/assistance from government to create an enabling environment for the cooperatives to thrive and successfully market their products.

5. CONCLUSION

Studies by Hedge (2013), Prakash (2009) revealed that agricultural cooperatives in emerging economies like India play an active role in boosting agricultural development through its marketing function. This is not the case with Nigeria whom it shares the same similarities of small scale farmers accounting for a large percentage of its agricultural production. Hence the urgent need for agricultural cooperatives in Nigeria to learn from India where agricultural cooperatives have evolved from the level of solely obtaining credits to a purpose driven business oriented enterprise characterised by active involvement in marketing of agricultural products. Hence based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- There must be seriousness of purpose and determination to succeed on the part of both the government and these agricultural cooperatives. Hence the need for Nigerian Government to take a cue from India where the government is greatly committed to the success of its agricultural cooperatives by creating an enabling environment for them to engage in marketing activities. Hedge (2013), Prakash (2009) noted that the Indian Government in a bid to ensure the success of agricultural cooperatives incorporated its development into the country's national development plans. This is to ensure that economic policies that will encourage the marketing function of these cooperatives were put in place. A good example is the success story of Dairy cooperative which accounts for a major share of processed milk sold in India. Hedge (2013) revealed that these dairy cooperatives involved the collection of milk from small scale farmers in the villages which were subsequently processed and sold by these cooperatives. Thus the government in a bid to protect these cooperative dairy factories restricted milk processing to only these cooperatives.
- The need for government support through improved infrastructure such as transportation, storage, processing facilities which will invariably provide an enabling environment for agricultural cooperatives to effectively engage in marketing activities.

- The need for the formation of a business oriented agricultural co-operatives. This type of organization as described by Chambo (2009) will ensure a departure from the traditional co-operative to a business oriented organisation with a strong motivation for membership and capacity for efficient marketing.
- Cooperatives should put in place measures to prevent fraud so as to boost members' trust since trust and confidence is necessary for cooperatives to engage in marketing activities.
- Intensive reorientation of rural farmers through the use of appropriate media such as agricultural extension agents, workshops, etc., on the economic benefits of cooperative marketing.
- There is need for consistency in the implementation of the agricultural co-operative policy to provide an enabling environment for effective performance and achievement of their marketing functions.

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APPENDIX 1:

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Objective 1: Reasons for formation of the Agricultural Cooperatives:

- What was the reason behind the formation of this cooperative?

Objective 2: Members' expected benefits/interest:

- What are the benefits derived from this cooperative?
- Are these derived benefits in line with your expected benefits?
- If not, what are your expected benefits?

Objective 3: Involvement of the cooperatives in the marketing of agricultural products:

- Does the cooperative perform marketing functions for its members?
- If yes, describe the process involved
- What are your benefits from joint marketing of your agricultural produce?
- If no, how do you go about the marketing or processing of your agricultural produce?

Objective 4: Hindrances to the marketing of agricultural products by agro based Cooperatives

- What are your feelings towards joint marketing or processing of your agricultural produce?
- What are other hindrances to the effective marketing of your agricultural products through the cooperative?