

TANZANIA RURAL WOMEN AND AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES: WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS TO EXTENSION SERVICE

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INTRODUCTION

It was the recognition of the importance of women in agricultural life which made the World Conference on agrarian reforms and rural development (WCARRD), held in Rome, July, 1979, to urge various governments to promote women organisations, including cooperatives, as a means of increasing their productivity and improving their conditions of living. Women are vastly under-represented in agricultural cooperatives in the third World, although they constitute two thirds of the agricultural labour force in large parts of the World (Lamming, 1983, p.1). In Tanzania for example, it is estimated that about sixty percent of all required farm labour is provided by women (Wiley, 1984; Rwambali, 1990), yet cooperative membership is usually limited to heads of households who are mainly male (McCall, 1987).

Lamming (1983) noted that full participation of women in agricultural co-operatives can bring several advantages such as raising food production and acting as a channel to raise women issues for consideration by planners and implementors of agricultural development programmes. He further noted that, it would be difficult to find any cooperative law in any country which discriminates against women, which is also true of Tanzania. However, informal procedures may be strong enough to have a hampering effect particularly when yardsticks such as land ownership or authorization by a husband for a wife to undertake economic transactions are applied (Lamming, 1983, p.14). The paper is based on data obtained from a 1989 survey conducted in the Morogoro and Kilosa districts of Tanzania to examine women role in agricultural production and their involvement in agricultural cooperatives.

WOMEN AND COOPERATIVES

Women Membership in Cooperatives

Women's membership in agricultural cooperatives is claimed to be generally low (Lamming, 1983, p.16; Headland, 1988, p.12; McCall, 1987, p.306). A study done in 1987 in Morogoro region of Tanzania indicated that although there was an increase of female members in cooperatives by 210 percent from the time of registration of cooperative societies in 1984 to December 1986 as compared to 117 percent increase of males, yet female members were outnumbered by a ratio of 7:1 (Rutachokoziwa et al., 1988, pp.8-9).

Table 1. Aggregate Society Members at Registration and by December 1985.

	Total Male	Total Female	Grand Total
At registration 1984	35.14	359	3973
December 1986	7624	1110	8740
% Increase	117	210	119

Source: Baseline Survey of Rural Primary Cooperative Societies in Morogoro Region, Tanzania: Rutachokoziwa et al., 1988, p.9.

In the 1989 study covering five cooperative societies (Sungaji, Kitete, Msowero, Jembemali, Hembeti) it showed that the situation has not changed, women membership ranged from 5 to 27 percent, with the biggest cooperative society having the least percentage of female members (Table 2).

The average percentage of female membership was 16.8 percent which is just slightly above the 1986 value (by 2.2 percent) found by Rutachokoziwa and others in 1988. From these figures it is clear that women membership in cooperatives is very low in Morogoro region. With less than 20 percent female composition it is difficult for women to influence decisions made in the cooperative movement.

Some characteristics were analysed to see if there were any differences existing between cooperative members and non cooperative members. There was a significant statistical difference between the mean ages of cooperative members and non-cooperative members ($p=0.042$). The overall mean age was 39.7 years. The mean age of cooperative members was 42.2 years while that of non-cooperative members was 39.6 indicating that most cooperative members are older than non-cooperative members.

Another significant statistical difference was observed between the mean educational level scores of cooperative members and non-cooperative members ($p=0.012$), indicating that cooperative members were more educated than non-cooperative members. Cooperative members had a mean score of 2.9 while non-cooperative members had a mean score of 2.3.

Further analysis indicated that education levels contributed more towards cooperative membership than age, suggesting that mature educated women are more likely to become cooperative members than others.

Women's Leadership and Decision Making in Cooperative

The administration of the cooperative society is done by a management committee and in most cases it is also responsible for making decisions on behalf of the members in line with the by-laws laid down by the general meetings. However, women participation in leadership is very low. A study done in Morogoro of all primary cooperative societies indicated that, out of 65 societies, about half had no women in their management committees. Even in those societies which had women committee members, it was on average one female per society (Rutachokoziwa et al. 1988, p.9) out of about twelve committee members. The study in 1989 found moreless the similar findings. Among the five cooperative societies which were examined only two cooperative societies had one female each on their management committee list.

At the sametime, it was found that more than half (52.9%) of women cooperative members did not attend general meetings at all and very few (9.8%) attended three general meetings. Almost 20 percent had attended twice and 17.7 percent attended once for the whole season.

Although most of the major decisions and by laws are made during the general meetings, very few women are involved in decision making. First of all, because few attend the meetings as they are tied up with other activities and secondly due to the fact that those who attend rarely speak at the meetings. When asked whether they spoke at meetings since they joined the cooperative society, 72.6 percent said they had never given their opinions at meetings, 21.6 percent had occasionally given their opinions and

5.8% unusually gave their opinions at general meetings.

Reasons given by women cooperative members (n=51) for their low participation in cooperative societies were very interesting despite 57% of them who declined to give their opinions. Twenty five percent stated that they were too busy with both agricultural and domestic duties hence could not manage to attend the meetings. Ten percent said they were usually not informed about meetings. The rest (8 percent) said their low levels of education made it difficult for them to cope with cooperative activities, while others said they did not see any benefit.

Credit and Input supply

None of the respondents had ever received any financial credit from cooperative societies. However, it was learnt from cooperative leaders that loans are normally given in terms of input rather than cash. It is disappointing to note that even inputs loans provided were very little. For example, the five cooperative societies in the season 1988/89 provided inputs loans at a value ranging from 3,500 to 600,000 T. Shs. Taking into consideration the number of villages in each of the cooperative society it is obvious that very few receive such services.

The input loans are open to any farmer under the jurisdiction of that particular cooperative society and this does not discriminate between cooperative and non-cooperative members. Nevertheless, in most cases inputs brought in are mainly meant to service cash crops such as cotton which many farmers do not cultivate. For example, most of the insecticides brought in, which constituted much of the cost were meant for cotton spraying. The respondents also expressed the concern that although such inputs loans can substitute the cash loan, yet they are reluctant to take them because the inputs are very expensive and when repayments are deducted at the end of the season very little is left. They also thought that getting a cash loan would be better since it could be invested in the most demanding issues such as hiring a tractor to reduce drudgery in seedbed preparation.

Cooperative societies have played a significant role than any other source in providing input and price information to the farmers, indicating the need for extension service to educate cooperative leader in the proper utilization of inputs so that they can pass the same to their clients. For example, input information was provided to about 23.7 percent of respondents by cooperative leaders while extension provided 12.4%.

WOMEN INFORMAL COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES

Lamming (1983) noted that women - only cooperatives can be a means for women integration into the mixed agricultural cooperatives. This study found that women farmers are involved in various informal cooperative albeit to a small extent. Group activities which are more common include brewing local beer, gardening, crafts, shops, bars or restaurants and farms (Table 2). Women receive less support from development institutions both in terms of finance and advice. For example cooperatives and extension services have taken less interest in the activities outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Women by Involvement in Informal cooperative Activities.

Activity	% involved	% Not involved	% Total
Brewing	7.2	92.8	100
Gardening	3.1	96.9	100
Crafts	1.0	99.8	100
Shops	11.3	88.7	100
Bar/Restaurant	6.2	94.8	100
Women farm	11.3	88.7	100

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women groups producing crops like onions, cabbage, tomatoes and amaranths do not get extension advice, since extension agents concentrate more on the prominent traditional crops such as maize, cotton, sorghum and rice. In addition, these non-traditional crops have proved to bring in much more cash and supplement a lot of the urban's food requirements. Thus extension service need to address these informal groups to raise their revenue consequently raising the incomes of their families. The extension service could also use neglected informal women groups as a means of getting access to more women.

Following the new cooperative act of 1991 informal cooperative groups are actually allowed to exist before they reach a status of being registered as a cooperative society. According to Van De Ban and Hawkins (1988, p.19) "Extension organisations can play an important role in teaching farmers how to organise themselves effectively". Since this is one of the extension roles, it is imperative for it to help women to organize themselves. Since it was found that age and education affect women's readiness to join cooperatives, extension service should probably start with mature educated women and use those as contact people or key informants.

One of the reasons given by women for not attending cooperative meetings was due to domestic obligations. In other words, when scheduling extension activities such as demonstrations, the timing of when to carry it is of importance in order to get as many women to participate.

It was also learnt that inputs used were expensive in relation to the yield they get. It implies that extension service should consider the cost-benefit analysis before advising the farmer to adopt a particular innovation. The shortcomings involved should be made clear. For example, indicating the consequences of adopting half the recommended rates of fertilizer application. It is not just enough to say use fertilizers, but it is worth indicating how profitable it is as compared to other indigenous means of making the soil fertile.

Women get information from several sources, these sources need to be identified and become a target for extension service so that women can receive correct information. Cooperative leaders, for example need extra training by the extension service since they are widely known by women due to their

role in input distribution and crop marketing. They can be used as a tool to disseminate information on correct use of fertilizers, insecticide and other inputs.

CONCLUSIONS

Policies related to agriculture and cooperatives do not give any special recognition to women's contribution in agriculture. There is a need for policies to clearly state the position of women and how they can be helped to attain equality.

Extension services need to deal with the male domination of community affairs by increasing efforts to unlearning the negative attitude of both men and women to the long accustomed economic and social subordination of women. In order to achieve this it demands skills in group dynamics and participatory techniques which need to be imparted to new extension workers as well as to the already employed through in-service-training.

If rural areas are to be made more progressive increased efforts to help women develop themselves have to be made because they are the major producers. Otherwise, rural development efforts which do not pay special attention to women (according to Lewis, 1984) are likely to encounter difficulties and will delay rural development in general.

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