

Influence of Cooperative Society on Women Empowerment in Nigeria

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Abstract This study set out to determine the influence of cooperative society on women empowerment in Nigeria with particular interest in Awka North LGA, Anambra State. Specific objectives were to determine the influence of social activities of cooperative society on women empowerment; and ascertain the influence of economic activities of cooperative society on women empowerment. Two hypotheses were tested from the responses gathered from the field. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to determine the sample size of 91 respondents from the population of 118, representing a 77% response rate. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, means, percentages, and tables were used to present the data obtained to achieve the study objectives. While the classical linear regression technique using the ordinary least squares (OLS) approach was used to test the hypotheses. Findings revealed that the social activities of women cooperatives in Awka North LGA have significant influence on women empowerment index (F ratio = 4.887; Significant at 0.001). Which shows that social activities of women cooperatives are important determinants of women empowerment. It was also revealed that the economic activities of women cooperatives in Awka North LGA have significant influence on women empowerment index (F ratio = 9.917; Significant@ 0.001). Which implied that efforts at encouraging and promoting economic activities/farming of members of women cooperatives are critical determinants of women empowerment. Among other recommendations, concerted efforts should be made by the government, civil society groups, NGOs, and cooperative societies in raising awareness among rural women on the benefits of joining cooperative societies and a channel for promoting their economic wellbeing and empowerment. Cooperative societies should enhance their economic and social functions to enable women benefit maximally and thereby elevating their status, social profile, and dignity in their communities. This they could do by finding out from the members what they believe will further improve their socio-economic wellbeing and integrating into their core functional activities.

Keywords: *agricultural development, women empowerment, group farming, capacity building, poverty reduction, food security, cooperative.*

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1. Introduction

Cooperative in a simple sense is working together with people. It also means any form of two or more people working to achieve some aim. Cooperative societies are institutions through which activities of cooperation are practiced or demonstrated. International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) stated that it is 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. The cooperative and economic empowerment of women is determined by society and by the societal perception of the status and place of women and the extent of their participation in the economic development of their families and society in general. Women in rural

development are a subject of greater interest no matter where one lives in rural or urban areas. Women are the invisible farmers of the third world war, although they constitute above 50% of the labour force, they are excluded or even marginalized by agricultural modernization and development plans.

In the household, they hold pre-economic tending children and even husbands. The degree of disorganization and chaos that occurs when they are absent in the house confirms the extent of their importance. Women in the past and even until today have played an active role in the socio-economic development of society. Their role in socio-economic development is not left out like women in India, France, and Taiwan, among others. Over the years, women's contribution to different sectors of the economy has been recognized.

People have come to appreciate the vital role played by women in society. The later approaches to development

have in long run gained some recognition for women as an active contribution to rural development. Naturally, women play a major role in childbearing, rearing, and socialization. Thereby ensuring generation continuity and bringing up children that behave true to their cultural background.

In Nigeria, there exist large disparities in the socio-economic development of the genders. Religious and cultural stereotypes have resulted in a patriarchy where the male is in domination and women are obedient followers of male leaders. Nigerian women are seen as a negligible and unorganized force, with little political involvement and progress. Economically, they constitute the majority of the peasant labour force in the agricultural sector, while most of the others occupy the bottom of the occupational ladder and continue to be channeled into service and domestic occupations.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in its 2005 human development report listed some examples to show that despite the considerable progress in developing women's capacity, women and men still live in an unequal world. Poverty has a woman face because 70% of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty are women, the increasing poverty among women arises from their unequal situation in the labour market, their status and power in the family; women have relatively low access to credit from formal banking institutions because they mostly do not have collateral to offer; all regions record a higher rate of unemployment among women than men; among illiterate people in developing countries, the proportion of women is higher than men; women still constitute less than one-seventh of administrators and managers.

In Awka North Local Government Area, it is easily observed that there is a gender gap that hinders women's effective participation in socio-economic and political activities. The women in the area are underrepresented in educational, economic, and political programmes. There are almost non-existent programmes and initiatives set up to address issues of women's access to education and participation in the cash economy and politics. Cooperatives from their antecedents are known to be a channel through which socially and economically marginalized persons have sought to improve their lot. However, extant literature has not provided enough evidence as to their relevance in women empowerment, especially in Awka North LGA.

Therefore, this study sought to determine the influence of cooperative society on women empowerment in Akwa North LGA with specific objectives in determining the influence of cooperative society on women empowerment; and ascertain the influence of economic activities of cooperative society ascertaining its influence on economic activities on women empowerment.

1.1. Hypotheses

Ho₁: Social activities of cooperative societies in Awka North LGA do not have significant influence on women empowerment.

Ho₂: Economic activities of cooperative societies in Awka North LGA do not have significant influence on women empowerment.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Understanding Cooperative

Cooperative has been variously described by scholars and regulatory agencies. International Co-operative Alliance (1995), in [1] defined a co-operative 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. University of Wisconsin Centre for Cooperatives also captured the essence of cooperatives in their definition. The centre has two perspectives to the definition: "a cooperative is a business voluntary owned and controlled by its member patrons and operated for them and by them on a non-profit or cost basis. It is owned by the people who use it". It also viewed it as "a user-owned and democratically controlled enterprise, in which benefit is received according to use". As observed from the definitions, a key element of the definition is the members' dual nature- they are both owners and users, investors, and patrons. It is the dual nature that differentiates the cooperative from other organizations. According to [1], a co-operative is an independent enterprise, promoted, owned, and controlled by members to meet their needs. As an enterprise, co-operatives are active in markets locally, nationally, and worldwide.

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. Co-operatives recognize their accountability to members, employees, customers, suppliers, and other co-operatives, and the larger society. Many of these stakeholders also share ownership of the co-operative. Corporate responsibility is embedded in the principles of co-operative organization and operation and can inspire growing corporate sector efforts in this direction [1].

2.2. Women Empowerment

The empowerment of women has been shown to be essential for sustainable development and economic growth. Empowerment is a process which relates to the power of an individual to redefine her possibilities and options and to have the ability to act upon them [2]. [3] defines empowerment as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them." Thus, empowerment is fundamentally about the enhancement of individuals' capabilities to make a difference in their surroundings, which affects their lives. Empowerment also relates to the influence of an individual on social and cultural norms, informal institutions, and formal institutions in society. Women can be empowered in many ways; socially, economically, politically, and legally. Women's empowerment encompasses complexity in comparison to other disadvantaged groups. Women make up half of the world's population and form a cross-cutting group that overlaps all other groups in society. Compared to other disadvantaged or socially excluded groups, household and family relations play a central part in women's disempowerment [4]. Therefore, policies directed towards women's empowerment must be directed to the family and household level. Several studies have

been made investigating women's autonomy, empowerment, and contraceptive behavior in the five Asian countries included in the survey. However, only a few have investigated the determinants of women's empowerment or autonomy. [5] compare women's autonomy in India and Pakistan, looking at the influence of region and religion. In their study women's autonomy includes four dimensions: economic decision-making, mobility, freedom from threats from the husband, and access to and control over resources, to create a summary index of autonomy. [5] found that there is a large variation in the levels and determinants of women's autonomy in South Asia. They found out that the region plays a greater part in shaping women's autonomy than religion or nationality.

2.3. Role of Cooperatives in Promoting Women Empowerment

Cooperative is viewed as an organization for the promotion of the economic interests of its members; it does not confine itself only to the economic aspect. It also permeates the social aspect of life and aims at establishing a new democratic social order based on freedom and equality, where people live in harmony, caring and sharing like a family, where there is a unity of spirit and a common economic bond [6,7]. Cooperatives have a role to play in alleviating different shocks and paving the way towards a recovery that is socially and economically sound and sustainable. Ultimately, cooperatives can create a safe environment where women increase their self-confidence, identify their own challenges, make decisions, and manage risks. As a result, women are empowered and become active agents of change, entrepreneurs and promoters of social transformation who can improve their own lives and those of the community.

[8] revealed that cooperatives are also effective points of entry for addressing a broad range of gender equality issues such as unpaid work, shared responsibilities, and gender-based violence. Cooperatives have been successful in not only increasing the social participation of women but also in developing drives, initiatives, and leadership qualities. However, to date women's active involvement and leadership in agricultural cooperatives continue to be rather low [9].

Although cooperatives are open to both men and women, the participation of women in terms of membership and leadership positions is still minimal. Thus, there is still much to be done to strengthen women's participation in cooperatives.

In Africa, women are known to produce up to 80% of the food. However, they receive very limited inputs like only 7% of agricultural extension services, less than 10% of the credit offered to small-scale farmers, and own only 1% of the land [10]. In this context, women are often found concentrated in subsistence agriculture and unpaid farm work. The cooperative and self-help model can change this by enabling women and men, farmers, or women to come together for the purposes of acquiring inputs, production services, and marketing of their produce.

2.4. Empirical Review

[11] examined the effect of membership of cooperative societies on the economic activities of farmers, as well as

the determinants of their income in rural Nigeria, focusing on Anambra State using multistage stratified random sampling. The study found, among others, that members' incomes are dependent upon their socio-economic profile such as age, marital status, and membership or otherwise of cooperative societies, education, cooperative marketing, credit, gender and business expertise. Furthermore, it was found that the major challenges of the farmer members are inadequate funds, poor education and illiteracy among most members, conflict among members, and lack of access to farm input. [12] examined the level of participation of women in a cooperative organization and its determinants in Yewa North Local Government area of Ogun State, using two-stage sampling technique to select 180 respondents. Descriptive statistics and logit regression analysis were used to analyze the data generated. The results showed that pressure from household heads, insufficient funds, and low membership were found to be the major problems militating against women participation in cooperatives. Logit regression analysis revealed positive and significant relationships between variables such as education, years of business experience, and forms of cooperative (producers and credit and thrift), and these variables were the major determinants of participation in cooperative society. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that any policy that will further increase the level of education of women would increase their participation in cooperative society.

[13] examined the role of women in agricultural development and their constraints : A Case Study of Biliri local Government Area, Gombe State, Nigeria. Findings revealed that men alone cannot achieve success in farming without women. Therefore; there was a need to encourage female farmers by making available all that was necessary for successful farming. Findings revealed that female farmers were found to have more access to technologies for controlling pests and diseases in livestock, improved livestock housing units, and cassava processing than their male counterparts.

[14] also conducted a study to determine the impact of agricultural development programmes (ADP) on rural women contact farmers' poverty levels in Aguata, an agricultural zone of Abia State, Nigeria. A-multistage random sampling technique was used to select 180 rural women farmers (90 pieces for rural women contact and noncontact farmers). Instrument for data collection was two sets of pretested and structured questionnaires. The poverty line was N5037.79 and N5027.91 per month for rural women contact and non-contact farmers, respectively. Poverty incidence was 0.444 and 0.5222 for rural women contact and non-contact farmers, respectively. The results of the paired t-test showed that ADP impacted positively and significantly on rural women contact farmers' farm income, farm size, and fertilizer use levels at 5.0% risk level. The multiple regression analysis with double log as the lead equation showed that the critical determinants of gross expenditure of rural women contact farmers include household size, farm size, labour use levels, and farm income at given levels of significance.

[15] examined women empowerment through agricultural cooperative in Enugu state. The broad objective of the study was to identify how women in Enugu especially Awgu local government area can be empowered through

agricultural co-operative societies. The researcher identified why women join agricultural co-operatives and their demographic variables like age, income, education level, etc. Examined the extent of women participation in agriculture in Awgu local government area in 2008-2014. Determined the extent to which these agricultural co-operative societies help its members economically through empowerment. Identified problems that confront women participation in agricultural co-operative societies. Data for the study were sourced from two main sources which included primary and secondary. Simple tables and percentages were used in the treatment of data. Chi-square was used in testing the hypotheses. At the end, the researcher found out that Women agricultural co-operative society lacks adequate finance. Most of the agricultural co-operatives could not participate in agricultural co-operatives because of lack of understanding and illiteracy. The women agricultural co-operative societies in Awgu Local Government Area are known for early marriage. The women agricultural co-operative members in Awgu lack adequate health services which leads many of them to deliver their babies at home with the assistance of untrained traditional birth attendants and herbalists. Based on the findings, the researcher recommends that women agricultural co-operative members should be given adequate financial and moral support from the government, particularly on their establishment; the government should provide the women with formal and informal education when the women are educated and the nation is educated as well. They should not be encouraged to get married at an early age to enable them learn things about general empowerment.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

2.5.1. The Collective Action Theory

This study was anchored on the Collective Action Theory. This was propounded by Mancur Olson in 1967 [16]. Collective action occurs when more than one individual is required to contribute to an effort to achieve an outcome. Olson central argument is that concentrated minor interests will be overrepresented and diffuse majority interests trumped due to a free-rider problem that is stronger when a group becomes larger. He further argues, instead that individuals in any group attempting collective action will have incentives to "free ride" to the efforts of others if the group is working to provide public goods. Individuals will not "free ride" in groups that provide benefits only to active participants [16]. Pure public goods are goods that are non-excludable (i.e., one person cannot reasonably prevent another from consuming the good) and non-rivalrous (one person's consumption of the good does not affect another's, nor vice versa). Hence, without selective incentives to motivate participation, collective action is unlikely to occur even when large groups of people with common interests exist. Olson noted that large groups will face relatively high costs when attempting to organize for collective action, while small groups will face relatively low costs, and individuals in large groups will gain less per capita for successful collective action. Hence, in the absence of selective incentives, the incentive for group action diminishes as

group size increases, so that large groups are less able to act in their common interest than small ones.

The cooperative is often portrayed as the ideal organizational form to overcome poverty and promote women empowerment. Cooperative forms of collective action have a strong presence in agriculture, worldwide, processing, and/or commercializing one-half of the world's food at some given stage of the value chain. Cooperatives are not a homogeneous group of enterprises. They operate in all sectors, they may be single-purpose or multipurpose, and they may serve their members exclusively, serve non-members also, or serve the wider public (e.g., cooperative banks). Indeed, the study of cooperatives may well be a study of collective action in practice.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design

The study is a cross-sectional survey, a non-experimental, descriptive research method. Cross-sectional surveys are used to gather information on a population at a single point in time. Here, research instruments, notably the questionnaire were produced and administered by members of women cooperative societies in Awka North LGA.

3.2. Area of Study

The study areas are the towns that make up Awka North Local Government area of Anambra State in Nigeria. Anambra State is one of the States in Southeastern Nigeria. The state lies within the Igbo heartland of the South Eastern geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It was created on August 27th, 1991, with Awka as its capital by General Ibrahim Babangida. Anambra State has a total land area of 4,416 sq kilometers with an estimated population of 4.18 million people [11]. Anambra State has 21 local government areas (LGAs) and four agricultural zones (AZs) of Aguata, Awka, Anaocha, and Onitsha. Hence, the study was carried out in Awka North Agricultural Zone which includes Awba-Ofemili, Ugbene, Ebenebe, Achalla, Urum, Amanasa, Amanuke, Isu Aniocha, Mgbakwu and Ugbenu communities. They are all rural communities. The major occupation of these rural communities is farming. Thus, farming and farm-related activities are the major sources of income for the people of the area.

3.3. Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The population of the study comprises of four "women" cooperatives in Awka North, namely, Njikobi Amanuke Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society Ltd with a total number of 25 women, Awba-Ofemili (cassava) cooperative with a total number of 45 women, Mgbakwu Farmers Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society Ltd with total number of 28 women and Anyibuofu Umuelom Isuaniocha Multi-Purpose with total number of 20 women. The total number of members in these 4 cooperative societies was 118. This number was not much; therefore,

the entire population was adopted for the study. The researchers produced and distributed a total of 118 copies of the questionnaire, but only 91 of these were recovered from the respondents; thus giving a return rate of 77%.

3.4. Validity and Reliability of Instruments

The instrument for data collection underwent scrutiny and approval by three research specialists at the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. At the suggestion of these experts, the instrument was corrected and modified before the final production of the instrument. On the reliability of the instrument, it was established using the test-retest technique. The instrument was administered to a sample of 10 members of a women cooperative in Awka South LGA within a two-week interval. The coefficient of reliability was determined applying Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient formula which yielded 0.90 indicating very high reliability with the prescribed threshold of 0.6.

Table 1. Reliability test using Pearson correlation analysis

		Response Mean A	Response Mean B
Response Mean A	Pearson Correlation	1	.921**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	40	20
Response Mean B	Pearson Correlation	.921**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	20	40

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3.5. Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, means, percentages, and tables were used to present the data obtained to achieve the study objectives. To test the hypotheses and/or to ascertain the effect of social and economic activities of women cooperatives on empowerment, a two regression models was estimated. The estimation technique involved the classical linear regression technique using the ordinary least squares (OLS) approach.

The necessary two models are explicitly specified as follows:

$$WEAI_1 = a + b_1X_{i1} + b_2X_{i2} + b_3X_{i3} + b_4X_{i4} + \dots + b_kX_{ik} + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

$$WEAI_2 = a + b_1X_{i1} + b_2X_{i2} + b_3X_{i3} + b_4X_{i4} + \dots + b_kX_{ik} + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

The dependent variables in the two models, WEAI, are the women empowerment indexes, as explained. The Xs are independent or explanatory variables, designed to capture the various social and economic activities of the women cooperative. The α s and the β s are the parameters to be estimated and ε s are error terms designed to capture the effects of unspecified variables in the model. The regression analyses were run using SPSS package to determine the order of importance of the explanatory variables in explaining the variations observed in the two dependent variables. The t-tests were performed to test the significance of each of the explanatory variables at the alpha level of 5%.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Socio-economic Status of the Respondents

Table 2 shows that the majority of the members (44%) were in the age bracket of 41 to 55 years; followed by 33% of the respondents who were 56 years and above. Only 23% of the respondents were in the age range of between 27-40 years. In the same table, most of the respondents 88% were married. Only 12% were single. Table 2 further revealed that 55% of the respondents had First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC), as their highest educational qualification while 45% had Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSCE). From this, it is obvious that the respondents were not very literate. All respondents had secondary occupations apart from farming. From Table 2, it was seen that a majority of the respondents (56%) were also engaged in processing farm produce, 33% of the respondents were in animal husbandry, while 11% of the respondents were also engaged in marketing of farm produce.

Table 2 further shows that 11% of respondents have been members of the cooperative society from 1 to 5 years, while 22% have been a member for 6-10 years; also 44% of respondents have been members for 11-15 years. Finally, 23% of the respondents have been members for 16 to 20 years. It therefore concluded that there were experienced members in the women cooperatives.

Table 2. Demographic Factors

N	Biographic	Options			Total
1	Age	27-40	41-55	56-above	91
	Frequency (%)	21(23%)	40(44%)	30(33%)	
2	Marital Status	Single	Married		91
	Frequency (%)	11 (12%)	80 (88%)		
3	Educational Qualification	FSLC	SSCE		91
	Frequency (%)	50 (55%)	41 (45%)		
4	Occupation	Processing	Animal Husbandry	Marketing of farm produce	91
	Frequency (%)	51 (56%)	30 (33%)	10 (11%)	
5	Membership	1 – 5yrs	6 – 10yrs	11 – 15yrs	91
	Frequency (%)	10 (11%)	20 (22%)	40 (44%)	
		16 – 20yrs			
		21 (23%)			

Source: Field survey, 2021.

4.2. Indices of Women Empowerment

The responses as presented in Table 3 revealed that seven out of the 10 listed items (in the 5 domains) items depicting women empowerment were affirmed (based on the theoretical acceptance mean rating of 3.0. Indeed, the respondents affirmed, among others, taking part in decisions in their households regarding: Input in production decisions; control over use of income; access to and decision on credit; purchase, sale or transfer of assets; ownership of assets, leisure; autonomy in production; and workload. The grand mean of the responses of 3.38 equally attests to the fact that the respondents were to a great extent involved in decisions about their households and their future.

4.3. Social and Economic Activities of Women Cooperatives in the Area.

With affirmation to all 6 items in Table 4 (i.e., based on the size of the mean ratings of 3.0 and above), the

respondents indicated that their cooperative performed basic social functions for the members. These social functions include: Organizing leadership training for members; intervening in disputes among members; solidarity with members in emergencies; trains women on basic social and household etiquette; enhancing their social welfare of members; and promoting socio-cultural activities among members. The overall grand mean rating of 3.8 is a further confirmation that the respondents would have benefitted satisfactory from the social activities of their cooperative.

Of the 6 variables assumed to be indicative of economic activities of the women cooperatives, 5 had mean ratings of at least 3.0. However, the grand mean of the responses was also above 3.0. This then suggests that their cooperatives performed the indicated economic functions, including: Offering training on entrepreneurship; processing/value addition of farm output; providing access to favorable market for farm output; supply of quality and affordable farm inputs; and providing agricultural extension services for members.

Table 3. Socio-economic indices of empowerment of status of women cooperative members

S/N	Items	Mean	Std Dev.	Decision
A	Production			
1	Input in production decisions	3.8914	.65280	Great extent
2	Autonomy in production	3.3687	.69386	Great extent
B	Resource			
3	Ownership of assets	3.4293	.93730	Great extent
4	Purchase, sale or transfer of assets	3.5581	.95422	Great extent
5	Access to and decision on credit	3.5934	.93259	Great extent
C	Income			
6	Control over use of income	3.8384	.73201	Agree
D	Leadership			
7	Group member	2.8687	.62677	Low extent
8	Speaking in public	2.6566	.69953	Low extent Disagree
9	Leisure	3.3838	.76250	Great extent
E	Time			
10	Workload	3.2475	.77907	Great extent
	Grand mean	3.3836	.28615	Great extent

Source: Field survey, 2021.

Table 4. Social activities of women cooperatives (n=91)

S/N	Items	Mean	Std Dev.	Decision
1	Intervenes in disputes among members	3.9369	.71763	Agree
2	Enhancing their social welfare of members	3.6692	.88542	Agree
3	Trains women on basic social and household etiquette	3.7096	.83227	Agree
4	Promoting socio-cultural activities among members	3.6313	.82089	Agree
5	Solidarity with members on emergencies	3.8182	.79382	Agree
6	Organizing leadership training for members	4.0354	.63146	Agree
	Grand mean	3.8119	.31436	Agree Agree

Source: Field survey, 2021.

Table 5. Economic activities of the women cooperative societies (n=91)

S/N	Items	Mean	Std Dev.	Decision
1	Provision of loan and credit to members	2.6111	.79891	Agree
2	Offering trainings on entrepreneurship	3.3384	.77730	Agree
3	Processing/value addition of of farm output	3.0328	.70185	Agree
4	Providing access to favorable market for farm output	3.0985	.74146	Agree
5	Supply of quality and affordable farm inputs	3.2879	.74150	Agree
6	Providing agricultural extension services for members.	3.5177	.78414	Agree
	Grand mean	3.0672	.31468	Agree

Source: Field survey, 2021.

4.3. Effect of Cooperative Activities on Women Empowerment

4.3.1. Test of Hypothesis One

Ho₁: Social activities of cooperative societies in Awka North LGA do not have significant influence on women empowerment.

Ha₁: Social activities of cooperative societies in Awka North LGA have a significant influence on women empowerment.

The estimates of R² and Adj. R² suggest that all variables in the model collectively accounted for only about 13% of the variation in credit repayments by the farmers (Table 6). The F ratio of 4.887, however, was significant at the 1% level. It was also seen that the explanatory variables, provision of loans and credit to members, train women on basic social and household etiquette, promoting socio-cultural activities among members, and organizing leadership training for members were significant at the acceptable level of 5%. The above notwithstanding, the fact that the F ratio was significant at the 5% level indicates that the aggregate of the effect of the items depicting social activities of women cooperatives in the area had a significant influence on women empowerment. As a result of this, the null hypothesis one as stated above is rejected and the alternate

hypothesis is accepted, and we conclude that the social activities of women cooperative societies in Awka North LGA have a significant influence on women empowerment.

4.3.2. Test of Hypothesis Two

Ho₂: Economic activities of cooperative societies in Awka North LGA do not have significant influence on women empowerment.

Ha₂: Economic activities of cooperative societies in Awka North LGA have a significant influence on women empowerment.

From the results of the regression analysis in Table 7, the explanatory variables jointly explained 29% of the variations in the empowerment index. It is also seen that the F statistics value of 9.917 was significant at the 0.000 level. However, only processing/addition of farm output, supply of quality and affordable farm inputs, and providing agricultural extension services for members were significant at the conventional 5% level.

Based on the above, the researchers therefore rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that the economic activities of cooperative societies in Awka North LGA have a significant influence on women empowerment.

Table 6. Regression Estimates on the effect of social activities of women cooperatives on women empowerment.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	3.558	12.835	.000	.000
Intervenes in disputes among members	-.115	-4.226	.000	.636
Enhancing their social welfare of members	.164	4.030	.000	.952
Trains women on basic social and household etiquette	.101	2.325	.021	.000
Promoting socio-cultural activities among members	-.018	-1.182	.238	.005
Solidarity with members on emergencies	-.129	-5.220	.000	.143
Organizing leadership training for members	.000	-.018	.986	.000

Residual Standard Error: 306370.148

R²: .132; Adj. R²: .105

F Statistic: 4.887; the p-value is 0.000

Dependent Variable: Empowerment index.

Table 7. Regression Estimates on the effect of economic activities of women cooperatives on women empowerment

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	3.558	12.835	.000	.017
Provision of loan and credit to members	-.115	-4.226	.000	.217
Offering trainings on entrepreneurship	.164	4.030	.000	.420
Processing/value addition of farm output	.101	2.325	.021	.047
Providing access to favorable market for farm output	-.018	-1.182	.238	.658
Supply of quality and affordable farm inputs	-.129	-5.220	.000	.054
Providing agricultural extension services for members.	174797.699	49958.526	3.499	.001

Residual Standard Error: 306370.148

R²: .295; Adj. R²: .280

F Statistic: 9.917; the p-value is 0.000

Dependent Variable: Women empowerment index.

5. Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that the social activities of women cooperative societies in Awka North LGA have a significant influence on women empowerment. The study found, among others, that members' incomes are dependent upon their socio-economic profile such as age, marital status, and membership or otherwise of cooperative societies, education, cooperative marketing, credit, gender and business expertise. Therefore, more studies should be geared towards the social activities of cooperative societies with each other to empower women. The study also revealed a significant influence of the economic activities of women cooperatives in Awka North LGA on women empowerment in the area. This finding is in agreement with the one by [9] who, in her study of *Impact of Cooperative Society in Empowerment of Rural Women in Nimo Town, Anambra State*, reported that cooperative societies impact significantly on the living standard of their members through their various empowerment programmes. Similar finding was equally recorded by [15] and numerous other researchers. The implication of all these is that any women empowerment programme that ignores a role for the cooperative will not record a maximal success. Indeed, cooperatives have a significant role to play not just in women empowerment but also in the fight against rural poverty and women marginalization in economic matters in rural areas.

6. Conclusion

Cooperative effort is ultimately the group instinct in human beings, which enables them to live together and help each other in times of stress and strain. Based on the findings of this study, it will be instructive to conclude that women are able to enrich their lives. They are fully satisfied with the services rendered by these cooperative societies to them. They get more recognition in the society and enjoy greatly economic interdependence in the family. Hence, it is needful to say that cooperative is playing an essential role in the empowerment of women through various programmes. Among other recommendations toward empowering more women, particularly women in cooperative societies across rural communities; concerted efforts should be made by the government, civil society groups, NGOs, and cooperative societies in raising awareness among rural women on the benefits of cooperative societies as a channel for promoting their economic wellbeing and empowerment. Cooperative societies should enhance their economic and social functions to enable women benefit maximally and thereby elevating the status, social profile, and dignity in their communities. This they could do by finding out from the members what they believe will further improve their socio-economic wellbeing and integrating into their core functional activities.

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