

UTILISING AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

This work was carried out to determine the needs to allow the agriculture cooperative societies to be fully involved in poverty alleviation since other means have failed in their quests to alleviate poverty, the roles that cooperative societies play in alleviating poverty, the strategies that agricultural cooperative society will adopt in alleviating poverty and the level to which the agricultural cooperative society, contributed in alleviating poverty in Enugu State Nigeria. This was done through the use of questionnaires that were distributed to members of an agricultural cooperative society with the help of their officials. The responses were accordingly analyzed, interpreted in tabular form and finally, were discussed. The researchers found among other things, that agricultural co-operative societies aid farmers in marketing their farm produce at fair prices, encourage thrift saving as well as make soft loan available to members. Conclusively, formation of agricultural cooperative society is the sure way of eradicating the menace of poverty in our society. In recommendation, Nigeria government should partner with the agricultural cooperative societies to not only alleviate poverty but eradicate it by providing funds, professional advice and encouragement to agricultural cooperative societies in the country.

Introduction

Many Nigerian are known to live below poverty level. Graduates of 15 years standing and more still roam the streets searching for white collar jobs that do not exist. Those who are lucky to get a job are poorly paid. The advent of democratic governance in many states of the federation experienced increase in poverty, as many civil servants lost their jobs. To worsen the matter, the cost of education went high and many Nigerians could not have access to education, which provided the basic necessities of human existence. The

scenario recently in Nigeria is similar to that of England in the 19th century expressed (Obodoechi and Onoh,2005).

Various governments in the country have made a lot of efforts towards reducing the menace of poverty in the country and most of these efforts were merely glorified in the pages of newspaper and news conferences. Some of the efforts included: 1972 Accelerated Food Production Programme by Gen. Yakubu Gowon led government which turned out to be a colossal waste and little was achieved. The next was operation feed the nation in 1976

by Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo led government which expended much money and effort in getting ill prepared university undergraduates to go to the rural areas to teach the peasant farmers how to farm; the Green Revolution by Alhaji Shehu Shagari led government that spanned 1979 – 1983 was also a waste; “The go back to land programme” by Gen. Buhari led government also failed. In 1986, Gen. Babangida established the Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) for rural development and poverty alleviation, was also a waste after huge amount of money was spent.

In 1993, Abacha led government came up with “The family support programme” and “The family advancement programme” which were meant to help the poor in the country also collapsed after billions of naira was spent in them. Likewise other governments that made efforts towards poverty alleviation by establishing their own programmes and little was achieved after huge amount of money was spent towards such programmes. It could be said that these various governments used the name of alleviating poverty to divert tax payers money that run into billions of dollars to private pockets and with little or nothing to show for it, (Maduagwu, 2005).

Poverty on the other hand, is a condition or quality of being poor and indigent, needing basic things of life. It is also a deficiency in necessary properties or desirable qualities or specific quality for example poverty of imagination. However, poverty in the broadest sense implies lack of resources for living a reasonably comfortable life, destitution and want. This will include the loss of self respect and inability to afford minimal comfort and life necessities. Uniamikogbo (1997) linked poverty with unemployment or being unproductive. According to him, those who are poor are those who are unable to

contribute adequately to the production process to warrant an income or those whom the economy has failed to provide job for. Nigeria has been generally recognized as a poverty stricken country.

Poverty alleviation has been described as methods or ways directed towards the eradication of poverty from individuals in a community, state or country. It is the effort made in improving the condition of living of the citizen by providing social amenities like water, constant electricity, quality education, social security and unemployment benefits. Poverty alleviation involves the various personal or external government and private agencies initiatives made available to people for them to use in minimizing or eradicating poverty.

Nigeria as a country is blessed with sufficient mineral resources but due to high level of corruption in government circle, her citizens still struggle with chronic poverty. This work does not call for the country's money to be shared among individuals in the name of alleviating poverty but calls on government to put in place meaningful programmes that will help in raising the standard of living of the citizens of this country such as the use of cooperative society.

Cooperative society as the name implies can simply be referred to as an organization of self help through mutual help. The International Cooperative Alliance (2000) defined cooperative as “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspiration through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise”. According to Berko (1987), this society is being guided by a principle known as the principle of cooperation which stipulates the mode of entry, the nature of the society and the rules and regulations including the bye-laws that

help in the running of the society on a day to day basis. Chukwu (1990) pointed out that a cooperative society is not a profit-oriented organization but aims at achieving the welfare of its members. These aims might be social or economic.

The roles cooperative societies play in alleviating poverty are too numerous to mention and ranging from marketing of agricultural products to advising the governments on rural matters. Setting up of credit facilities in the rural areas (economic role) and helping them to achieve self help through mutual help by forming cooperative society for them (social role). It can also be in the form of availing small credit or micro credit scheme for the rural dwellers who are of low income like farmers and petty traders that have no access to the loan from commercial banks, advising them on issues of community development which can be carried out by the cooperative field administrator of the society (Cooperative education) and serving an intermediary between them (the rural dwellers) and government or other international development organizations, (Okonkwo, 2008).

It is veritable to state that the target population of poverty alleviation schemes of the government are same target of the cooperative society, this is to say that since government appears to have failed in its effort to alleviate poverty, the cooperative society deems it fit to participate in alleviating poverty as their counterparts in Namibia, Zambia, Malaysia and other African countries . Cooperative society can alleviate poverty through creation of credit cooperative, creation of cooperative small scale industries, strengthening marketing and cooperatives, creation of production-promotion cooperative, establishment or cooperative housing and building society, setting up of consumer

cooperative societies, establishment of workers or industrial cooperative. Given the chance, cooperative societies could have turned around the economic and social status of the citizenry.

The issue of poverty alleviation can only be solved when people that are involved are allowed to partake in finding solution to their problems and by involving people in organizations that have such goals of reducing poverty rather than sending people that are comfortable in material resources to go and solve poverty problem knowing fully well that they will only end up taking from the people they are meant to help.

Past governments made efforts to reach the rural areas where the poor people were being inhabited and that had been a big problem for them since they were unable to have the necessary agencies and institutions that would serve as an intermediary between them and the rural dwellers. The problem of this study is, how will agricultural cooperative society contribute in poverty alleviate in Enugu State?

Purpose of the Study

Generally, the purpose of the study was to determine how agricultural cooperative society would contribute in poverty alleviation in Enugu State Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the strategies that agricultural cooperative society will adopt in alleviating poverty in Enugu State;
2. ascertain the levels the agricultural cooperative societies contributed in alleviating poverty in Enugu State.

Research Questions:

The following research questions guided the study:-

1. What are the strategies that agricultural cooperative society

will adopt in alleviating poverty in Enugu State?

2. To what level have agricultural cooperative societies, been involved in alleviating poverty in Enugu State?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis which was tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study:

- 1) There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female members of the cooperative society regarding the strategies in agricultural cooperative society will adopt in alleviating poverty in Enugu State.

Methods

The research method used was the survey research design. A survey design refers to a study of a group through the collection and analysis of the data using instrument or techniques such as interview, observation or test from people considered to be representatives of the entire group (Nwaogu, 1991).

Area of the Study

The area in which the study was carried out was Enugu East Local Government Area. The state had 17 local government areas. The Enugu East local government area had 52 member strength of agricultural cooperative society.

Population

Fifty two members strength constituted the population. The entire 52 members responded to the questionnaire items gotten from research question one and two. The population size was small and needed no sampling. The respondents that correctly filled the questionnaire and returned them was 50 because two were not returned.

Instrument

Structured questionnaire was used to collect the relevant data for the study. The

members of agricultural cooperative society filled the open ended questionnaire. A four point scale structured questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection. This instrument was designed for members of the cooperative society to respond to in Enugu East Local government. The questionnaire had two main divisions, part I and part II. Part I dealt with personal data while part II was sub-divided into sections A and B. Section A dealt with information on strategies that agricultural co-operative society will adopt in alleviating poverty. Section B sought information on the levels in which the agricultural co-operative society contributed in alleviating poverty in Enugu State.

Validation and Reliability of the Instrument:

Face validation was used for the study. In other to determine the face validity, a draft copy of the instrument used was sent to three (3) cooperative experts. The reliability of the instrument was established using 10 members of the agricultural cooperative society in Njikoka L.G.A of Anambra State. The data obtained were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha reliability co-efficient to establish internal consistency of the instrument for the study. The reliability co-efficient of 0.77 was obtained. To this effect the instrument was considered reliable for the study.

Data collection technique

The researchers obtained data directly from the respondents through two assistants. The researcher and the assistants went into the field, interviewed members of cooperative society and equally administered the questionnaire.

Method of data analysis

The items were structured on a four point scale using response options of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree for the two questions. Data collected were

analyzed using mean responses. To calculate the mean, each of the rating scales was assigned a value: strongly agree = 4; agree = 3; disagree = 2; strongly disagree = 1. The interpretation of the calculated means was made by using the upper and lower limits of the mean.

Thus:

3.50 – 4.00	= SA
2.50 – 3.49	= A
1.50 – 2.49	= DA
1.00 – 1.49	= SD

Research Question 1

What are the strategies that agricultural cooperative society will adopt in alleviating poverty in Enugu State?

Table 1

The various strategies that agricultural cooperative society will adopt in alleviating poverty in Enugu State. N=50

S/N		4	3	2	1		
	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	DA	SD	Mean (\bar{X})	Remarks
1.	Regular supply farm inputs and credit to farmers.	10	35	5	0	3.10	Agreed
2.	Giving financial advice to farmers.	15	35	0	0	3.30	Agreed
3.	Encouraging the rural farmers to form Self help organizations like cooperative society	10	30	8	2	2.96	Agreed
4.	Carrying out enlightenment programme on behalf of the government on farming principles.	10	40	0	0	3.20	Agreed
5.	Participating in development programme meant to alleviate poverty as building access roads to the farm areas.	0	35	5	0	3.10	Agreed
6.	Educating rural farmers on better farming methods.	10	33	5	0	3.06	Agreed
7.	Helping farmers to market their farm produce on fair price.	15	35	0	0	3.30	Agreed
8.	Providing employment opportunity by establishing large farm areas.	7	30	10	3	2.82	Agreed
9.	Encouraging thrift and savings.	15	35	0	0	3.30	Agreed
10.	Providing feeder roads to open up new areas for cultivation and facilitate evacuation of farm produce.	8	30	7	5	2.82	Agreed
	Grand mean					3.27	Agreed

From table 1 above, all the responses in item 1 to 10 have mean responses of between 2.82-3.3 and grand mean of 3.27 showing that majority of the respondents agreed to the various strategies that cooperative societies adopt to alleviate poverty.

Research Question 2

To what level has the cooperative society,

contributed in alleviating poverty in Enugu State?

Table 2:

The levels in which the agricultural cooperative society, has contributed in alleviating poverty in Enugu State.

S/N		4	3	2	1		
	Questionnaire items	SA	A	DA	SD	Mean (\bar{X})	Remark
1.	The agricultural cooperative societies have been making loans available with little or no interest to farmers.	15	35	0	0	3.30	Agreed
2.	Farmers have set up agricultural cooperative in the rural areas.	10	35	5	0	3.10	Agreed
3.	Agric cooperative societies have served as intermediary between the rural dwellers and government in poverty alleviation.	7	30	10	3	2.82	Agreed
4.	Cooperative society should be involved in agricultural marketing boards.	10	40	0	0	3.20	Agreed
5.	Cooperative society is best for providing basic amenities and employment opportunities.	10	30	8	2	2.96	Agreed
6.	The cooperative society has expanded to manage the resources of this country to alleviate poverty.	8	30	7	5	2.80	Agreed
	Grand mean					3.33	Agreed

Discussion

Research question one identified various strategies which agricultural cooperative societies will adopt in alleviating poverty in Nigeria among which are supply of regular supply of farm inputs, credit to farmers, giving financial advice and carrying out enlightenment programmes on farming principles and all that are in the table. These strategies are in consonance with the cooperative members who opined that poverty alleviation should involve various personal, government and private agencies initiatives. In the enumerated strategies, items 2, 7 and 9 had the highest mean score of 3.3 agreeing that giving financial advice, helping farmers to market their farm produce on fair price and

encouraging farmers to go into thrift & earnings are strategies to adopt in agricultural cooperative society to alleviate poverty. Second in importance is the enlightenment programmes although various agencies go into enlightenment programmes the populace hear of agricultural cooperatives, they are not aware that co-operative societies are formed just for the welfare of the members as supported by Chukwu (1990). Item 4 with mean score of 3.2 says that carrying out enlightenment programme is a sure strategy for farmers to join the cooperative society as to attract interest and serve as a collateral in securing loans from banks and financial houses. Items 1 and 5 recorded mean score of 3.1,

recommending that regular supply of farm inputs and credit to farmers as well as participating in development & programmes meant to alleviate poverty such as building access roads to the farm areas. Item 3 with mean score of 2.96% has the strategy that encouraging the rural farmers to form self help organization like the cooperative society, is a means of alleviating poverty in the country. Orie cannot conclude that the various agricultural programmes in Nigeria did not help, but the researchers have observed that it seems that Nigeria problem on food security will depend on the attention given to the rural farmers who for now will continue to sustain Nigeria food wise until the nearest future. Items 8 and 10 with mean score of 2.82 agreed that providing employment opportunities by the agricultural cooperative societies establishing large farms, and providing feeder roads to open up new areas for cultivation and facilitate evacuation of farm produce are ways out of poverty. That was why Obodoechi and Onoh jointly expressed their mind when they said that our collective destiny is in our hands and that is through cooperative society, a common wealth.

Research question two above showed that all the items 1 to 10 have mean responses of between 2.82-3.3. from the foregoing, it could be seen that agricultural cooperative society is relevant in alleviating poverty in the country.

Research question two listed various levels in which agricultural cooperative society has contributed in alleviating poverty in Nigeria. Item 11 with mean score of 3.3, the highest score is of the opinion that agricultural cooperative societies have been making loans available with little or no interest to farmers. In the cluster, 15 strongly agreed and 35 agreed. This is in

synergy with Okonkwo (2008) whose opinion on roles of cooperative societies play in alleviating poverty were: that setting up credit facilities play economic role in achieving self help; by agricultural cooperative society members availing themselves small credit or micro credit scheme. Items 14 has mean response score of 3.2 agreeing that cooperative societies should be involved in agricultural marketing boards. Item 15 agrees that cooperative societies are best for providing basic amenities and employment

opportunities with mean score of 2.6 The various programmes were laudable but did not change Nigerian situation. Maduagwu (2005), agreed but could not contain himself when he noticed the failures of these programmes and said that "these various governments have used the name of alleviating poverty to divert tax payers money, running, into billions of dollars for decades now to private pockets and little or nothing to show for it. Items 12 with mean response of 3.1 agreed that farmers have set up agricultural cooperatives in the rural areas. The researchers supported this opinion as that will help to alleviate poverty in Enugu State. Obodoechi and Onah (2005) commented that the scenario today in Nigeria is similar to that of England in the 19th century. Hence a way to alleviate poverty is by affording food security in Nigeria which is possible by encouraging agricultural cooperative society formation. In item 16, opinion is that cooperative societies should expand to manage the resources of this country to alleviate poverty. Items 13 and 16 have the lowest mean response of the table.

The respondents agreed that agricultural cooperative societies have served as intermediary between rural dwellers and government in poverty alleviation and that the corporative society, should manage the countries resources to alleviate poverty in Nigeria.

From the discussions, it is seen that most of the respondents vehemently agreed that cooperative societies have adopted various strategies in alleviating poverty and that the cooperative societies, have been involved in alleviating poverty in the country and Enugu municipality is not an exception.

Hypothesis one

There is no significance difference in the

mean ratings of male and female members of the cooperative society regarding the strategies the agricultural cooperative society will adopt in alleviating poverty in Enugu State.

Table 3: t-test analysis of mean responses of male and female members regarding the strategies the agricultural cooperative society will adopt in alleviating poverty in Enugu State.

Item Nos	Items	Males N = 34 \bar{X}	SD	Females N = 16 \bar{X}	SD	df = 48 $\alpha = .05$ t-cal	t-tab value	Remark
1.	Regular supply of farm inputs and credit to farmers.	3.5	1.2	2.5	0.87	1.76	1.96	NS
2.	Giving financial advice to farmers.	2.9	0.66	3.4	0.70	1.87		NS
3.	Encouraging the rural farmers to form self help organizations like co-operative society.	2.5	0.71	2.6	0.92	0.63		NS
4.	Carrying out enlightenment programme on behalf of the government on farming principals.	2.2	0.73	3.4	0.70	1.12		NS
5.	Participating in development programme meant to alleviate poverty as building access roads to the farm areas.	2.6	0.97	2.9	0.97	1.22		NS
6.	Educating rural farmers on better farming methods.	3.2	0.55	3.1	0.60	1.73		NS
7.	Helping farmers to market their produce on fair price.	2.7	0.87	3.6	0.69	1.74		NS
8.	Providing employment opportunity by establishing large farmers areas.	3.1	0.77	3.5	0.71	1.97		S
9.	Encouraging thrift and savings	3.0	0.69	2.9	0.97	0.22		NS
10.	Providing feeder roads to open up new areas for cultivation and facilitating evacuation of farm produce.	3.01	0.72	3.2	0.63	2.18		S

NS = Not significant, S = Significant

The data presented in table 3 above show that items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9 has a calculated t – value less than table – t value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance and at 48 degree of freedom. This means that there was no significant difference between the

mean responses of respondent cooperative members on mean ratings of males and females regarding the strategies the agricultural co-operative society will adopt in alleviating poverty in Enugu State.

Also the data presented that items 8 and 10 had a calculated t -value more than the table t -value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance and at 48 degree of freedom. This also means that there was significant difference between the mean response of female and male agricultural co-operative members on these items regarding the strategies the agricultural co-operative society will adopt in alleviating poverty in Enugu State. With this result, the null hypothesis (H_0) of no significant difference was upheld at .05 level of significance for all the items except for items 8 and 10.

Principal Findings

1. During the course of this work, the researchers found out in research question 1 that mean 3.30 of the respondents which was the highest point of the responses, agreed that cooperative societies give financial advice to both members and non members, help farmers to market their farm produce on fair prices and encourages thrift and savings.
2. The researchers also found out in research question II that 3.30 of the respondents agreed that the cooperative societies made loans available with little or no interest to farmers and petty traders of farm produce.

Conclusion

It is important that all hands must be on deck to see that the menace of poverty is eradicated from our society. Nigeria and Enugu State government in particular should see that poverty is alleviated in the country, through the encouragement of the formation of agricultural co-operative society.

Recommendations

In light of the above findings, the following recommendations are made:-

1. The Nigeria and Enugu State in particular should assist the cooperative

societies in their quests for poverty alleviation by providing funds, professional advice and miscellaneous support which will help the agricultural cooperative societies to achieve their mandates.

2. That government set up agricultural marketing boards should be managed by agricultural cooperative societies to ensure that the agricultural products are distributed to the consumers.
3. Farmers in cooperative societies should form marketing cooperative in order to assist themselves in providing an efficient marketing system and also improve their income by ensuring a better return for their produce.

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