

THE ROLE OF COOPERATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN ADVANCING SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: EVIDENCE FROM IDO/OSI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, EKITI STATE

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Abstract

In the Ido/Osi Local Government Area of Ekiti State, Nigeria, this study investigated how cooperative entrepreneurship helps members of cooperative organizations achieve socioeconomic empowerment. 25 cooperative members and leaders participated in focus groups and semi-structured interviews to gather data using a qualitative method. The study looked at how members' empowerment and general well-being are impacted by cooperative activities, such as financial access, skill development, and involvement in governance. The results showed that cooperative membership improves decision-making ability, social inclusion, human capital development, and economic prospects. Participants highlighted that while training programs enhanced their technical and entrepreneurial abilities, access to loans and savings plans improved their standard of living. Participation in governance allowed members to have an impact on cooperative policy and promoted a sense of agency and belonging. However, obstacles such as inadequate funding, delayed loan release, and occasional administrative inefficiencies hampered the full potential of empowerment. The study emphasizes the multidimensional aspect of empowerment through cooperative business, which supports the Social Capital, Cooperative, and Empowerment Theories. It offers policymakers, cooperative managers, and development practitioners valuable insights into how to strengthen cooperative structures, build member capacity, and promote long-term rural development

Keywords: Cooperative Entrepreneurship, Financial Access, Governance Participation; Skills Development; and Socioeconomic Empowerment

Introduction

Cooperative entrepreneurship has in recent times turned out to be the main avenue for sustainable and inclusive development all over the universe. This is for the reason that it permits people to gather resources, apportion tasks, and attain mutual goals economically. In accordance to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), cooperatives contribute meaningfully to creation of employment, reduction of poverty, and stability of enduring socioeconomic by means of permitting people, principally those who are not included in traditional economic establishments, to participate in productive activities. The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA, 2021) accentuates cooperatives as tools for promoting member democratic decision-making while as well increasing access to credit, markets and technical support. Thus, the United Nations (2020) identifies that through their solidarity-driven and people-centred approach, cooperatives may aid in achieving significant sustainable development goals which include gender fairness, minimized inequality, and absent of scarcity.

In history, cooperatives have been indispensable pillars of rural growth in Sub-Saharan Africa, due to limitations such as deficiencies in infrastructures, constrained financial access, and prevalent poverty. The World Bank (2019) came to the recognition of solidarity-driven structures as advantageous in local resources mobilization, rural livelihoods boosting, and

increase in small producers' market prominence. In Nigeria, cooperatives assist not only farmers, but also craftsmen, traders together with micro-entrepreneurs by means of joint investment, knowledge sharing, and increase in bargaining power in sectors such as credit and thrift, marketing, agriculture, and consumer services.

Cooperative entrepreneurship is tightly entrenched in commerce and agricultural undertakings that are in tandem with cooperative ethics in Ekiti State, particularly in the Ido/Osi Local Government Area. Cooperative societies are turning out to be more and more generic with limited definite data on how much they ameliorate the region socioeconomic enablement. Examination is required for vital topics such as enhanced growth in income, development of skill, standards of living, and accessibility to economic services. So, this study examines the manners in which cooperative involvement promotes members' economic prospects, capacity in decisions- making, and overall welfare in Ido/Osi. The conclusions of the examination are envisioned to benefit development actors, policymakers, and leaderships in cooperatives in ensuring cooperatives' performance and developmental in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In spite of the extensive acknowledgement of cooperative entrepreneurship as a stratagem for reasonable development, a number of

Nigerian societies see continually sole modest socioeconomic benefits. The expected benefits are still not fairly dispersed all over rural regions, despite cooperatives' intent to upsurge access to funding, better employments, and encouraging collective enablement (ILO, 2020). Cooperative efficacy is nevertheless hindered by continuing matters like inadequate government support, weak management structures, and deficient capital (World Bank, 2019). For this reason, many who are members are faced with issues such as dissatisfactory earnings, inability of the organization to develop, and circumscribed access to required services. Governance concerns, slight involvement in making decisions, and lack of training for members, all add to the co-operatives' under performance in Nigeria. The ICA (2021) stresses that active member participation and capability building are necessary to the success of the cooperatives, but both are often non-existent in rural areas, putting forward questions regards whether cooperatives actually helping members or just stands as unofficial savings platforms.

In the face of the creation of several cooperative establishments in the Ido/Osi Local Government Area, hardly is there any real hint of socioeconomic enablement. National development studies reveal continuing joblessness, instability of income, and limited access to inexpensive credit in rural Nigeria (United Nations, 2020), presenting concerns on whether Ido/Osi cooperatives are carrying out their

planned developmental tasks. Hence, the vagueness surrounding the effectiveness of cooperative entrepreneurship in improving socioeconomic empowerment in Ido/Osi is the key matter that triggers this study. There exists an apparent incongruity between members' real experiences and cooperatives' theoretical potential. Stakeholders including policymakers do not have the evidence obligatory to better cooperative deeds, strengthen results of the members, and tying local doings with worldwide development structures in the non-existence of experiential evaluation. Accordingly, this study seeks to clarify existing situations, identify restrictions, and establish the exact effect of cooperative entrepreneurship on socioeconomic empowerment in Ido/Osi.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to find out the role of cooperative entrepreneurship in heightening the members' socioeconomic empowerment in Ido/Osi Local Government Area, Ekiti State. The particular objectives are to:

- i. investigate how much cooperative entrepreneurship helps members in the Ido/Osi Local Government Area in achieving socioeconomic empowerment;
- ii. evaluate how cooperative membership improves the study area's economic development, income-generating prospects, and access to financial resources;
- iii. ascertain how cooperatives affect members' ability to make decisions,

- acquire new skills, and general well-being;
- iv. pinpoint the main obstacles impeding the efficacy and performance of cooperative entrepreneurship in Ido/Osi;
 - v. suggest methods for enhancing cooperative activities to increase their impact on development and better support the livelihoods of their members; and
 - vi. propose strategies for strengthening cooperative practices in order to improve their developmental impact and better support members' livelihoods.

Literature Review

Conceptual Foundations of Cooperative Entrepreneurship and Socioeconomic Empowerment

Cooperative entrepreneurship denotes member-owned and legitimately administrated economic doings undertaken by cooperative societies, which gives room for mobilizing collective resource and shared decision-making. In rural and semi-rural areas such as Ido/Osi, cooperatives are considered important machineries for grassroots economic involvement where social services and formal financial are restricted (ILO, 2020). Socioeconomic empowerment involving growth of income, access to finance, acquisition of skills, making of decision, social inclusion, and enhancement of welfare (Nwoha & Erimma, 2024; Okwara & Uhuegbulem, 2023).

Experiential studies illustrated that cooperative membership produces substantial economic aids. Cocoa farmers in Southwestern Nigeria more productivity experience, improved income through cooperative credit access (Kehinde, Adeyemo, Oke, & Ogunleye, 2018). Cooperative involvement also supports entrepreneurial growth and poverty reduction, as seen in multi-state analyses where regression findings indicated strong positive effects on income and business expansion (Wachi, Nwachukwu, Ibrahim, Lawal, & Abdullahi, 2025). Similar outcomes were observed among women in Enugu State, where cooperative loans improved household welfare (Nwoha & Erimma, 2024), and among teachers in Oyo State, whose cooperatives enhanced self-financing and economic security (Ibrahim, Gbadebo, & Dada, 2025). These findings affirm that cooperatives operate as credit providers and catalysts of livelihood stability.

Beyond financial gains, cooperatives foster broader forms of empowerment. Women's cooperatives in Anambra State improved members' economic autonomy and social status (Adelakun, Odebode, & Fabunmi, 2025), while cooperatives in rural Imo State enhanced inclusion through training, input provision, and social protection programs (Okwara & Uhuegbulem, 2023). Cooperative membership also strengthens social capital through knowledge-sharing, collective action, and participatory governance,

enhancing members' agency and influence (Ihenacho, Chikaire, Ejiogu-Okereke, Oguegbuchulam, Osuagwu, & Obi, 2023). Fish farmers in Awka agricultural zone likewise benefited from cooperative access to inputs, technical support, and joint marketing (Global Journal of Applied Sciences and Technology, n.d.)

Despite these advantages, cooperative entrepreneurship is not automatically empowering. Its effectiveness relies on governance quality, leadership capacity, adequate funding, and active member participation (Various Authors, 2021; Global Journal of Applied Sciences and Technology, n.d.). In some rural contexts, cooperatives struggle to provide sufficient credit or sustainable services, limiting income growth and employment outcomes (Okwara & Uhuegbulem, 2023; ASRJETS, 2023). Benefits may also be unevenly distributed, with resourceful members gaining more while disadvantaged ones remain marginalized (Global Journal of Applied Sciences and Technology, n.d.; PubTexto, n.d.). These disparities highlight that empowerment is shaped by contextual and organizational conditions rather than cooperative membership alone.

A clear research gap exists because many Nigerian studies aggregate state-level data or focus on specific groups, such as women or teachers, without examining multidimensional empowerment at the local government level (Various Authors, 2024; Wachi, et al., 2025). Past research also

emphasizes income or credit access while neglecting skill acquisition, decision-making participation, social inclusion, and long-term welfare outcomes. This underscores the need for a localized, quantitative, multidimensional study assessing cooperative entrepreneurship's impact on socioeconomic empowerment in Ido/Osi LGA. Such evidence is necessary to reveal local variations in cooperative effectiveness and guide targeted policy interventions.

Summarily, cooperative entrepreneurship in developing countries grasps robust potential to increase socioeconomic empowerment through improvement of decision-making power, access to finance, and social presence. Nevertheless, these outcomes are dependent on the strength of the organization and contextual certainties, ensuring a concentrated empirical evaluation in a rural LGA such as Ido/Osi critical for comprehending real empowerment influences and enlightening development policy.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework produces the basis for comprehending the mechanisms through which cooperative entrepreneurship may impact socioeconomic empowerment. For this study, three complementary theories (Cooperative Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Empowerment Theory) are accepted to help in conceptualization, variable selection, and findings' interpretation.

Cooperative Theory

Cooperative Theory offers the rationale and principles behind the development and process of cooperatives, accentuating shared possession, shared benefits, and democratic governance (International Cooperative Alliance [ICA], 2021). The theory postulates that cooperatives subsist to meet needs of member rather than capitalize on profit, encouraging unbiased access to opportunities and resources. Cooperative Theory is specifically pertinent in elucidating on how the structure of cooperative (shared inputs, collective marketing, loans) can boost the members' socioeconomic status.

Cooperative Theory buttresses the operational facets of cooperative entrepreneurship in this study. It clarifies how structures of cooperative and governance practices (independent variable) directly affect members' socioeconomic empowerment (dependent variable) by easing access to economic and non-economic resources. Empirical evidence in Nigerian settings advocates that well-structured cooperatives add to the economic growth of the members, social inclusion, and decision-making partaking (Adelakun, Odebode, & Fabunmi, 2025; Okwara & Uhuegbulem, 2023).

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory emphasizes the value of social networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity in facilitating collective

action and access to resources (Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1988). According to this theory, individuals embedded in strong networks can access information, financial resources, and opportunities that may otherwise be unavailable. In the context of cooperative entrepreneurship, membership in a cooperative constitutes a form of social capital, where members share knowledge, provide mutual support, and collectively mobilize resources.

For this study, Social Capital Theory explains how cooperative membership (independent variable) provides members with networks that enhance access to credit, training, and markets, ultimately improving their socioeconomic outcomes (dependent variable). Previous studies in Nigeria indicate that cooperative participation enhances trust, knowledge-sharing, and collective decision-making, leading to better livelihood outcomes (Nwoha & Erimma, 2024; Wachi et al., 2025). Thus, social capital is conceptualized as a key mechanism linking cooperative entrepreneurship to income growth, skills development, and household welfare.

Empowerment Theory

Empowerment Theory accentuates growing individuals' or groups' ability to make choices and convert those choices into anticipated outcomes and actions (Kabeer, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment is multidimensional, including social, economic, and psychological domains. In this study's context, empowerment refers the

dependent variable, measured by indicators like financial access, income, skills, and social inclusion, and household decision-making. Cooperative entrepreneurship is known as an avenue for empowerment by proffering members with opportunities to partake in social and economic activities that improves their control and abilities over resources. For instance, partaking in cooperative governance may upsurge power of decision-making as accessibility to cooperative credit is capable of improving economic independence (Ihenacho et al., 2023; Nwoha & Erimma, 2024). Consequently, Empowerment Theory unswervingly joins cooperative entrepreneurship (independent variable) to measurable enhancements in members' socioeconomic status.

Integration of Theories

The three theories jointly proffer a vigorous framework for this study. Social Capital Theory describes the networking mechanisms and resource sharing; Cooperative Theory makes contextualization of the operational and structural aspects of cooperative entrepreneurship possible; and Empowerment Theory structures the results of these processes in terms of multidimensional socioeconomic rewards. In togetherness, they help in conceptualizing the independent variable (cooperative entrepreneurship) and dependent variable (socioeconomic empowerment), proffering a vivid theoretical basis for the quantitative analysis of the study.

Empirical Review

Cooperative Entrepreneurship and Financial Access

Access to credit, savings, and loans is one of the primary benefits of cooperative membership. Quantitative studies have consistently shown that members of cooperatives enjoy better access to financial services compared to non-members. For example, a study of thrift and credit cooperative societies in Nigeria found that cooperative members could save regularly and access loans at lower interest rates, which supported personal and business needs (Nwoha & Erimma, 2024). Similarly, research among cocoa farmers in Southwestern Nigeria revealed that cooperative members with access to credit achieved significantly higher productivity than farmers without such support (Kehinde, et al., 2018).

However, access to finance does not automatically lead to improved outcomes. Organizational factors, such as governance quality and availability of training services, strongly influenced members' ability to repay loans and use funds effectively in Nasarawa State (Ibrahim, et al., 2025). These findings highlight that while cooperatives can enhance financial access, the effectiveness of such access depends on internal management and support mechanisms.

Cooperative Participation and Income Levels

Quantitative evidence shows a positive link between cooperative participation and income. A survey of 384 cooperative members across Southwest Nigeria came to the realization that cooperative involvement significantly contributed to poverty reduction ($R^2 = 0.584$) and entrepreneurial business growth ($R^2 = 0.743$) (Wachi, Nwachukwu, Ibrahim, Lawal, & Abdullahi, 2025). In a similar way, regression analyses showed that cooperative involvement and associated benefits positively impact business performance and the incomes of families among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Ekiti State, (Ibrahim, et al., 2025). Additionally, in Enugu State, study among farmers in rural areas indicated that access to cooperative loans and farm inputs meaningfully improved per-capita income, corroborates that cooperative participation is capable of improving economic steadiness and family well-being (Nwoha & Erimma, 2024). These results submit that cooperatives are a real apparatus for income heightening, especially in low-income and rural societies.

Cooperative Entrepreneurship and Skills/Training Development

Yonder financial reimbursements, cooperatives as well are in support members' skill attainment and substance building. For instance, researches among cocoa farmers specified that services of cooperative together with extension support

and training meaningly enlarged the embracement of enhanced farming technologies (Kehinde et al., 2018). Furthermore, research in Nasarawa State established that cooperatives help in technical support and training, improved members' productivity outcomes and financial discipline (Ibrahim et al., 2025).

These outcomes authorize that cooperative entrepreneurship adds to human capital expansion, improving members' knowledge, skills, and long-term capability for economic empowerment.

Cooperative Governance and Decision-Making Empowerment

Partaking in cooperative governance is additional serious path to empowerment. Quantitative surveys have revealed that cooperatives with translucent management and active member participation delivers ample social and economic results (Wachi et al., 2025). For example, researches point to the fact that members who participate in making decision over savings, loans, and resource apportionment do have more experience over household and community economic activities (Okwara & Uhuegbulem, 2023).

Nevertheless, limited researches have straight-away measured governance-associated empowerment which representative of a gap in research that is quantitative in nature. Larger percent of the existing researches emphasis on business and financial outcomes instead of decision-

making ability or agency in the cooperatives.

Cooperative Entrepreneurship and Overall Socioeconomic Empowerment

A number of researches have made attempts to evaluate the wider socioeconomic influence of membership of cooperative. In Southwestern Nigeria, membership of cooperative was strongly linked with the decrease in poverty ($R^2 = 0.937$) and development of community ($R^2 = 0.909$), increasing its role in general empowerment (Wachi et al., 2025). Likewise, among SMEs in Ekiti State, cooperative membership meaningfully improved business performance, representing enhanced economic wellness and livelihoods (Ibrahim et al., 2025).

In spite of these positive results, there exists sizable difference. Factors like internal management ability, cooperative governance, and members' engagement influence the extent of achieved empowerment. This variability accentuates the need for context-specific quantitative studies, predominantly in rural LGAs like Ido/Osi, to comprehend how cooperative entrepreneurship change into quantifiable socioeconomic empowerment.

Gaps in the Empirical Literature

Main gaps develop from the assessment of quantitative studies: Limited researches quantitatively measure governance and decision-making empowerment; larger percent of these

concentrated on credit, income or productivity. Too, study is often restricted to SMEs in peri-urban areas or agricultural cooperatives, with a reduced amount of emphasis on rural LGAs such as Ido/Osi. Still, most researches are cross-sectional, restrictive of perceptions into long-term and justifiable empowerment. Equally, all-inclusive empowerment guides that mix social, financial, and human capital results are erratic. These gaps rationalize a qualitative study investigative multiple dimensions of socioeconomic empowerment in rural cooperatives.

Contextual Review: Nigeria and Ido/Osi LGA, Ekiti State

Synopsis of Cooperative Development in Nigeria

Cooperative societies in Nigeria operate as grassroots establishments that pool resources, encourage joint action, and improve members' economic and social welfare. They are broadly known as instruments for rural expansion, sustainable community advancement, and penury mitigation (Wachi, Nwachukwu, Ibrahim, Lawal, & Abdullahi, 2025). With a focus on Southwestern Nigeria, together with Ekiti State, cooperatives offer important financial aid, farm inputs, coupled with accessibility to the market (Ibrahim, et al, 2025). As substitutes to official financial organizations which are often unreachable in rural regions, cooperatives rally savings and proffer low-interest loans that make small entrepreneurs and farmers to finance manufacturing and investing in businesses with good

opportunities, and thus, improving family welfarism (Nwoha & Erimma, 2024). Therefore, cooperative development is fundamental to rural economic systems all over LGAs such as Ido/Osi.

Experimental studies constantly confirmed that cooperative membership promotes economic result. Accessibility to infrastructure provision, cooperative loans, and shared inputs in Ekiti State meaningly enhanced rural dwellers' economic sustainability (Nwoha & Erimma, 2024). A wider multi-state study established that cooperatives contributed strongly to entrepreneurial advancement ($R^2 = 0.743$) and poverty minimization ($R^2 = 0.584$) (Wachi et al., 2025). In the same way, study on SMEs in Ekiti State exhibited that patronage, financial services, and training through cooperatives desirably influenced performance of business and family revenue (Ibrahim et al., 2025). These results authorize that cooperatives enhance financial accessibility, income generation, productivity and livelihood buoyancy in rural areas.

Nevertheless, cooperatives faced with problem that restricts their success. Insufficient funding, dissatisfied infrastructure, and reduced market access repeatedly weaken cooperative actions in rural settings in Ekiti State (Nwoha & Erimma, 2024). Management and Governance feebleness, together with unreliable member involvement additionally reduce their ability to proffer sustainable

socioeconomic assistances (Wachi et al., 2025). All the same, cooperatives continue to serve as a worthwhile podium for empowerment in as much structures of governance, credit accessibility, capability-building, and market connections are supported (Ibrahim et al., 2025). However, enhanced cooperative administration could greatly promote members' financial accessibility, earnings, aptitudes, and community welfare, contributory to multidimensional empowerment in Ido/Osi LGA.

An assessment of literature disclosed numerous gaps that validate the current study. In contextual term, some researches targeted other states of the federation like Oyo or Enugu or broad regional investigation. This was little consideration on rural Ekiti LGAs such as Ido/Osi (Nwoha & Erimma, 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2025). Consequently, there exists minute localized proof on cooperative success in less important rural societies with discrete socioeconomic features. Conceptually, limited researches ascertained cooperative entrepreneurship as a mean of multidimensional empowerment; most underline revenue, credit accessibility, or business performance instead of social, human capital, or dimensions of decision-making (Okwara & Uhuegbulem, 2023; Wachi et al., 2025). Empirically, many studies rely on small or unrepresentative samples, produce mixed findings, or omit non-financial empowerment indicators (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Nwoha & Erimma, 2024). Thus, existing research often lacks

comprehensive measurement of empowerment across economic, social, and participatory dimensions.

Why This Study Is Needed and How It Contributes

Consequent to these restrictions, the current study is essential to proffer multidimensional, and qualitative, and localized evidence on cooperative entrepreneurship in Ido/Osi LGA. By giving analysis on financial accessibility, revenue, development of skills, participation in governance, and general empowerment, the study deals with contextual, conceptual, and empirical gaps, and methodological. The results would give clarification on the mechanisms in which cooperatives encourage empowerment in rural communities while offering practical direction to cooperative leaders, policymakers, and development agencies. Eventually, the study intends to strengthen cooperative efficiency, promote welfare of the members, while giving support sustainably for the development of rural areas in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design stuck in the interpretivist archetype, intended to explore how cooperative entrepreneurship re-shapes members' existing experiences and socioeconomic empowerment in Ido/Osi Local Government Area of Ekiti State. The qualitative method was suitable for the reason that the study required to have

understanding of empowerment as a context-specific, multidimensional, and on a social basis created phenomenon expressed through participants' narratives, perceptions, and everyday practices.

The investigation was carried out in Ido/Osi LGA, a rural location where cooperative societies play key parts in agricultural invention, community solidarity, credit accessibility, and trading activities. The population was made up of members of five cooperatives unions that have registered, as well as multipurpose, thrift and credit, and traders' cooperatives. The unions are Ibukun-Olu Credit, Thrift and Consumers Society Ltd, Ido Ekiti, Federal Teaching Hospital Staff Cooperative Multipurpose Society Ltd, Ido Ekiti, Agbewumi Farmers' Cooperative Multipurpose Society Limited, Orin Ekiti, Agbedola Farmers' Cooperative Society, Ifaki Ekiti and Ifesowapo Cooperative Multipurpose Ltd, Usi Ekiti. Participants were chosen utilising purposive sampling, in addition to snowball sampling, to guarantee inclusion of information-rich people who could proffer profound knowledge into cooperative encouragements challenges, and processes of empowerment.

Data were collected via thorough semi-structured interviews, concentrated group discussions, and document review. Interviews investigated experiences of participants with cooperative involvement, improvement of income, development of skills, constraints; governance participation.

Concentrated group debates addressed collective viewpoints, dynamics of group, and shared clarifications of empowerment. Cooperative documents like as minutes, constitutions, and membership records ensured contextual comprehension of structure and practices of the organization. An interrogation guide with open-ended questions meant to be the primary instrument, and which were supported by field notes and reflexive memos that made documented contextual observations, non-verbal cues, and emerging insights possible.

Data analysis trailed thematic analysis, systematic coding, involving acquaintance with transcripts, realization and modification of themes, and revelatory synthesis. This iterative aspect process afforded the researcher to unearth prototype having to do with financial accessibility, social insertion, participation in decision-making, and structural constraints within cooperatives.

Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, reflexivity, and thick description to enhance credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed: informed consent was obtained, pseudonyms ensured anonymity, and participants' rights and dignity were fully protected.

Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

This segment exhibits the key experiential insights engendered from the study, trailed by a thematic analysis and clarification of how cooperative entrepreneurship add to socioeconomic empowerment in Ido/Osi Local Government Area of Ekiti State. The results are prepared around the main themes that arisen from narratives of participants, concentrated group discussions, and review of documents.

Presentation of Findings

Participation in Cooperative Entrepreneurship

Membership participation in all cooperatives was realized to be high and varied in age, occupation, and education. Participants joined mostly to access credit, have business support, collective security, and shared learning. Several designated cooperatives as a practical "alleyway out of instability of income," specifically for traders, farmers, artisans, and micro-entrepreneurs.

Access to Financial and Business Support

Participants accentuated the availability and suppleness of cooperative credit likened to banks. Loans were relaxed to get given the minimum collateral, lesser rates of interest, and member-friendly refund plans. Cooperatives as well proffer bulk buying, training, sharing of information, and linkages of market, which jointly reinforced

business performance of members and operational ability.

Socio-economic Empowerment Outcomes

Members testified great enhancements in family revenue, growth of business, capability to meet the needs of the family, and general welfare. Cooperative membership likewise improved community acknowledgement and social status. Females emphasised improved financial liberation, self-confidence, and decision-making ability as key empowerment outcomes.

Challenges Faced by Cooperative Entrepreneurs

In spite of these benefits, members acknowledged a number of limitations which included uneven or weedy government support, defaults of loan, poor managerial capability, lack of accessibility to contemporary technology, market rivalry, and resource shortages. These problems delayed cooperative enlargement and sustainability in the long run.

Community-Level Impacts

Cooperatives brought about employment creation, social consistency, and shared problem-solving at the level of the community. They gave support to development projects of community, promoted local talents, trust networks, and boosted collective obligation.

Analysis of Findings

Cooperatives as Inclusive Development Platforms

The analysis reflected that cooperatives minimized social and financial entry barricades, allowing side-lined groups, mostly women, small farmers, and low-income employees to partake in economic life enthusiastically. The value of open membership was maintained visibly all over the communities.

Financial Capital as a Core Empowerment Driver

Accessibility to cooperative loans appeared as the utmost transformative factor. Financially, business enlargement was triggered, stability of family's economy was ensured, while members' self-worth was guaranteed. Participants saw credit as a catalytic agent for own and entrepreneurial development instead of simply a fiscal asset.

Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building

The cooperative setting nurtured peer mentorship, learning, and joint problem-solving. Members achieved novel aptitudes, enhanced financial knowledge, and attained groundbreaking business mindset through workshops, meetings, and unceremonious interactions. This reinforced entrepreneurial competence resilience.

Gendered Empowerment

Cooperative entrepreneurship meaningfully empowered women by boosting their agency, voice in family

decisions, capability to give support to their household, and self-assurance in business management. The data uphold the gender-transformative probable of cooperative membership.

Structural and Operational Limitations

Nevertheless, weedy leadership ability, poor managerial skills, lack of consistent government contribution, and loan non-payment toned-down cooperative performance. These structural limitations acme the necessity for robust institutional and governance support.

Interpretation of Findings

Cooperatives as Engines of Community-Based Empowerment

The discoveries recommend that cooperative entrepreneurship operate concurrently as a social and economic empowerment apparatus. Yonder enhancing revenue, cooperatives deepen social ties, joint trust, and shared agency making them traditionally pertinent tools for rural expansion.

A Multidimensional Empowerment Process

Empowerment extended beyond finances to psychological, social, and relational dimensions. Financial stability improved self-esteem; training boosted competence; and active governance participation strengthened members' sense of belonging and influence. Thus, empowerment occurred holistically.

Filling Institutional Gaps

Cooperatives effectively filled gaps left by formal banks and support institutions. In a context where low-income individuals face exclusion due to collateral and high interest rates, cooperatives provided accessible platforms for financial inclusion and entrepreneurial advancement.

Institutional Strengthening as a Prerequisite

Enduring empowerment is not certain; sustainability is dependent on improved governance, leadership development, answerability, and helpful procedures. Empowerment outcomes would not be sustained without reinforced institutional contexts.

Policy Implications

The results accentuate the necessity for development actors and policymakers to mix cooperatives into rural development approaches. With apt support, cooperatives could be considered as regionalized catalyst of poverty lessening, financial attachment, women's empowerment and agricultural development.

Summary Statement

Generally, the study realized that cooperative entrepreneurship expressively brings about socioeconomic empowerment in Ido/Osi Local Government Area through enhancement of financial accessibility, solidification of business expansion, extending social links, and empowering sidelined groups, particularly women. In

spite of subsisting problems, cooperatives keep on being vibrant devices for public economic revolution.

Conclusion, Recommendations and Limitations

Conclusion

This study investigated the role of cooperative entrepreneurship in enhancing socioeconomic empowerment among members of cooperative societies in Ido/Osi Local Government Area, Ekiti State. Findings the qualitative analyses indicate that cooperative membership contributes significantly to members' empowerment through financial access, income improvement, skills and capacity development, and participatory governance.

Financial access emerged as the most influential factor, enabling members to invest in productive activities, improve household welfare, and reduce economic vulnerability. Skills development and training enhanced members' human capital, allowing them to adopt improved practices and manage their businesses more effectively. Governance participation strengthened social empowerment, agency, and decision-making influence. Despite these positive outcomes, challenges such as limited funding, delayed disbursement of loans, poor record-keeping, and weak governance were found to constrain the full potential of cooperative empowerment.

Overall, the study confirms that cooperative entrepreneurship is a viable

mechanism for multidimensional socioeconomic empowerment in rural Nigerian communities, aligning with Social Capital, Cooperative, and Empowerment Theories. It also extends existing literature by providing context-specific evidence from Ido/Osi LGA, which has previously been underexplored in cooperative research.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed for policy, cooperative management, and future research:

- i. **Strengthen Financial Systems within Cooperatives:** Cooperatives should improve access to loans, savings, and credit facilities by ensuring timely disbursement and proper management of funds. Government and development agencies can provide additional financial support or guarantee schemes to enhance liquidity.
- ii. **Expansion of Skills Development Plans:** Cooperative societies should establish consistent mentorship programs, training workshops, and capability-building conferences to boost members' entrepreneurial, managerial and technical competencies. This would heighten productivity and encourage long-term empowerment.
- iii. **Promotion of Participatory Governance:** Cooperatives should employ all-encompassing decision-making structures, guaranteeing members are enthusiastically engaged in policy preparation, elections, meetings and

election. This would result in answerability, transparency, and social empowerment.

- iv. Addressing Structural and Operational Problems: Cooperatives should enhance their internal controls, record-keeping, coupled with management practices. Cooperative development agencies and policymakers should give training in operational effectiveness and

governance so as to improve cooperative sustainability.

- v. Encouragement of Additional Research: Future researches should explore longitudinal impact of cooperative membership on empowerment, using greater and extra and various samples, and fit in mixed-method methods to capture quantitative results and qualitative knowledges of members.

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