



RESEARCH ARTICLE

COOPERATIVE SOCIETY AND EMPLOYEES' WELFARE

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ABSTRACT

Membership of cooperatives entitles eligible members access to financial resources for capital accumulation, investment and consumption purposes. However, becoming a member of the cooperative comes with the price tag of consistent savings in the cooperative pool account. It is this that qualifies such committed members access to certain benefits. In Nigeria, available statistics from the World Bank (2015) reports that about 70% of the population still live in abject poverty, 83.9% of the Nigerian population is still living on less than US \$2 per day and the inequality of wealth distribution is 42.9%. Based on this background, there is the tendency to question consumer cooperatives welfare promoting impact. We explore the relationship between cooperative societies and employees' welfare. A survey research design is adopted in which a Likert 5 – point scale, self-constructed questionnaires were administered among the faculty and staff members of the Covenant University Cooperative Society, Ota, Ogun State and Lead City University Cooperative Society Ibadan, Oyo State, as a means of data collection. A sample of faculty and staff members was selected through purposive random sampling. Data collected were analysed using the descriptive and inferential analytical techniques. One of the findings of this study is that membership of cooperative societies cut across people in different age, sex, educational attainment, levels of income and number of households. Majority of the respondents were satisfied with the current models adopted by the cooperative societies in meeting the welfare needs of the members. The administration of loan disbursement by the cooperative societies was also found commendable by members.

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INTRODUCTION

Credit is an important element in any progressive and dynamic economy; hence as economic activities increase and the economy becomes diversified, the need for credits becomes unavoidable (Umebali et al., 2004). According to the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA, 1995), a cooperative society 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" Cooperative societies are formed based on the powerful idea that together a group of people can achieve goals that cannot be achieved singly. They help members to address economic problems, and their ultimate goal is to encourage thrift among members and meet credit needs of people who might otherwise fall prey to loan sharks and other predatory lenders (ledger, 2004 and Adekunle et al., 2007).

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Cooperative societies are widely spread in developing countries and they are known for strong commitment as well as participation in the decision making of their members (Haan et al, 2003). They mobilize local savings and administer credit to members, thereby encouraging thrift and entrepreneurial activity (Adekunle et al, 2007). (UNDESA, 1999) puts it that cooperative societies can be set up in poor communities where access to means of secure savings and credit at non-exploitative terms is of great importance. It can exist among traders, farmers, craftsmen, artisan, professionals and so on, who pool their resources together to meet their common needs by means of regular savings. The International Labour Office (ILO) define cooperative as "an association of persons usually of limited means, who have voluntarily joined together to achieve a common economic end through the formation of a democratically controlled business organization, making equitable contributions to the capital acquired and accepting a fair share of the risks and benefits of the undertaking in which members actively participated" (ILO, 1993). (Adu, 2014) submits that for over 160 years, cooperative societies have been an effective way for people to exert control over their economic livelihoods. They provide a unique tool for achieving one or

more economic goals in an increasingly competitive global economy. With the existence of cooperatives, salary/wage earners save for the future through a soft-felt monthly contribution either from source or paid directly by the individual cooperative member. Cooperatives act as strengthening agents to their communities as they provide economic boost for communities. He proceeds to hint that despite the roles and years of existence of cooperative societies, it became popular in Nigeria only recently when workers cooperatives started gaining ground among working class citizens. Prior to the existence of cooperatives, traditional African associations existed and were found in many spheres of human endeavours before the introduction of modern forms of cooperative societies. The traditional associations existed in form of agricultural production and finance especially for credit mobilization. A traditional form of credit cooperatives also existed in which a group of people come together to contribute equal amount of money usually weekly, fortnightly, monthly or even every market day. These various types of traditional associations were loose in nature and there were no legal legislations backing them up. This also hindered them from benefitting from government or financial institutions. A modern cooperative tend to bring about a sort of equilibrium between producers and consumers in a market. For instance, the producers are mainly builders, developers, landlords, mortgage lenders, planners, professionals and suppliers, while consumers on the other hand are made up of buyers, tenants, not mortgagees, borrowers, purchasers and users of end product, whose bargaining strength had generally been weak (Akomoledede, 2010; Yebisi, 2014). As regards the features and values of cooperatives, the law on Cooperative Societies (1984) identifies the following:

- Voluntary and open membership,
- limited interest in the capital by the members (as opposed to shareholders in a company),
- distribution of surplus assets for the purposes of the society under its own rules,
- commitment to the education of its members either generally or in relation to the use of their own property and
- Tendency to relate with other cooperatives.

The ILO and International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) present similar principles of cooperatives with the inclusion of some other key features such as:

- Co-operatives are expected to be democratic and participatory organizations actively controlled by their members within the existing frameworks,
- Co-operatives educate their members so that they can play their roles and improve on their cooperative knowledge,
- Co-operatives also recognize their community responsibilities. While focusing on members' welfare, they respect and protect the global environment and serve their communities through democratically approved policies.

Co-operative values are based on the freedom, equality and mutual help, all of which are based on the premise that "few who work together can achieve more than many who strive alone". Co-operatives are distinguished by these values from other self-help organizations (Pekka, 1993). Many other researchers define cooperative organization as an independent association of individuals coming together voluntarily to address needs common to them. These needs could be social or

economic; hence, a cooperative makes available collective powers to individual members, which they would not have had individually on their own (Devi & Govt, 2012; Kumar, Wankhede, & Gena, 2015). Thus, individuals involved in agriculture can come together to increase their chances of accessing capital to increase their output (Dimelu, Enwelu, Attah, & Emodi, 2014); individuals in organizations can improve their healthcare by cooperating (Onuoha, 2014); and business owners can increase their asset base by developing capital (Asratie, 2014). Beyond these, evidence has shown that cooperative societies are timely in their response to their members compared to how other institutions deliver such related services (Uchenna & Olabisi, 2012; Devi & Govt, 2012; Lakshmi & Visalakshmi, 2013; Lwova, 2016).

As beneficial as cooperative societies may be, not everyone subscribes to being a member of any; hence, various individuals have their different perceptions. These perceptions could be due to various factors, some of which are educational attainment, gender, operational costs, age, geographical location, and risk perception (Adekunle & Henson, 2007; Zheng, Wang, & Awokuse, 2012; Kumar, Wankhede, & Gena, 2015). On the other hand, cooperative societies have their terms and conditions, which are necessary to govern operations and processes to achieve their desired outcomes. The concern, however, is whether or not their terms and conditions are favourable to their members. The study of (Frank, Mbabazize, and Shukla 2015), which examined the impact of cooperative societies' terms and conditions on the economic status of their members, provided relevant insight. Using cross-sectional, correlational and survey research design, they found out that terms and conditions usually are not sufficiently communicated to members; hence, members may not sufficiently be acquainted with the opportunities available to them to boost their welfare. The outcome of this is that optimal benefits accrued to members usually are not delivered to them. The result, however, shows that there is a significant and direct relationship between the terms and members welfare. Hence, if the terms are unfavorable, members are dissatisfied; and if they are favorable, members' welfare is maximized. Although, this depends on the level at which the terms and conditions are effectively communicated to members (Asratie, 2014).

It is not sufficient, however, for cooperative societies to communicate their terms to members. As much as it is important for members to be aware of what the conditions are, cooperative societies also have to be open to their members on the strategies they employ in order to maximize their members' welfare. For a cooperative society that encourages savings, for instance, it should be clear what the cooperative society does with the savings of members to maximize their welfare. (Cheruiyot, Kimeli, and Ogendo 2012) revealed that there is a direct correlation between the extent of cooperative societies' disclosure of their strategies to members and the extent to which members mobilize their savings. Thus, when members understand the way cooperatives societies use their savings to create further wealth, they are motivated to mobilize their income for savings. It is necessary to ascertain whether or not membership of a cooperative translates to the welfare of members, despite favorable terms and disclosure of wealth creation strategies to members. One indicator that can help ascertain whether members' welfare is maximized, is income level. (Kwai and Urassa 2015) evaluated how the activities of cooperative societies affected the income level of member in comparison with non-members. Result from this study is

necessary to guide members on whether or not to continue their membership in cooperative societies. Using descriptive and inferential statistics, it was apparent that membership improved the income and welfare status of members as well as enabled members to create more wealth. This, however, depends on opportunities made available to members to deploy their savings. Opportunities that dwell more on consumption than investment tend to affect welfare status of members through gratification but limits wealth creation capacity. The kind of opportunities offered by cooperative societies as well as the strategies they adopt are, thus, crucial factors that affect members' income status (Asratie, 2014). This result, therefore, suggests that cooperative societies need to expose their members to opportunities for capital formation beyond just maximizing their welfare. The coming together of members to maximize their welfare is one thing; the kind of education they get as well as the opportunities available to them is another (Kareem, Arigbabu, Akintaro, & Badmus, 2012). Thus, cooperative societies need to educate their members as part of the benefits they deliver to them. For instance, a cooperative society that is made of individuals with business interests should endeavor to educate their members on investing in assets that create more wealth rather than liabilities that increase the volume of recurrent expenditures; hence, member are encouraged to pool capital to build their businesses. (Odetola, Awoyemi and Ajojola 2015) validated this in their study where they examined how the cooperation of fish farmers affected their fish farming business and welfare. Using descriptive statistics and Tobit regression analysis, they found out those fish farmers, who were members of cooperative society, were more oriented toward pooling capital to build their businesses; hence, they had greater access to capital for their business development (Adekunle & Henson, 2007; Devi & Govt, 2012). Co-operatives are also faced with some challenges.

(Tiamni, 1997) emphasizes the fact that co-operatives all over the world are often faced with challenges ranging from crisis of ideology, capital, credibility and management. (Cheney, 1995) in his own submission identified cultural transformation, competition/expansion, wage solidarity, centralization/ re-organization and lack of programmes to increase productivity and participation. (Groove, 1985) however hints that one of the major challenges of co-operatives has to do with how to keep balance between business efficiency and democracy. He proceeds by identifying the fact that those who are charged with the operation of a co-operative (the board members and manager) are to ensure good business practice while performing the role of a business organization. Furthermore, educating, training and retraining of members in general and officers of the co-operatives in particular have always been a challenge to co-operative societies. The Nigerian economy, despite endowments with abundant resources, her monocultural nature has created a narrow and weak economic base. The country is presently in a recession due to the contraction in its Gross Domestic Product in two consecutive quarters. The sluggish economic growth has forced the governing authorities to adopt an expansionary fiscal policy in 2016 with the aim of stimulating the economy. (World Bank, 2015) reports that over 100 million Nigerians live below the poverty line. 83.9% still live on less than US \$2 per day and the inequality of wealth distribution is 42.9%. Youth unemployment is over 42% in 2015 creating high level of poverty. Most of the studies on cooperative societies and members' welfare tend to focus on savings and credit and acquisition of products in agriculture

and industry related areas. Not much, however, has been done on how educators in schools maximize their welfare by forming cooperative societies. Besides, little is known as to the effect of cooperatives on the welfare of members in institutional workplace. This study addresses some of these gaps by examining cooperative societies in two private Universities strategically located in South- West Nigeria. It considers how the existence of these cooperative societies affects the welfare of their members. It questions consumer cooperatives welfare promoting effect in relation to their roles and features as identified in literature reviewed. The focus is however on faculty and staff in Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State and Lead City University, Ibadan, Oyo State. Specifically, the paper:

- Examines the socio-economic characteristics of members of the co-operative societies,
- assesses the responses of members to the model of loan disbursement by the co-operatives
- investigates the relationship between members savings and the amount of loan disbursed and
- identifies the relationship between years of membership and the extent of project accomplishments of members.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses the case study research design as the strategy of investigation. Questionnaires were used to collect information from the respondents. The use of questionnaires is the best practice of data collection as far as primary data is concerned. Questionnaires well-structured are used to allow the same type of information to be collected from a large number of people in the same way. This allows the data to be systematically analysed quantitatively. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for analysis.

### Population of the study

The population of the study comprises of the members of two cooperative societies. These are Covenant University Cooperative Society (CUCS) situated at Ota in Ogun State of Nigeria and Lead City University Cooperative Society (LCUCS) in Ibadan, Oyo State. Both Universities were considered and chosen for the purpose of this research due to their strategic geographical location in the South- West Geopolitical Zone. Covenant University Cooperative Society has a total of three hundred (300) members while Lead City University Cooperative Society has a total of eighty members (80).

### Sampling Technique

The study adopts purposive sampling selection procedure to select members who were offered questionnaires with structured and non-structured questions to fill. The structured questions collected quantitative data while non-structured questions enabled the respondents to express their opinion on non-quantitative question items. From the list of members of these cooperative societies, one hundred and sixty (160) questionnaires were given out to respondents in Covenant University Cooperative Society out of which 113 were completed and returned. In Lead City University Cooperative Society on the other hand, seventy (70) questionnaires were given out and a sum of fifty-three (53)

were completed and returned. Therefore a total of 166 questionnaires were completed and returned for the purpose of analysis. Information sought and collected from the respondents through the questionnaires include socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, basically their age, sex, income level, number of households, educational attainment and so on. The researchers administered the questionnaires to the respondents personally and with the help of junior colleagues under a thorough supervision so as to obtain reliable data. The respondents were allowed to answer the questions without any influence or fear of the researchers this ensured that the data from the respondents is unbiased.

### Data Analysis Technique

The data collected for analysis involves both quantitative and qualitative, hence two types of statistical techniques were used in analysing the data. These are descriptive statistics involving frequency counts and percentages and inferential statistics, mainly correlation and chi-square. In order to have the background information of the members of these cooperative societies, we examined the socio-economic characteristics of respondents using frequency counts and percentages. The variables of interest include age, sex, income level, educational level, and number of dependants. Frequency counts and percentages of different facilities obtained from the cooperative societies were also found to measure the amount of different facilities people obtained from the cooperative societies. Also a measure of satisfaction of members concerning the performance of cooperative societies is also considered. This is in terms of the models used in disbursing different facilities.

As a measure of welfare of the members of these cooperative societies, two inferential statistical techniques were employed. Correlation analysis was carried out to measure the relationship between individual saving and the amount of loan taken from cooperative societies. Correlation between the year of joining the societies and the amount of projects members have accomplished was used as a measure of what they have achieved since they became members of these societies. Finally, a chi-square analysis of the projects they have accomplished was taken to determine whether what they have accomplished was as a result of their membership of cooperative societies or not. In carrying out the analysis, Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) statistical software was employed in computing different statistics used in the study. The choice of SPSS was informed by its advantages of handling primary data effectively over other statistical software.

## RESULTS

The analysis of data carried out by the study is mainly in three parts. The first is the analysis of the socio-economic characteristic of the members of the cooperative societies. Second is the measure of the amount of facilities ranging from overdraft, regular loan, and commodity purchase to special land acquisition loan. Additionally, a measure of the members' level of satisfaction of the performance of these societies is computed. The third part deals with the measure of welfare of the members, precisely how members' saving influences the loans granted to them by the societies. This part also takes a measure of the amount of projects members have accomplished since they joined the cooperative societies. It examines whether

these accomplishments are as a result of their membership of these cooperative societies or not.

### Socio-economic characteristics of the members

The table below summarizes the result of the analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of members of the cooperative societies.

**Table 1. Socio-Economic Characteristics of Members of Cooperative Societies**

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age Group</b>		
21 – 30	19	23.2
31 – 40	31	37.8
41 – 50	17	20.7
51 – 60	11	13.4
61 and above	4	4.9
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	95	59.4
Female	65	40.6
<b>Income Level</b>		
Up to 50,000	19	15.1
51,000 – 99,000	32	25.4
100,000 – 149,000	32	25.4
150,000 – 199,000	16	12.7
200,000 – 399,000	26	20.6
400,000 and above	1	0.8
<b>Number of Dependants</b>		
None	2	2.1
1 – 3	30	31.9
4 – 6	51	54.3
7 – 9	8	8.5
10 and above	3	3.2
<b>Formal Educational Level</b>		
Secondary	5	3.2
OND/NCE	14	9.0
HND/B.Sc.	59	38.1
M. Sc.	41	26.5
PhD	36	23.2

Source: Authors' Field Survey

It was observed that membership of cooperative societies cut across different age groups, 23.2% for people between age 21 and 30, 37.8% for people between age 31 and 40, 13.4% for 51 to 60 years, 4.9% for 60 years and above. In terms of sex, membership of cooperative societies comprises of both male and female. Our findings indicate that men are more involved than women with 59.4% for men and 40.6% of women. As regards income level, membership of the cooperatives is not discriminatory; membership cuts across people with different income groups, ranging from 25.4% in the lower cadre to 20.6% in the middle/upper cadre. More people in the lower cadre are involved in the cooperative societies than people in the upper income cadre. The number of dependants on members influences the amount an household can set aside for saving, yet the membership of the cooperative societies cut across people with different number of dependants. Findings indicate that members who have no dependant were an average of 2.1% while 43.1% of members have one to six dependants and members with more than six dependants averaged 5.85%. Lastly, in terms of educational attainment, there is no discrimination between people with different levels of educational attainment. People with different educational levels embrace membership of cooperative societies in both institutions. Being societies situated in ivory towers, there is a lower percentage of secondary school holders as well as OND/NCE ( 3.2% and 9% respectively), HND/B.Sc- 38.1%, M.Sc- 26.5% and PhD- 23.2%.

**Analysis of facilities members benefitted from and satisfaction as regards the disbursement model of Cooperative Societies**

The loan facilities disbursed by the cooperative societies ranges from overdraft (short term contingency loan), regular loan, and commodity purchase to special land acquisition loan. Only few members benefitted from overdrafts. Precisely, 60.9% have never taken overdraft while only 7.8% did benefit. Regular loan on the other hand is being taken from time to time by majority of members, only 9.6% have never taken a regular loan 53.6% benefitted from it while the remaining 36.8% rarely accessed regular loan. In the case of commodity purchase, about half of the members purchased commodities from the cooperative group while about 39% never bought commodities from the societies. Special land acquisition loan was accessed by few members of the societies, precisely about 7.4%. 26.2% rarely accessed the loan, while 66.4% of members have never benefitted from this type of loan. This is unlike what operates in most other cooperative societies where such special loans are embraced and accessed by substantial number of members. The table below shows the detailed figure of the analysis of facilities taken by the members.

**Table 2. Percentage distribution of facilities accessed from Cooperative Societies**

Facilities	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Almost always (%)	Often (%)
Overdraft	60.9	21.9	7.8	9.4
Regular Loan	9.6	36.8	24.8	28.8
Commodity Purchase	39.0	35.0	13.8	12.2
Land Acquisition Loan	66.4	26.2	4.9	2.5

Source: Authors' Field Survey

Majority of members of the co-operative societies commended the loan disbursement model of their cooperative societies. For instance, 33.1 % of the members commended the disbursement models for its swift response to their loan requests, 51.1% are of the opinion that their loans are rarely delayed unless there are challenges beyond the control of the operators while only 15.8% complained of delayed bureaucratic process. Generally speaking, quite a number of members are satisfied with the way the societies are meeting the welfare needs of members. 83.7% are satisfied while only 16.3% are not satisfied.

**Welfare of the Members**

The third and the last part of the analysis concern the welfare of the members. The table below gives the correlation between saving and loan on one part, and year of membership and projects accomplished on the other part.

**Table 3. Results of Correlation Analysis**

	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Significance	N
Saving and Loan	0.113	0.344	72
Years of joining societies and project accomplishment	0.349*	0.034	37

\*significant at 5%.

Source: Authors' Computation

**DISCUSSION**

The correlation between members saving and the loan granted to them is 0.113 with a probability value of 0.344. This shows

that the relationship between the loan granted and their amount of saving is not significant. This suggests that there are other important factors being considered apart from saving of members when loan is to be approved by operators of the cooperatives on one hand and demand for loans by members on the other hand. The correlation between the number of years members have joined the societies and the amount of projects they have accomplished is 0.349 with a probability value of 0.034. The relationship is significant but a low correlation of 0.349. This also suggests that what they have acquired is not consistent with the number of years they have joined the cooperative societies. This implies that the societies might need to do more in terms of giving more loans to those who are qualified especially those who have enough saving with them. Lastly, a chi-square of projects members have accomplished with the loans taken shows a coefficient of 55.824 with a probability value of 0.000. This is significant at 5%. The details of chi-square analysis are shown in the table 4 below.

**Table 4. Chi-square test of Project Accomplishment**

	Chi-square Coefficient	Df	Asymp Sig
Project Accomplished	55.824*	5	0.000

\*significant at 5%.

Source: Authors' Computation

It therefore implies that most of what they have accomplished is as a result of their membership of cooperative societies. If they have not been members, or they have not taken the loans, they might not have achieved those things. Hence, membership of cooperative societies helps in improving the welfare of members by making it possible for them to acquire their desired properties. The membership of cooperative societies has been of assistance to low income group as various empirical findings have shown. One of the findings of this study is that membership of cooperative societies cut across people in different age, different sex, educational attainment, levels of income and number of households. Regardless of status, individuals are found to be members of cooperative societies. If individuals in ivory towers can be members of cooperative societies and they are able to accomplish a lot of things as a result of their membership, individuals in the rural areas and even from other categories of the working population should imbibe the culture of membership of co-operative societies of which they will certainly be better off in the long run. The study further observes that members of co-operatives access only a few of the services of these cooperative societies, particularly regular loan. As good as other services are, members do not really embrace them.

Further investigations reveal that most of these services have stringent conditions attached to them. These conditions need to be relaxed for members to benefit from them. In fact, cooperative societies need to do more in the provision of friendly services with less stringent conditions in order to make members to embrace these services and improve their welfare. Services like special housing loan, commodity purchases including car purchases with special repayment arrangements are services members should like to benefit from if strict conditions are not attached to them. This finding supports evidence from literature. (Frank, Mbabazize and Shukla, 2015), for instance emphasizes the fact that sometimes, terms and conditions associated with cooperative societies are not sufficiently communicated to members. These however deprive them of opportunities of maximizing their welfare.

Furthermore, other researchers found significant relationship between terms of loan disbursements and members' welfare. This study also finds out that despite the fact that there is a positive correlation between membership of these cooperative societies and their acquisition of assets like housing, motor vehicles and so on, they do not give adequate consideration to members' saving as an important factor when approving loans. It is important to consider faithfulness of members and other important factors, while the amount of members' saving should also be given due consideration while approving loans for disbursement to members. Finally, project accomplishment by the members are found to be linked to their membership of cooperative societies, hence the more these cooperative societies rise up to their responsibilities of providing good services to their members, the more the members will live a better life.

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