

Sustaining the Growth and Development of Agricultural Cooperative Societies Through Training for Sustainable Agricultural Development in the Sub-Sahara Africa

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Abstract

The paper investigated the sustainability, growth and development of agricultural cooperative societies through training for sustainable agricultural development in the sub-Sahara Africa. It examined many existing and newly emergent problems due to lack of education/training leading to the failure and collapse of agricultural cooperative societies' in Nigeria and the Sub-Sahara Africa, a few years after establishment. The paper sought to explain some salient issues related to cooperative education/training relevant to the success and sustaining of agricultural cooperative societies. The focus was on education and training of agricultural cooperatives. The paper accentuates the need for education/training as a fundamental pillar for sustaining the growth and development of agricultural cooperative societies in Nigeria and the Sub-Sahara Africa. To achieve the objectives of the study, six rice farmers' cooperatives in Bansara community were used to determine the relevance and relationship of training farmers to farmers' productivity. The study adopted an ex post facto research design with a stratified and purposive sampling technique used to select a total of six farmers' cooperatives in the study area. Data were collected from the rice farmers' field work report and were analyzed using simple percentage analyzes. At the end of the harvesting season the farmers' production shows that farmers' cooperatives that received training had a higher production output than farmers' cooperatives that were not trained. This implies that training is necessary to increase and sustain farmers production output. The results also implied that training of farmers influence farmers' productivity. Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it was recommended that periodic training should be organized for cooperators in order to help them acquire skills, knowledge, and competences that are required for maximum farm production.

Key words: Agricultural cooperative societies, Cooperative education/training, Sustainable development.

Introduction

Agricultural co-operative societies, also known as farmers' co-operative societies, are groups of farmers or agriculturalists who have combined their resources together for the production and marketing of their produce. They are also seen as communities working collectively to achieve common goals (Shahid, Tim, & Geoffrey, 20203). Participation in farming as well as membership in a cooperative society is voluntary (Valley, 2023), and one of their principles is the training of members. Obstacles are easily overcome for cooperatives by training (Damion, Martijn, & Koen 2022). They also obtain some equipment and items to enhance the effectiveness of their production and marketing of the items, with the hope of benefiting members financially and economically. These include receiving loans, farm inputs such as fertilizer, professional advice or training, financial education, mobilization of savings, provision of extension services, management of credit and attraction of the government's support, land and soil conservation, and irrigation. (Mai-Lafia, 2011).

According to ICA (2010), agricultural cooperatives are autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise. Based on the ICA (2010) definition above, agricultural cooperatives can be seen and known as user-owned and user-controlled business organizations that distribute benefits equitably on the basis of patronage.

The National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA) (2005) states that agricultural cooperatives are formed by their members when there is low productivity and the market fails to provide needed goods and services at affordable prices and acceptable quality. They provide the following reasons why agricultural cooperatives are being formed: to strengthen bargaining power, maintain access to competitive markets, capitalize on new market opportunities, obtain needed products and services on a competitive basis, improve income opportunities, reduce costs, and manage risk. Essentially, then, co-operators generate economic benefits and cooperative societies gain sustainable development:

1. By receiving education and training for increased productivity
2. By obtaining inputs and services at lower costs than they could obtain elsewhere or that were not available to them.
3. By promoting and marketing their products at better prices or in markets that were previously not accessible, they increased their income.
4. By raising and accumulating capital for investment promotion and
5. By having wider access to needed information for their business growth.

Agricultural sustainability is based on the principle of meeting the agricultural needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs in resource use and management. Sustainable agriculture gives equal weight to environmental, economic, and social factors as it concerns agricultural productivity. Sustaining the development of agricultural cooperatives is the gradual and continuing growth through progressive changes as a result of the benefits co-operators obtained through training in terms of knowledge, skills, resources and income that lead to an increase in the standard of living of co-operators based on the activities provided by agricultural co-operative societies to co-operators. Cooperative education

and training for sustaining the development of agricultural cooperatives deserve a critical assessment because, agricultural co-operative societies' activities in the areas of: training of members are not effective and efficient enough to produce the desired sustainable economic benefits expected of agricultural co-operative societies, which is why co-operators are unable to mobilize resources for income generation and are still trapped in poverty and low standard of living thereby leading to the collapse of cooperatives a few years after its existence.

Materials and methods

The concept of sustainable development in agriculture

Poverty is one of the greatest challenges facing the world today. In spite of the wealth and magnitude of intellectual, scientific, and technological achievement in the world today, it is ironic that global hunger is on the rise, and about 10% of the world population still goes to bed at night hungry, with as many as 150,000 million people, many of whom are children, dying daily of hunger. In Nigeria, the story is not different, despite its rich human and agricultural resources. Sustainable development is not a cluster of benefits given to people in need but rather a process by which a populace acquires greater mastery over its own destiny (UNICEF, State of the World's Children, 1981–1992). Sustainable development is development that takes care of the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs through the use of developmental resources. Agricultural sustainability is based on the principle of meeting the agricultural needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs in resource use and management. Sustainable agriculture gives equal weight to environmental, economic, and social factors as it concerns agricultural productivity.

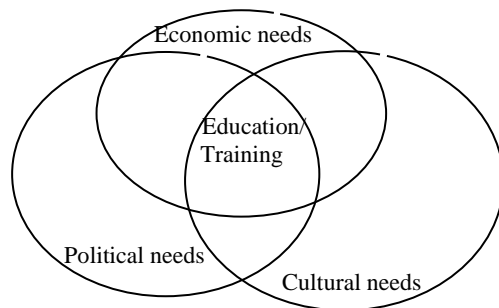
The word 'development' is derived from the word 'develop'. The dictionary meaning of this word simply means 'to grow bigger' or 'to a more advanced state'. Development can therefore be defined as the process of growing from one stage to the next. To grow is to move upward continuously until the desired stage is achieved. The concept of development is very wide, but for the purpose of this paper, development would be explained from its' agricultural cooperative management point of view as follows:

1. **Development is a process.** This means that development is systematic in nature, i.e., moving from one level to the next. For this reason, sustainable development will require participation by all members of agricultural cooperative societies', in all aspects. It is believed that cooperative members know best their problems and how to implement their own development if given cooperative education and training.
2. **Development is an evolving journey.** This means that development begins where the people are and enables them to figure out what their own needs are. This requires training cooperative members to work with a number of structures and alternatives in order to discover what can actually be done for the betterment of their particular situation.
3. **Development is a multi-dimensional reality.** This means that development is an integrated process that permeates every human endeavor among cooperative members. Therefore, a development effort in a cooperative society, for instance, should seek to address related problems like health, education, transportation, etc. for cooperative

members. And these could only be achieved through the cooperative education and training of co-operators.

4. **Development is enabled by a catalyst:** This means that for a developmental change to take place there has to be an event to wake cooperative members up to realize their potentials and responsibilities. This event can be initiated either from within or outside the cooperative society through cooperative education/training.

There are a lot of cooperative development strategies. But the training process strategy which is depicted in the vane diagram below would be used to explain the concept of education/training for sustainable development in agriculture and agricultural cooperatives.



Training process: economic needs, political needs, cultural needs.

The vane diagram shows the relationship between the basic elements of cooperators needs. These are economic, cultural, and political needs.

Economic aspect: These involve the organization, production, and operation of resources like:

Natural: extraction, cultivation, and production of agricultural goods and services by cooperative societies.

Human: nurturing, equipping, and skill development of cooperative members.

Inputs: Acquiring, applying agro-materials, and operating machinery are inputs needed for cultivation and production.

Distribution is the process of channeling goods and services to their destination and marketing agricultural products.

These aspects can best be enhanced or properly developed among agricultural cooperative members through cooperative education and training, like training cooperative members on methods of production, skill development, methods of distribution, and marketing strategies.

Political aspect: This deals with ways the cooperative society is organized into forms and structures that implement the will of cooperative members and serve the well-being of cooperators. These aspects include three processes:

Order: enforcement and maintaining social stability, provision of security, and sustaining the balance of power among cooperators in the cooperative society.

Justice: This relates to cooperators participation and responsibility, fair treatment, and equal opportunity for all members of the cooperative.

Welfare: this ensures that cooperators have a place to live, enough food, and access to other social benefits they need. It also includes access to information services.

Cultural aspect: This aspect seeks to inject meaning into the economic and political aspects of society and the cooperative society itself as cooperators interact within and outside the cooperative community. This aspect is expressed in three dimensions:

Wisdom involves the acquisition, preservation, and transmission of accumulated knowledge and useful skills, as well as determining the final meaning for the next generation.

Style: This process involves the preservation of necessary roles, maintaining cooperative bylaws, cooperative values and goals, and participation in social life.

Symbol: This is a process where cooperative society is continually reminded of the values and beliefs that bind them together, such as cooperative goals and values.

One major lesson from the training process vane diagram is a reminder that all the development process that goes on in agricultural cooperatives are inter-related, inter-dependent, and mostly dependent on cooperative education/training.

Cooperative education/training

Cooperative education/training has been considered as essential parts of co-operative activities from the time the first society was found (Elham, & Tiberio 2023). One of the principles laid down by the ICA is that co-operatives should make provisions for the education and training of all stakeholders, which includes co-operators, leaders, employees and the public. Farmers' cooperative training is achieved through participation of farmers members as one of the essential elements in self –organization in farmers' organization, (Kusnandar, Olaf, & Frances 2023)

The term education/training is concerned with the transfer of knowledge and skills (Ali, & Khan 2023), that seek to better the performance of cooperative members, through the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitude necessary to motivate members to carry out specific tasks (Bastion, & Joost 2023) or activity of the job. Because the world is changing at a much faster rate than we can keep pacing with, it is important that agricultural cooperative members, indeed, those who contribute to the production process, keep abreast of changes in the job in order to remain relevant and current. To do so, co-operators need to be trained on motivational pathways (Stephen, Haroon, Gabriel, & Duncan 2023), for better performance, increased agricultural productivity for sustainable development. Training develop the right skills needed for future growth and it enhanced performance (Kamy 2022) as supported by De- Grippa and Sauermanna in their study in 2011 on “The effects of training on own and co-worker productivity: Evidence from a field experiment” The study analyses the effects of work-related training on workers' productivity. To identify causal effects from training, the study combined a field experiment that randomly assigned workers to treatment and control groups with panel data on individual worker productivity before and after training. The study revealed that participation in the training programme leads to a 9 percent increase in productivity. The study provided evidence for externalities from treated workers on their untreated peers: An increase of 10 percentage points in the share of treated peers leads to a productivity increase of 0.45 percent. De- Grippa, & Sauermanna,(2011)

Well-trained co-operators are more capable and more willing to take control over their jobs as they acquire positive attitudes (Ubong, Christabel & Ubong 2023). They need less supervision. Co-operators who are properly trained understand the business and complain less, are more satisfied and are more motivated,(Fadipe, Obiana, & Aishatu, 2023), and are always willing to change and adapt to new trend that would bring about agricultural sustainability.

Relevance of cooperative education/training

An agricultural co-operative is a community of farmers doing business together, purchasing farm equipment, seed, and fertilizer; arranging transportation, storage, and marketing of produce; mobilizing savings and advancing credit; and, in general, providing whatever is needed to increase the income (Gray, 2021) and improve the condition of the co-operators for sustainable agricultural development.

The success of agricultural cooperatives depends to a great extent on the ability of their leaders (the committee members), staff who look after the day-to-day business, and individual members to be trained on the various skills and knowledge their work requires. Training of agricultural cooperatives has been considered an essential part of cooperative activities since the time the first society was found. One of the principles laid down by the ICA is that cooperatives should make provisions for the education and training of all stakeholders, which includes co-operators, leaders, employees, and the public. This is supported by Konings (2008), who states that “training increases labor productivity.” In many countries, setting aside part of the net surplus for education and training has become a statutory obligation for many organizations. Unfortunately, this money is not always used as productively as it might be. Nevertheless, whatever the situation, the education and training program should be considered with as much seriousness as any other program to extend business operations.

Since the environment in which agricultural cooperatives exist continually changes, there is a constant need to learn new skills and techniques (Yemane, 2022). While this is always true to some extent, at present there is a greater than usual need for training as agricultural cooperatives learn to adjust themselves to a market-oriented environment, which is why Konings (2008) says “training is needed by co-operators to cope with increased pressures induced by technological change and globalization.”

The purpose of all cooperative education and training is to develop skills to increase productivity and encourage behavioral and attitudinal changes in participants (Michele, 2022). Not all problems, however, can be solved by training. Training needs to arise when the knowledge or skills needed are lacking, or when new activities are to be started, new products are to be introduced, etc. (FAO, 2014).

The importance of cooperative education and training activities as one of the tools for sustainable development in agricultural productivity among agricultural cooperatives is supported by a research study carried out by the researcher in 2023 with six rice farmers’ cooperatives in Bansara, Nigeria. The cooperatives were tagged: team A, team B, team C, team D, team E, and team F, which were assigned equal hectares of land and farm inputs. Team A, C, and D were randomly selected and trained for three months in the use of farm inputs and planting methods for the rice farm. While teams B, D, and F were not trained.

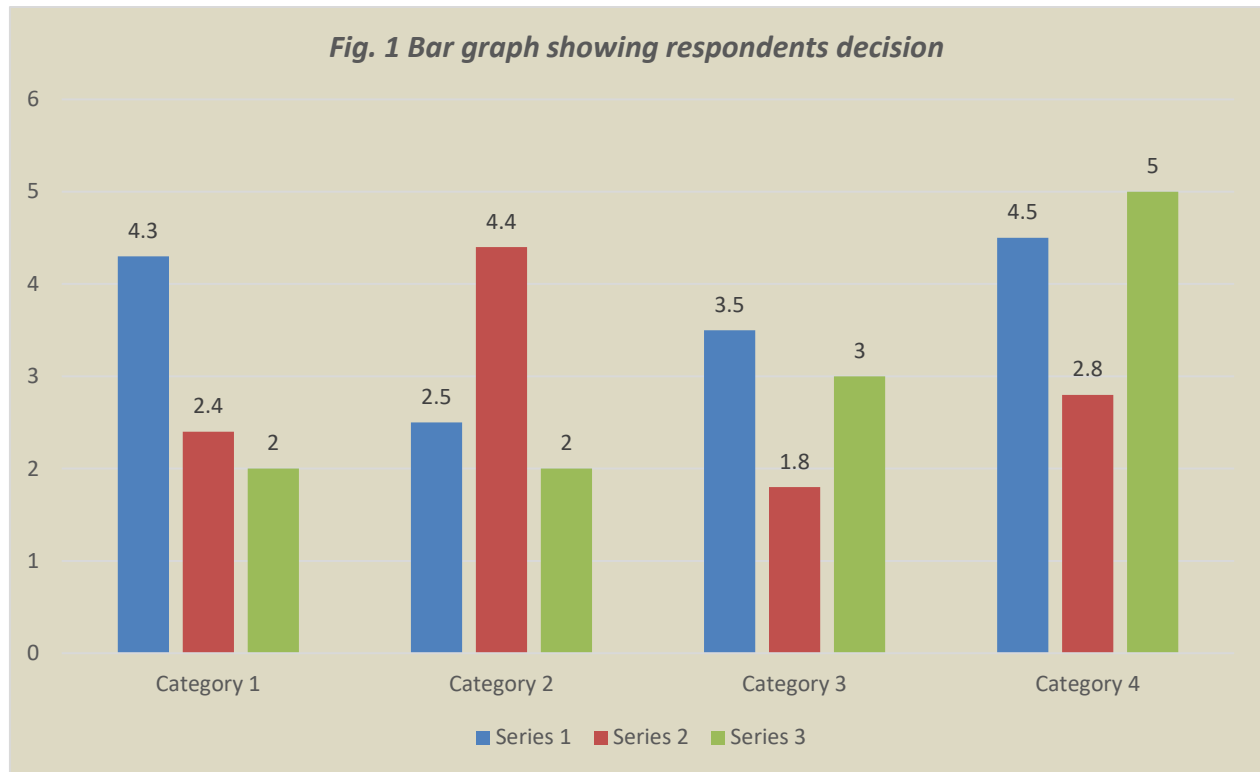
Results

At the end of the harvesting season the team production shows that: team A produced 2,500kg of rice, team B produced 1,600kg of rice, team C produced 2,400kg of rice, team D produced 2,600kg of rice, team E produced 1,200kg of rice, and team F produced 1,400kg of rice. The researcher used a simple percentage to represent the various team production output in table 1 and bar graph below:

TABLE 1
Production output

Cooperative in % farmers	Training period in weeks	Hectares of land	Production output in kg	Production output
Team A	3	1	2,500kg	21%
Team B	Nil	1	1,600kg	14%
Team C	3	1	2,400kg	21%
Team D	3	1	2,600kg	22%
Team E	Nil	1	1,200kg	10%
Team F	Nil	1	1,400kg	12%
Total			11,700kg	

Source: Field Work Report, 2023.



Discussion

From the table above, it shows that the farmers' cooperatives that received training had a higher production output than the farmers' cooperatives that were not trained. These imply that training is necessary to increase and sustain farmer's production output. Also, Konings in 2008 on "The Impact of Training on Productivity". The study uses longitudinal data from more than 13,000 firms to analyze the effects of training on firm-level productivity. It was revealed that workers receiving training are on average more productive than workers not receiving training. Also training increases firm level measured productivity 1–2% area to firms that do not provide training. This makes firms that introduce training activities more productive. (Konings; 2008).

In the same vein, Hossain, Hasan, and Naher (2008) carried out a study in three potato growing areas, viz. Munshiganj, Bogra, and Jessore, covering 75 potato growers, to measure training technical efficiency and the economic performance of potato production. Farmers obtained an average tuber yield of 24.90 t/ha, which was higher than the average yield of Bangladesh (14.90 t/ha) but close to the potential yield (25–30 t/ha) of diamant and cardinal varieties. The estimated results showed that the gross margin for potato cultivation increased, respectively. The average level of technical efficiency due to training among the sampled farmers was 75%. This implies that, given the existing technology and level of inputs, the output could be increased by 25%. Training on potato production, extension linkage, and quality seed played a significant role in the technical efficiency of potato production.

Cooperative education and training and sustainable development in agriculture are certainly part of corporate strategy to improve performance in agricultural cooperatives to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Unfortunately, when the leadership is not progressive, cynicism about the training prevails. Training brings about attitudinal changes (Ketemaw & Wonde, 2023), improves skills, and thereby improves job performance. Human capital development takes place through cooperator training, which concentrates on operational, technical, and other related areas (Hastowohadi & Arief, 2023), as well as management development, which focuses on managerial and behavioral skills and knowledge. Both eventually help in re-orienting attitudes towards the job and result in improvements in job performance.

According to Dunn-Smith (2010), the benefits to be gained by investing in workforce training and development include:

- Increased worker morale and job satisfaction
- Highly motivated workers
- A willingness to adopt new technologies and methods
- A flexible, creative, and innovative workforce
- Enhanced cooperative image and status
- Increased efficiencies and productivity, resulting in financial gains for the cooperatives.

Not all problems, however, can be solved by cooperative education and training (Michele, 2022). Training needs to arise when the knowledge or skills needed are lacking, or when new activities are to be started, new products are to be introduced, etc. (FAO, 2000). Training needs may exist at various levels, namely, for the whole organization or cooperative; for administrative staff or groups with specific tasks; or for individuals (members). Training of members should, above all, aim at developing an active body of members who are able to participate effectively (Marcelo & Doug, 2022) in the running of their agricultural cooperative societies. Direct involvement of members in all aspects of the running of agricultural co-operatives is the only self-reliant way to ensure long-term survival for the organizations (FAO, 2014). According to Bekele & Pillai (2010), cooperative education and training are the most significant pillars of a strong and self-reliant cooperative movement for sustainable development.

According to Williamson (1998), training agricultural cooperative members is essential to effective communication, both internal and external, between the cooperatives. Members need to know about the unique features of agricultural cooperatives in general and how those features affect their co-operatives day-to-day operations. When they know more about co-operatives, trained members find themselves in a better position to communicate and relate with fellow members and the public about their agricultural cooperative. They are also more likely to become actively involved in it and can contribute positively to its success. Training resulting in meaningful member involvement are not is for poor products and services, poor marketing methods, unqualified directors, or poor management. Rather, they can prevent such circumstances because trained members, meaningfully involved in their agricultural co-operatives, will not tolerate inferior performance in any of these areas. Agricultural cooperative training is a continual process. Just as co-operative membership continually changes, so do a substitute needs of co-operators, directors, the training and employees. The various public with which agricultural cooperatives

need to do business managers, also continually The need for continuous training stems from several changes. Including changing membership as young farmers join factors, changes in consumer attitudes and loyalty to agricultural cooperative, and, agricultural cooperative growth and expansion requiring members to adjust to a more complex business organization.

Moreover, cooperative values and principles stress education and training. This is partly in order to ensure the effective operation and management of each cooperative enterprise, which in itself is valuable with respect to matters of sustainable development because it serves to emphasize community solidarity and intergenerational responsibility. It is also intended to meet the broad needs of members of agricultural co-operatives and their families and communities for literacy, basic education, vocational training, and education as citizens.

Given on the one hand that members of agricultural co-operatives are aware and concerned with the issues of sustainable development on the basis of their own experience and interests, and that on the other hand the international co-operative movement has adopted the task of working for sustainable development, this inherent acknowledgement of the value of the relevant training is of particular value in respect to any attempt to create stronger awareness, to support this with relevant information, and to mobilize and facilitate appropriate action (Ezeude & Nwankwo, 2023).

All sectors of agriculture are changing rapidly to a new trend, often referred to as the "industrialization of agriculture" (Boehle, 1999; Drabenstott, 2000). Agricultural cooperatives are no exception. Vandenburg et al. (2000) identify that the driving forces behind the restructuring of locally owned cooperatives, through mergers, acquisitions, joint ventures, and strategic alliances, are decreasing numbers of farms, increasing costs, industrializing agriculture, increasing competition, and decreasing profits. In order for agricultural cooperatives to be competitive, productive, and meet a new trend for sustainable development, the need for training members is very necessary for increased output productivity and the economic development of co-operators.

Conclusion

Increasing and sustaining importance is being attached to education/training of agricultural cooperative societies in order to increase cooperators awareness of the inherent opportunities to help them to enhance their effective and efficient service delivery in work environment and have a means of earning a living in the society. Recognizing the need to equip cooperators with relevant knowledge and skills needed in modern day agricultural environment for sustainable development of agricultural sector. This becomes very important now with the rapidly changing in science and technology in agricultural sector, which requires new knowledge and skills for agricultural productivity and sustainability.

Recommendations

For cooperatives to obtain sustainable development in agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria, the following learning principles should be taken into consideration:

1. Individual differences: this implies that co-operators are people from different backgrounds, religions, physical appearances, and intellectual and social lives. Education and training needs

must recognize these differences and tailor learning towards helping them achieve their individual and collective goals.

2. Interest of co-operators: co-operators interests, needs, and motives are very important in the education and training process. Co-operators need to be motivated to learn, especially if they see the need that their learning will meet.
3. Prioritizing needs: cooperators training needs should be identified and prioritized.

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